

Praenotandum

This article was published in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 10, 4 (1998): 333-351. The page numbers of the article are indicated in the text below in bold and between square brackets. . I have also revised the text in a number of places. The introduction, which the editors of MTSR deleted from my original text, has been added again. All brief references, which the MTSR editors inserted in the text of the MTSR article, have been removed to the footnotes again.

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FROM CONSONANCE TO AUTONOMY: SCIENCE OF RELIGIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS, 1948-1995

'Science [of Religions] has a right to a place of its own [in the university] free from heteronomy from whatever quarter'.¹

Introduction

This article is one of three in which I analyse Dutch Science of Religions (*godsdienswetenschap*) as it developed in institutions of academic theology between 1860 and now.² Two deal with its history in the so-called *duplex ordo* faculties of theology of the three *rijksuniversiteiten* ('state [i.e. public] universities') of Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen and the municipal university of Amsterdam. One is my article in *Numen*, 'Close Harmonies', which surveys the period 1860-1960.³ This article studies developments since WWII. In a third article,⁴ I will analyse the much more modest position Science of Religions has in Dutch *simplex ordo* institutes of academic theology. Though they are fully funded by the Dutch state and their degrees have civil effect in Dutch society, the theology produced in them is controlled by the churches, RC and Protestant, that founded them. In the *duplex ordo* faculties, however, academic theology was formally freed from control by the NHK-church,⁵ the former 'Public Church', by law in 1876. It stipulated that professors of theology were to be appointed by 'the Crown', i.e. by the Minister of Home Affairs, except for the professors of Dogmatic and Pastoral Theology. They were to be appointed by the NHK-church for teaching future ministers *at*, but not *in*, these faculties in these church-tied subjects. Their chairs were removed by the law of 1876 from the faculties proper into an adjunct termed *kerkelijke opleiding*, [department of] 'ecclesiastical training', which had a distinctly inferior academic stat-

¹ Van Baaren 1960b: 324. All the translations from the Dutch in this article are by the author.

² Van der Toorn's unpublished paper, 'The Coming of Age of Comparative Religion', which he read at a conference on 'Challenges to Theology', at Utrecht on 27 April 1990, has been a source of inspiration for me during my work on this article.

³ Platvoet 1998

⁴ Platvoet 2002

⁵ The *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, 'the Dutch Reformed Church'. Having fused in in 2004 with two other, smaller Protestant churches, it is now (2011) called the *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (PKN), 'Protestant Church in The Netherlands'.

us. These church-appointed professors, though paid for by the Dutch state and teaching *at* the Dutch *duplex ordo* faculties of theology, were therefore after 1876 by law no longer part *of* these faculties.

The law of 1876 also added the new discipline of Science of Religions to these *duplex ordo* faculties of theology. It achieved almost immediately international repute with scholars like C.P. Tiele, P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, William Brede Kristensen, Gerardus van der Leeuw, C.J. Bleeker, and others.⁶ Their ‘science of religions’ was, however, in ‘close harmony’ with liberal Protestant theology, and with some of the confessional theologies of the four ‘modalities’, or wings, of the NHK-church, each of which teamed up with one of the four *duplex ordo* faculties.⁷

After 1960, a paradigm shift occurred. Methodological agnosticism replaced the earlier ‘religionist’ approach. This paradigm shift is traced in this article as well as the vicissitudes of Dutch Science of Religions in Dutch *duplex ordo* faculties of theology till this very day (1998). I trace the contributions of Sierksma and Van Baaren to it, the first by initiating the paradigm shift, the second by completing it. In the third part, I wonder whether Dutch Science of Religions, having become a secular, cultural-historical discipline, should cut its umbilical cord with Dutch *duplex ordo* theology.

From Consonance to Dissonance

Modern ‘Science of Religion(s)’⁸ in the Netherlands is the product of three major paradigm shifts, which were tantamount to as many revolutions by as many outsiders. In the first one, which occurred between 1860 and 1877, C.P. Tiele, merely a minister of the small, liberal Arminian church, played a major role. It consisted in the establishment by law⁹ of the so-called *duplex ordo* in the Faculties of Theology of the (State) Universities at Leiden, Groningen and Utrecht.¹⁰ That new order eliminated ‘confessional’ theology from those faculties by removing the chairs in dogmatic and pastoral theology and in other denominational subjects from the faculty [395] of theology proper.¹¹ And it admitted the brand new science of religion(s) into it. As a reward, Tiele was given the professorship in the ‘General History of Religions’ (*godsdiensgeschiedenis in het algemeen*), as Science of Religions was termed in official documents, in the Leiden Faculty of Theology in 1877. He was, however, the only scholar from outside the NHK-church to obtain a chair in a *duplex ordo* faculty of theology, for though the *duplex ordo* faculties of theology were formally

⁶ Cf. Molendijk 2000

⁷ See for greater detail, Platvoet 1998

⁸ In Dutch *godsdienswetenschap*. This designation is best rendered in English by ‘the academic study of religions’. In this article, however, I prefer to stick to the Dutch, and continental, custom of terming it ‘science of religion(s)’ – in German: *Religionswissenschaft*; in French: *science des religions*; in Italian: *scienza delle religioni*; in Danish: *religionsvidenskab*; in Polish: *religioznawcze*; in Russian: *relgiovedeniya*; and in Afrikaans, South Africa: *godsdienswetenskap*.

