

Conference 'Religious Responses to Darwinism, 1859 - 2009', Ian Ramsey Centre for science and religion in the University of Oxford, Oxford UK, 15-18 July 2009.

Title

The late reception of Darwinism and the early reception of creationism among Dutch Calvinists

Abstract

Compared to the English-speaking world, Dutch Calvinists were relatively late in giving a substantive evaluation of Darwinism. It was not until 1899 that the leader of the Dutch neo-Calvinist movement, the theologian Abraham Kuyper, delivered a comprehensive rectorial address at the Calvinist University, Amsterdam (founded in 1880) about *Evolution*. Kuyper was critical of the 'mechanistic, a-teleological' character of Darwinian evolution, but he did not exclude the possibility of organic evolution as such. In the next decades the paths of neo-Calvinist theologians and scientists diverged. While the latter increasingly accepted elements of contemporary geology and biology, the theologians moved to a more fundamentalist approach to the Bible. For them – contrary to Kuyper – the Genesis account of creation became the major obstacle to the acceptance of evolution. Notably, already in the 1920s, the 'flood geology' of George McCready Price was discussed in Dutch Calvinist circles. While some of the theologians were sympathetic to this young-earth creationism, the majority of Calvinist scientists judged it too speculative. It was not until the late 1950s that Darwinian evolution was completely accepted by both Calvinist scientists and theologians. However, in the course of the 1960s it became clear that a considerable minority of ordinary Calvinists was still willing to accept the resurgent 'scientific creationism' then flooding the Netherlands from the USA.

Key words: Calvinism, Darwinism, creationism, the Netherlands

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