⁹ The law of 28 April 1876 by which the Dutch public education at secondary and tertiary level was reformed.

¹⁰ The City of Amsterdam also applied it to the Faculty of Theology of (Municipal) University of Amsterdam.

¹¹ The disestablishment of confessional theology was, however, even formally a partial one, for these chairs, and their professors, appointed by the NHK-church, were maintained at the public universities despite their not being an organic part of it. In addition, though appointed by the church, these professors were paid by the state. See Platvoet 1998 for more historical details; see Adriaanse, Krop & Leertouwer 1987 for an analysis of the academic status of these subjects in Dutch public universities in the 20th century.

disestablished in 1876, they remained for a long time factually tied to the NH-church and its modalities.¹²

Some seventy years later, in 1948, another outsider, Fokke Sierksma, the brilliant and literary gifted pupil of Gerardus van der Leeuw, revolted publicly, in his self-imposed role as a ‘nihilist’, against the theological inspiration of the Phenomenology of Religion of his virtually worshipped teacher.¹³ Sierksma was an outsider because he had become thoroughly alienated from the NHK-Calvinist religion in which he had been raised. In retribution for his rebellion, and because he was a foreign body in ecclesiastical terms, Sierksma’s application for the chair of van der Leeuw after his sudden death in November 1950 was rejected by the Groningen Faculty of Theology.

In his stead, another outsider was appointed in 1952: Theo van Baaren, who had been trained by H.W. Obbink in the even more confessional Utrecht Faculty of Theology. Though a much more cautious and irenic scholar, van Baaren rather unexpectedly continued the rebellion and in the end turned it into a proper revolution. He first exposed the ‘clay feet’ of Van der Leeuw’s Phenomenology,¹⁴ then revealed the biases in his views on ‘primitive mentality’ and preliterate religions,¹⁵ and finally established a fundamentally different paradigm, in which religions were studied as data in cultural history only.¹⁶

The institutional root cause of the rebellion of Sierksma, and of the revolution of Van Baaren, was the fact that the four *duplex ordo* faculties of theology continued to provide after 1876, and were meant to provide, the greater part of the training in academic theology of the future ministers of the *Nederlandse [336] Hervormde Kerk*, the former established church, and of a few other minor ones. Though the professors of academic theology in these four *duplex ordo* faculties were appointed by ‘the Crown’ (i.e. the government) and by fiction of law were not subject to supervision by the NHK church, such supervision proved usually unnecessary in practice, for until 1960, the Science of Religions taught in these faculties, Tiele’s not excluded,¹⁷ was fully consonant with liberal Protestant academic theology, and, in varying degrees, with that of the four modalities of the NHK-church.¹⁸ Van der Leeuw even explicitly re-confessionalized it by dismissing the possibility that it adopt metaphysical neutrality in respect of the truth claims of religion(s).¹⁹ Instead, he integrated (his) Science of Religion(s) into an *Ecce homo* theology of incarnation by holding that ‘all theology is anthropology, and all anthropology is theology, [for] the God-man, [the] Christ [is] the principle [fountainhead] of all knowledge about God and the natural world’.²⁰

¹² Platvoet 1998: 116-122, 125-130

¹³ Cf. Sierksma 1951a, 1979

¹⁴ Van Baaren 1957

¹⁵ Van Baaren 1960a

¹⁶ Van Baaren 1969, 1973

¹⁷ Wiebe (1991) is wrong to construct an absolute opposition between Tiele and Van der Leeuw by his argument that the former established the scientific study of religions and the latter subverted it. Tiele’s Science of Religions was as much an integral part of Tiele’s liberal theology as was that of Van der Leeuw (Platvoet 1998: 121-122, 126-133, 144 n55).

¹⁸ Cf. Platvoet 1998 for further details.

¹⁹ That could have been Wiebe’s point against Van der Leeuw.

²⁰ Van der Leeuw 1948b: 196. For further details, e.g. Van der Leeuw holding both state- and church-appointments at the Faculty of Theology of the State University (*Rijksuniversiteit*) at Groningen, cf. Platvoet 1998: 130-133. Cf. also Hofstee 1997: 40sq. on his professorship at Groningen, 170sq. on his Phenomenology.

The First Confrontation

The first shift towards an agnostic and secular approach may be dated to a unique document: an exchange of letters between Van der Leeuw and Sierksma, written in 1948²¹ and published in 1949.²² In his letter of 20 July 1948, Sierksma demanded in no uncertain tone that Science of Religions take a hard-nosed, frank, business-like, unromantic approach to the study of religions, one that is 'nihilist' in the sense of being limited to man only. He attacked van der Leeuw for not completely and permanently suspending his Christian beliefs, which he termed 'a romantic *pia fraus*'.²³ When Van der Leeuw wrote back that man himself could never find God, but was found only by God, and that God's words were the only talk that was to the point,²⁴ Sierksma wrote back that he mistrusted Van der Leeuw's easy shift from [337] romanticism to god.²⁵ By causing god to descend on the stage like a *deus ex machina*, Van der Leeuw himself could himself vanish from it and, having disappeared behind the scenes, forestall that he himself would have to face the fact that the riddle of man did *not* lead to god.²⁶ Sierksma added that humans talked a lot, but that god was silent.²⁷ Van der Leeuw answered with a confession of his faith that God had revealed Himself in the suffering Christ.²⁸ Sierksma accepted the 'true ring' of Van der Leeuw's confession, but pointed out that it had no meaning for him. Whereas Van der Leeuw had a 'guarantee [in] the cross at Golgotha and [in] the empty tomb', for Sierksma 'this salvation history [was] a human affair of the same order as e.g. the life and teachings of the Buddha'. To him, Christ's 'incarnation [was merely] a myth, [and] a beautiful lie if [it were] taken as a guarantee'.²⁹ Van der Leeuw, Sierksma added, was lucky to have 'a god in front of him' who provided him with meaning and direction. Sierksma confessed to having a creed and a religion of his own, be it a nihilist one that gave no directions:

I also know about a god. Behind the cosmos and behind my life I sense a power which is not at my disposal, not in my words nor in my deeds. [...] It is an X, a god-in-my-back. [...] In whatever direction I turn, I always have god at my back. And he is silent. There is, therefore, very little that I can say about him. I know only that he began at some time, in the cosmos and on earth, in the stones, plants, animals and humans. I only know about his nature that he is definitely not Love, as Jesus asserted, but acts as he sees fit, cruelly or mildly [...], that he takes the liberty of a painful experiment on me as a human being by splitting himself into nature and spirit and experimenting how the two might be reunited here on earth, without any guarantee [of success] in heaven or in history. [...] We must seek our own truths, our own facts, without [making] the detour by the way of Jesus Christ. [...] The rest is silence. Yet, not all is silence. However much or little I may still learn about my god, one thing is certain: he moves forward. I do not know whereto, but I will only learn something about him if I accompany him. He passes over those who stay behind. It means that he wishes to be realised in me. Therefore, I can better act out my religion for the time being than express it in words. [...] You will, for sure, deem my creed a poor one. So be it. [...] The ignorance of my nihilist religion has the advantage that I

²¹ The six letters are dated between 20 July and 27 December 1948.

²² Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949

²³ Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949: 5

²⁴ Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949: 6-7

²⁵ Van der Leeuw writes 'God'. Sierksma, however, consistently writes 'god'.

²⁶ Emphasis added by Sierksma

²⁷ Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949: 8-10

²⁸ Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949: 10-12

²⁹ 1949: 13-15

am not stuck with Christianity's half-heartedness, wedged in, as it is, between heaven and earth. That advantage outweighs its many disadvantages for me.³⁰

This passage has been quoted *in extenso* to show that Sierksma, despite his vehement rejection of the Christian [338] religion, was not an unbeliever, at least not in 1948.³¹ He belonged, with Eliade and others, to a new type of lay scholars of religions who had left the mainline Christian churches, but espoused a post-Christian, universalist, frail religious cosmology of their own making that inspired their science of religion(s).

At the same time, Sierksma was acutely aware of the 'a-theoretical', extra-scientific, and often unscientific, interests at the bottom of all scientific enterprise, his own included.³² He agreed with Van der Leeuw that they could not be avoided, yet held that the Christian theology at the heart of Van der Leeuw's *Phenomenology of Religion* gravely compromised its scientific character. His discussions with Van der Leeuw on this point had become so heated by 1948 that he abandoned the thesis on Greek religion on which he was working and switched to one on the methodology of *Phenomenology of Religion*.³³ Unofficial history has it that Van der Leeuw accepted that thesis on his deathbed and praised it as a breakthrough in the methodology of the science of religion(s). In retrospect, that verdict must be questioned for Sierksma proposed two reasons why Jung's 'complex psychology' be made to serve as the basic orientation of *Phenomenology of Religion*. One was that Jung's psychology would allow one to break free from its past bondage to Christian theology. The other was that it safeguarded the irreducibility of religion and of that other *sui generis* phenomenon, dear to Sierksma at that time, the human soul,³⁴ as well as man's religious nature.³⁵

Like Tiele, Sierksma set himself the task of freeing Science of Religions from bondage to confessional theology. Like Tiele, he remained himself at that time within the religionist paradigm from an 'a-theoretical interest' not unlike those of Tiele and Van der Leeuw. It is, however, also clear the Sierksma's position was not a static one. From an aside in his polemics with Hendrik Kraemer in 1959, it appears that the religionist elements in Sierksma's methodological position had considerably shrunk, or had perhaps even been abandoned.³⁶ He termed *epochè* then 'much ado about nothing: an [339] outlandish term for something quite normal which is practised in every civil conversation'.³⁷ He had also abandoned Jung,³⁸ and 'primitive mentality', which theory he had greatly cherished before 1953.³⁹ By the mid-1970s, when he had belatedly become Professor of Science of Religions in the Leiden Faculty of Theology, he may have been an atheist.⁴⁰ However, his preoccupation with religious projection and ethology,⁴¹ his public controver-

³⁰ 1949: 15-16

³¹ *Pace* Leertouwer (1991: 3): 'The Groningen Faculty [of Theology] did not dare to appoint the openly atheist Fokke Sierksma [as Professor of History of Religions] in 1951'.

³² Sierksma 1950: xxx

³³ Sierksma 1959: 87-88

³⁴ . Poetically termed by him 'that field of forces which science nor [mathematical] formulas have violated yet, and to which only poets dare to travel in this age that has no prophets' (Sierksma 1948: 31).

³⁵ Sierksma 1950: 12-25, 113-138, 227

³⁶ But see also Sierksma 1977b: 135-143

³⁷ Sierksma 1959: 88

³⁸ Sierksma 1959: 89

³⁹ Sierksma 1978: 61

⁴⁰ Kloos 1979: 12

sies, and his tragic academic isolation in the Leiden Faculty (1953-1977), prevented Sierksma from explicitly and systematically articulating an empirical and agnostic methodology for the study of religions,⁴² though he did plead strongly, in the last months of his tumultuous and unhappy academic career, that Science of Religions cut its umbilical cord with theology and take shelter with Cultural Anthropology.⁴³

The Silent Revolution

Van Baaren, said Drijvers, founded Science of Religions in the Netherlands as an autonomous,⁴⁴ secular study of religions as parts of human cultures by [definitively and completely] liberating it from theology.⁴⁵ Van Baaren is usually considered as having achieved this transformation in two steps, each covering roughly a decade. The first, 1952-1962, was that of the critique of the ethnological basis of van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion*,⁴⁶ and in particular his theories of dynamism and 'primitive mentality'.⁴⁷ In the second decade, 1962-1973, Van der Leeuw's legacy was further eliminated by replacing the term 'Phenomenology of Religion' with the 'Systematic Science of Religion',⁴⁸ and the publication of the papers of the Groningen Working Group for the Study of Fundamental Problems and Methods of Science of Religion in 1973. Though these facts are correct, they give van Baaren more credit for this methodological revolution than is perhaps his due. For, though the shift itself was crucial, it was, on the part of van Baaren, [340] a quiet and low profile one and, in its completion, a rather passive affair.

Van Baaren defended a slim PhD thesis in 1951 before the Utrecht Faculty of Theology in which he presented a phenomenology of revelation. It was quite an audacious feat at the time, because Van der Leeuw had reserved the study of revelation, as a matter of course, to theology and thereby declared it out of bounds as a legitimate object of study to the Science of Religions(s).⁴⁹ Van Baaren, moreover, shocked many in the Dutch *duplex ordo* theological establishment of 1951 by classifying the Christian God in one category with a multitude of other 'authors of revelation': gods, ancestors, demons, and even mountains, rocks, stones, animals, plants, and humans. Yet, his thesis was no revolution, for Van Baaren put one major limitation on that category: all 'authors of revelation' must belong to the realm of *das Ganz Andere* ('the Completely Other').⁵⁰ He did state, however, also that these beliefs about these sources of revelation could be placed within the purview of Phenomenology of Religion, because 'the decision about [the] truth or untruth [of beliefs in revelation] is not for Phenomenology to take'. Questions of ontology were out of bounds for it, because 'God, such as he is [in himself], can never be object of Science

⁴¹ Sierksma 1977b³; van Iersel 1991: 53-125; Hak 1994: 95-103

⁴² A caution must be sounded. Though Sierksma's work has received much attention lately (van Iersel 1991; Hak 1994: 95-112), a fuller study of his literary and scholarly work is still in order before a more definite appraisal of his contribution to the methodological transformation of Dutch Science of Religion can be given. The literary style of his scholarly work will, however, make any final assessment difficult.

⁴³ Sierksma 1977a: 20

⁴⁴ This autonomy of Science of Religion from Theology is, of course, radically different from the autonomy which Pals (1990a, 1990b) and others claim for religionist Science of Religions (cf. Platvoet 1994a: 34-38).

⁴⁵ Drijvers 1990: 8

⁴⁶ Van der Leeuw 1933

⁴⁷ Van Baaren 1957, 1960a

⁴⁸ Van Baaren 1969

⁴⁹ van der Leeuw 1948c: 9

of Religion'. Phenomenology is, therefore, restricted 'to God as he is experienced by men'.⁵¹ However, psychological and evolutionist 'explanations' of the origin of religion were out of bounds as much as were theological interpretations of it. Science must deal with both of them as hypotheses, for it can neither refute them, nor replace them by others that can be verified.⁵²

However, though Van Baaren did restrict Phenomenology of Religion to empirical matter and severely criticised Mensching's earlier (1940) phenomenology of revelation,⁵³ the religionist paradigm was still in full force in his thesis. The reality and activity of the meta-empirical, 'God', '*das Ganz Andere*' was self-evidently assumed.⁵⁴ Eliade's categories, *hierophanies* and *kratophanies*, were borrowed⁵⁵ for discriminating, in the multitude of revelations between, on the one hand, 'dynamistic'/'manistic' and 'animistic' religions, marked by their non-differentiating mystical participation thought,⁵⁶ and on the other hand 'personalist' religions, in which the number of revelations decreased, because man 'had [341] become progressively more individual, [and] had begun to address the impersonal *numen* as a thou'.⁵⁷ Van Baaren discerned three types of revelation: the dynamist, the polytheist, and the monotheist,⁵⁸ though he added that many dynamist revelations could be better termed 'manifestations', as the more narrow sense of 'revelation' required 'numinous content and purpose'.⁵⁹

By 1960, however, van Baaren had rejected Van der Leeuw's dynamism⁶⁰ and 'primitive mentality',⁶¹ and had corrected his views of 'primitive' cultures and religions by insisting that they were the highly diverse end products of long histories of change.⁶² However, he still held that History of Religions and Ethnology were proof that people were religious beings. He could not, he wrote, escape the 'axiomatic' conclusion that 'the religious aspect is part and parcel of human nature'.⁶³

The last traces of religionism seem to have vanished in Van Baaren by a barely perceptible process of attrition between 1962 and 1973 rather than by the articulation of a major shift. The transition, in Van Baaren himself, to an agnostic methodology seems due to three external factors, and was completed probably only after 1968. The first factor was, in the order of time, the spate of publications in Anthropology of Religion after 1965,⁶⁴ in which agnostic metaphysical neutrality emerged as a counter-paradigm against the positivist-reductionist cosmology dominant in Anthropology and Sociology of Religion till then.⁶⁵ Van Baaren seems to have followed

⁵⁰ Van Baaren 1951: 29, 105

⁵¹ Van Baaren 1951: 11

⁵² Van Baaren 1951: 11-14, 115

⁵³ Van Baaren 1951: 106-110

⁵⁴ E.g. van Baaren 1951: 12, 14-15, 16, 17, 18-19, 21, 29, 105, 112

⁵⁵ Van Baaren 1951: 21, 23

⁵⁶ Van Baaren 1951: 22sq., 111, 112-114

⁵⁷ Van Baaren 1951: 24, 111, 113

⁵⁸ Van Baaren 1951: 114

⁵⁹ Van Baaren 1951: 115

⁶⁰ Van Baaren 1960a: 51, 122, 191-210

⁶¹ Van Baaren 1960a: 17-37

⁶² Van Baaren 1960a: 24-27

⁶³ Van Baaren 1960a: 49-50

⁶⁴ E.g., Evans-Pritchard 1956, 1965; Geertz 1966; Spiro 1966; Turner 1967, 1968, 1969; van Baal 1971

⁶⁵ E.g., Berger's 'methodological atheism' in Berger 1967: 100, 180; cf. also Berger 1970. The methodological agnosticism of some of these anthropologists (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, Turner and van Baal), and sociologists (e.g. Berger), took its inspiration from their private religious convictions. Some, like Jan van Baal, shifted to methodologi-

the general drift of this decade by taking, unlike Sierksma,⁶⁶ ‘the anthropological turn’:⁶⁷ he adopted the anti-positivist position of Evans-Pritchard who insisted that empirical science deal with religion only as a cultural subsystem in its interaction with the other departments of culture, and refrain from positivist [and other] metaphysical speculation.⁶⁸ The second factor was the discussions in the Groningen Working Group [342] between the younger ‘methodologists’ in that group (Hubbeling, Drijvers, Leertouwer, Oosten, and Vink), in which Van Baaren seems to have been rather passive.⁶⁹ The third factor was an element in his private life: it had become clear to him by that time from his personal development that man was not religious by nature.⁷⁰

The upshot of it was that Van Baaren came to hold by 1973 that ‘all theological [and other] metaphysical presuppositions [were to be] eliminated’ definitively and permanently from Science of Religion as ‘irrelevant’.⁷¹ He no longer presented *das Ganz Andere* as a self-evident reality but as a ‘belief notion’.^{72, 73} Moreover, he now held that *das Ganz Andere*, as the *idée directrice*⁷⁴ of Phenomenology of Religion, had ‘greatly impeded our understanding of religion as it actually is’.⁷⁵ He no longer perceived religion as the origin of human culture, but as a ‘function’ of it, which was ‘connected and interacted with other functions of culture’.⁷⁶ He held that religions must not only be accurately and ‘congenially’ described⁷⁷ as symbolic action that is meaningful and relevant to the believers in the terms of their cosmology,⁷⁸ and as models of, and models for, their (empirical) world,⁷⁹ which can be compared⁸⁰ and classified.⁸¹ But he also insisted that their religions must be theoretically explained by, e.g., psychology or sociology, as functions of, and in, a culture, for they produce testable results in the empirical realm.⁸² Those explanations must, however, ‘not aim [...] at reducing religion to something else’.⁸³ Science of Religion was, therefore, a multi-disciplinary conglomerate of historical, social-scientific, and systematic disciplines,⁸⁴ all of which study religions, their data being integrated by the Systematic Science of Religion.⁸⁵ As a group, they aim ‘at a maximum of objectivity and a minimum of subjectivity’.⁸⁶

cal religionism later (van Baal 1991; cf. Platvoet 1991).

⁶⁶ Van Iersel 1991: 198-200

⁶⁷ Vergote 1980: 37-38

⁶⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1965

⁶⁹ Hak 1994: 129

⁷⁰ Cf. Nauta 1990: 27-28

⁷¹ Van Baaren 1973: 35, 42-44, 47-48

⁷² A category under which he grouped both the metaphors of myths and the concepts of theology (39).

⁷³ Van Baaren 1973: 38-39

⁷⁴ Cf. for this notion, Drijvers 1973: 63; Leertouwer 1973: 81

⁷⁵ Van Baaren 1973: 40

⁷⁶ Van Baaren 1973: 36, 50-51

⁷⁷ Van Baaren 1973: 48

⁷⁸ Van Baaren 1973: 39-40

⁷⁹ Van Baaren 1973: 43

⁸⁰ Van Baaren 1973: 51-52

⁸¹ Van Baaren 1973: 48

⁸² Van Baaren 1973: 39-40, 42, 45-46, 48-49, 51-52

⁸³ Van Baaren 1973: 37

⁸⁴ Van Baaren explicitly excluded Philosophy of Religion (1973: 44).

⁸⁵ Van Baaren 1973: 44-45, 47, 52

⁸⁶ Van Baaren 1973: 50

He urged that more precise and more neutral terminology be developed.⁸⁷ He held that scholars of religions need not themselves be religious.⁸⁸

Space does not permit the demonstration that the paradigm formulated in van Baaren & Drijvers 1973 has indeed since then [343] become [343] the dominant perspective in Science of Religions in the Netherlands as practised in the *Vakgroepen Godsdienstwetenschap* (Departments for the historical and comparative study of religions), not only in the four so called *duplex ordo* Faculties of Theology, but also in the *simplex ordo* (church-tied) institutes of theology in The Netherlands, and among anthropologists of religion.⁸⁹ Agnostic restraint seems to have been established as the normal framework of the academic study of religions, in the double sense of being the most common approach, and as setting the standard and norm. Religionist and positivist approaches have certainly not disappeared but have far fewer adherents. It would take a separate article to document their relative strengths.⁹⁰

Cutting the umbilical cord?

Some recent developments must now be indicated briefly, as they may affect the relative strengths of these paradigms in the Netherlands in the near future. One is the demand by some philosophers of religion, like Kuitert⁹¹ and Vroom,⁹² and the anthropologist Jan van Baal,⁹³ that scholars of religion study religion religiously.⁹⁴

Another is modifications of the *duplex ordo*. The chairs for confessional Dogmatic and Pastoral Theology adjoined to the Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen, and Amsterdam *duplex ordo* Faculties of Theology, have recently been merged by the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* into the national 'University for Reformed Confessional Theology'. That institute has been renegotiating the terms of the *duplex ordo*. The programmes of studies for future ministers have been rescheduled. Whereas of old, training in confessional theology came after that in academic theology and was fully separate from it, courses in confessional theology are now being taught simultaneously with the academic theology programmes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Moreover, though a practice had developed to permit future ministers to devote one third of their graduate study in academic theology to a confessional subject, they may now, if they so wish, [344] devote two thirds to it. The faculties have in addition agreed in principle to double appointments: some of the professors and lecturers in confessional theology may be appointed also to a lectureship in academic theology. It remains to be seen whether or not these institutional modifications will lead to a (degree of) reconsecration of the programmes of the academic training of future ministers. If it does, it may considerably strengthen the religionist paradigm in Science of Religions as

⁸⁷ Van Baaren 1973: 52-54

⁸⁸ Van Baaren 1973: 48

⁸⁹ The same could be said for Sociology of Religion, but not for Psychology of Religion, and definitively not for Philosophy of Religion.

⁹⁰ For details on Dutch 'poly-paradigmatic' Science of Religions since the 1970s, cf. Platvoet 2002: 131-136

⁹¹ Cf. e.g. Kuitert 1974: 15-23. On Kuitert's increasingly negative theology, cf. Verduijn 1998

⁹² Vroom 1988: 23, 33-34, 45-75, 274

⁹³ van Baal 1992

⁹⁴ During retirement, 1975-1993, van Baal published *Boodschappen uit de stilte*, 'messages from silence', a reflection, in the 'silence' of retirement, on the universe as silent Mystery, on which Mystery he founded his plea for a religiously inspired Anthropology of Religions. Cf. Platvoet 1991; Drees 1996; Leertouwer 1996; Vroom 1996

religionist scholars of religions may be more readily appointed to these programmes than those practising methodological neutralism.

Other institutional re-alignments have been taking place in recent years, or are looming. The immediate cause is the steady decline of the number of students preparing for the ministry in Faculties of Theology and its financial consequences. The long-term reason is the changing relationships between three distinct fields in Dutch society: the rapidly secularising religious scene in the Netherlands; the academic Study of Religions; and Theology, academic as well as confessional.

In the Utrecht Faculty of Theology, the position of the Department of Science of Religions seems to be weakening as a result of the need for faculty staff reduction: it is in danger of being restricted to undergraduate teaching, if further staff reductions become necessary.

In the Amsterdam Faculty, the Department of Science of Religions has already been virtually eliminated in the drastic overhaul of that Faculty in the recent past: only one or two part time posts have been retained for undergraduate teaching. However, a new and promising 'Centre for Religion and Society' has been established in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in its stead, with the social anthropologist Peter van der Veer as its Professor of Comparative Religion and Director, and a staff of three more anthropologists of religion (Dr. Gerd Bauman, Dr. Patricia Speyer, Dr. Birgit Meyer), and one historian of the developments of mainline religion in The Netherlands after 1600, Dr. Peter van Rooden.

The Groningen Faculty has officially been reconstituted into a Faculty of Theology & Science of Religions in 1988. Science of Religions' methodological autonomy from *duplex ordo* theology, and its distinct identity, have thereby received formal approval, as has its strictly secular Science of Religions programme. This re-alignment has the virtue of keeping Science of Religions closely bonded to its historical partner, liberal theology.

The Leiden Faculty embarked on again a different course. Despite the troubled history of Science of Religions in this faculty, Science of Religions has a strong position in it, in terms of its share in the [345] faculty's three teaching and research programmes, the number of its posts, the number of students majoring in Science of Religions, and of Ph.D. students. It has, moreover, developed a Programme of Islamic Studies in collaboration with the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, in which in particular the development of Islam in West Europe is a focal point in research and reaching; and it also participates in a one year postgraduate (MA) Programme in Islam for (Muslim) students from Indonesia. The Department's strong position is also expressed by its three research programmes in the recently established Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), which co-ordinates the eight research programmes of the Leiden Faculty of Theology. One of them is in Islamics; another in the Comparative Study of Religions; and the third is in Methodology of the Study of Religions, the latter for the purpose developing a dialogue in matters of methodology between the research groups of the Leiden Faculty. Its outcome has been the reflexive articulation of the several paradigms in use in the faculty, and the fostering of a culture of poly-paradigmatic awareness and tolerance rather than the imposition of a mono-paradigmatic framework upon all the studies in religions in the Leiden Faculty.⁹⁵ The Leiden institute is also actively promoting the intensification of relations between Science of Religions as pursued in its Department for the Study of Religions, the Faculty, and the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences in Leiden University.

⁹⁵ See Platvoet & Molendijk 1999

Four options have, therefore, emerged: reduction at Utrecht, with its attendant danger of a re-confessionalisation of Science of Religions; the Amsterdam exodus from the Faculty of Theology to Anthropology and its full ‘secularisation’ in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences; the Groningen ‘living apart together’; and the Leiden dialogue. Sierksma pleaded passionately that Science of Religions leave Theology and join Anthropology. In Amsterdam, Science of Religions has, however, virtually been swamped by Anthropology of Religion.

Van Baaren once said that an artist (he was one, as were van der Leeuw and Sierksma) can get down to work wherever he is given a good studio.⁹⁶ His light-hearted optimism seems a fair summary of the options, in terms of institutional strategy, which are now before Science of Religions, if it must choose in the near future between three alternative settings: *simplex ordo* theology, *duplex ordo* theology, and the faculties of arts or social sciences. I submit, on the basis of historical analysis, that the choice need not be made on the basis of the argument, invoked by Sierksma, of the [346] methodological incompatibility between Science of Religions and Theology, confessional or academic. His argument was valid to a degree in his time, but it holds no longer now, for all three settings are now poly-paradigmatic. None imposes one specific frame of reference as axiomatic, and all three current paradigms, agnostic, religionist, and reductionist, are found in all three settings. If a choice has to be made, it will have to be on the basis of the opportunities which the three settings present, or do not present, to Science of Religions for its own optimal development: on the basis of the number and types of students to be served in a faculty, department, or institute; the marginality or centrality of Science of Religions in teaching and research, research tradition, research organisation, research funding, and funding opportunities of that institution; the functional relevance of Science of Religions to, or isolation from, the other disciplines; and the relative allocation of posts, relative vulnerability for reduction of posts, etc. Scholars of Science of Religions will have to decide for one of the three settings on the basis of the best opportunities for their discipline at that particular time and place.

In the terms of van Baaren’s good studio, Science of Religions seems actually to have the best prospects in the near future in the Netherlands in its traditional environment of the *duplex ordo* faculties of theology for a number of reasons. Science of Religions has a long tradition of working in these faculties. The relevance of Science of Religions to the academic training of future ministers and interested lay people in any programme of modern theology, liberal or confessional, *duplex ordo* or *simplex ordo*, is beyond dispute. In the past three decades, Science of Religions has established a distinct status, group identity, and methodological autonomy in these faculties by its tradition of agnostic restraint in matters of ontology. Moreover, liberal theology, as a specific religious paradigm, seems to have weakened considerably in some of the other departments of Dutch faculties of theology, and to have disappeared from the methodology of some of its scholars. The Departments of Science of Religions in Groningen, and Leiden, and in Utrecht so far, are relatively strong, in terms of the number of posts,⁹⁷ and [347] those of Groningen and Leiden in the

⁹⁶ Leertouwer 1990: 59

⁹⁷ Groningen has one full Professor (Dr. J. Bremmer; his field is Ancient Religions and the Comparative Study of Religions); two Lecturers in Indian Religions (Dr. L.P. van den Bosch, Dr. H.J. Bakker); one in Anthropology of Islam (Dr. M. Buitelaar); and one in Anthropology of Religion (Dr. Y. Kuiper). Leiden has one full Professor (Dr. P.S. van Koningsveld; his field is Islam, specifically in West Europe); one Senior Lecturer for Comparative Religion (myself); another Lecturer for Islam in Spain and North Africa, Dr. G. Wiegers; and a Lecturer for Ancient Religions, Dr. A.F. de Jong. Utrecht has one full Professor (Dr. Ria Kloppenborg; her field is Indian Religions), one Lecturer for

quality of their staff, teaching, and research. The cooperation in teaching and research between Science of Religions and allied disciplines in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences has markedly increased in Groningen and Leiden in recent years.

Finally, the further emancipation of Science of Religions from theology was strongly supported in Groningen and Leiden by the development in recent years of programmes of Science of Religions Studies for students who do not prepare for the ministry or as teachers of 'religion' in secondary schools,⁹⁸ but train for secular jobs that require an academic training in Science of Religions, and an intimate knowledge of the wide range of religions developing in the Netherlands now. These students need to be introduced thoroughly to the religious pluralisation and fragmentation of modern Dutch and other Western societies, and the world at large; to the needs of the civil authorities for the development of policies for the smooth integration into Dutch society of the large and growing communities of 'ethnic minorities' professing religions other than Christianity; for educational programmes, and information and documentation services on immigrant and native religions for the schools, the media, institutions of public health, and the general public; and, more marginally and more exceptionally, the needs for non-church ritual service and pastoral or spiritual counselling for some of the large, and steadily growing, group of Dutch without any religious affiliation. Students trained in this secular Science of Religions are finding jobs in widely dispersed fields, such as the media, civil service, business consultancy, psycho-hygienic care, non-church [348] pastoral care, e.g., in the public institutions such as the army, prisons, hospitals, mental asylums and other institutions of public physical or mental health, public schools,⁹⁹ and in private enterprise in ritual, e.g. by devising the appropriate rituals at, e.g., marriages and burials for those who no longer use the services of the clergy, yet wish to ritualise these special moments in life, etc. The secular character of these programmes of Science of Religions may be further enhanced by weeding out some of the courses, e.g. in (Christian) Philosophy of Religion, which were traditionally deemed to be relevant for future ministers but are unhelpful for students in a secular programme in Science of Religions.

However, there is a danger that Science of Religions may become constrained in such a programme by its focus on professional training for jobs in modern secular Dutch society. Science of Religions should counteract those limitations by maintaining the traditional emphasis on the philological, historical, and comparative study of the religions of humankind worldwide and throughout their histories; and by requiring proficiency in languages, social science research methods, and theory and methodology in the study of religions as pertinent requirements for such studies. Its primary purpose must remain academic: the description and explanation of religions as parts of the cultures of humans. While the descriptive and interpretative task requires high standards in philological training, and/or the social-scientific methods of data gathering and interpretation, and in the techniques and problems of hermeneutics, or cultural translation, the task of social-sci-

Islam (Dr. Ghasan Ascha), and two part-time Lecturers for Ancient Religions (Prof.dr. D. van der Plas, Mr. H. Stadhouders).

⁹⁸ The *simplex ordo* institutes are also developing such programmes, but they are mainly theology programmes for interested lay people and have only moderate, or even tiny, portions of Science of Religion in them. The Faculty of Theology of the RC University at Nijmegen has a programme in *Religiestudies*, 'Studies of, or in, Religion(s)', which has virtually no Science of Religions in it. It is a programme in Christian Theology of Religions and Missiology.

⁹⁹ The Dutch Humanist Association was granted its one-faculty 'University for Humanist Studies' in 1989. It is located in Utrecht and has developed its own training programme for 'Humanist counsellors' in public institutions. It has appointed Dr. Alphons van Dijk as Lecturer in Science of Religions.

tific interpretation and explanation demands also a good grounding in the histories of social-scientific theories of religion.

These academic requirements should, however, be kept in a balance with the pragmatic needs of professional training for jobs in churches as well as in secular society in order to forestall the other danger to Science of Religions: an exclusive emphasis on a 'pure' Science of Religions. For that might lead to the centrifugal specialisation by which Science of Religions may become dispersed over, and ultimately dissolve into, the disciplines of the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences. It would shatter the identity which Science of Religions, as a group of disciplines, has acquired, to various degrees, in the past.

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In Conclusion

The comparative study of religions seems crucial for avoiding both extremes. It can provide courses relevant for ecclesiastical as well as secular training, yet retain a strong emphasis on the global, historical and methodological dimensions of the science of religion(s). It can also serve as the *trait d'union* between the several historical disciplines, and prevent them from ending up in the 'splendid isolation' of their specialisations by fostering in them the sense of belonging to a unified, and unifying Science of Religions. It can also act as bridge between the more descriptive Science of Religions, as History of Religions, and the more theoretical social-scientific study of religions by insisting on the contextuality of religions: they were, or are, 'embedded' in numerous specific societies and histories, developed consequently a rich morphology, and had many – religious and non-religious – functions in these diverse settings. Which means that they require not only description but also – non-ultimate, non-axiomatic – explanation. For short, Science of Religions need not cut the umbilical cord. It may stay put, provided it consider pragmatically whatever other option presents itself.

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