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## *The Low Countries*

STEFAN BLANCKE, ABRAHAM C. FLIPSE, AND JOHAN BRAECKMAN

In 2009 the world celebrated the Darwin year. In the Low Countries too, the two-hundredth anniversary of Charles Darwin's birthday and the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* were commemorated by countless events, exhibits, and publications. In Belgium, these celebrations did not inspire a public debate, let alone religious protest. In the Netherlands, however, creationists organized a leaflet campaign by which they intended to inform each and every household about their creationist alternative. This response did not come out of the blue. For decades, evolution has evoked heated debates both among Dutch Christians and in the public domain. In this chapter, we highlight the most relevant historical developments relating to creationism in both countries and cautiously provide an explanation for the remarkable difference in religious responses in the two small adjacent countries.

### **Religious Background**

Today, both the Netherlands and Belgium are secularized countries, but they have distinct religious traditions. In Belgium, Roman Catholicism has been a dominant cultural factor since the establishment of the country in 1830. Although the influence of the church has waned considerably, Catholicism has left its cultural mark, particularly in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of the country. Nearly 60 percent of the 10.4 million Belgians regard themselves as Catholics, but only 5 to 10 percent of the population attends church regularly. There are small Muslim and Protestant minorities of about 4 percent each, and about 40 percent of the population does not believe in God.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, since the time of the Reformation, the Netherlands has always been a religiously divided country. The majority of the population was Protestant (Calvinist), but there was a large Roman Catholic minority, concentrated in the southern provinces, and several other smaller minorities. The privileged position of the Reformed Church in the time of the Dutch Republic explains why today the Netherlands is still viewed as a Protestant country. In the course of the nineteenth century Dutch Protestantism split into several denominations.

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Around 1900, of the 5 million inhabitants, 49 percent belonged to the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church), 35 percent to the Roman Catholic Church, and 8 percent to the smaller Reformed churches. Today 17 percent of the Dutch population (of about 16.5 million inhabitants) is Protestant, and 27 percent is Roman Catholic. In addition, 6 percent is Muslim. Almost half the population is not affiliated with any traditional religion.<sup>2</sup> It was especially among the members of the smaller Reformed denominations and the orthodox wing of the Dutch Reformed Church—most of whom did not belong to the social, ecclesiastic, or academic elite—that creationism found fertile ground. Although, compared to the United States, the creationist movement remained numerically small, creationism has become a visible and sometimes prominent phenomenon in the twentieth-century Dutch religious landscape.

### The Dutch Calvinists' Struggle with Evolution

In the nineteenth century, leading theologians at the universities in the Netherlands tried to adapt Christian doctrines to modern science and to the historical-critical reading of the Bible. These “modernist” theologians managed to reconcile evolution with their faith. However, a considerable number of Dutch churchgoers—both in the Dutch Reformed Church and in various separatist churches—were less favorable to modern science and culture. The theologian, journalist, and statesman Abraham Kuyper became the charismatic leader of this marginalized group of (orthodox) Calvinists, who had no voice either within the churches or in Dutch society, which was dominated by a liberal elite. A process of emancipation started in which the Calvinists established their own private schools, a political party, newspapers, and many other organizations and institutions, including the Calvinist Free University in Amsterdam, founded in 1880. This resulted in a powerful orthodox subculture. Most of Kuyper’s supporters were members of the seceded Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands). Under Kuyper’s leadership, orthodox Calvinism experienced a revival, resulting in a worldview often denoted as “neo-Calvinism.”<sup>3</sup>

The Roman Catholics, the socialists, and other groups followed the example of the Calvinists, which produced a pattern of social organization called *verzuiling* (pillarization): a “vertical division” of society into various religious and ideological groups. Between 1920 and 1960 these groups existed in relative isolation, but they also adapted to the general culture and tried to meet the challenges posed by modern society.<sup>4</sup>

The question of creation versus evolution was discussed vigorously within

the Kuyperian, neo-Calvinist tradition. In contrast to pietistic, world-shunning Calvinist groups, the neo-Calvinists wanted to be both orthodox and modern, and they could not ignore the issue. However, they refused to adapt their faith as drastically to modern science as the liberal Protestants, which created a perpetual tension. The Dutch Roman Catholics also rejected evolution for a long time, but this was less determinative of their identity.<sup>5</sup>

The turn-of-the-century neo-Calvinists considered “the dogma of evolution” to be irreconcilable with the Christian belief in a providential God, because of its naturalistic, mechanistic, and ateleological character. Their criticism focused on the philosophical and social consequences that had been derived from evolutionary theory by Ernst Haeckel, Herbert Spencer, and others. However, they also addressed the discrepancy between the biblical creation story and the evolutionary account. Like most orthodox Protestants in the Anglo-Saxon world, Dutch neo-Calvinists were inclined to harmonize the findings of modern geology with the creation account in a “concordistic” way, for example, by using a day-age interpretation of Genesis 1.<sup>6</sup>

### **A First Wave of Creationism**

The next generation of neo-Calvinists evaluated the relevance of late nineteenth-century theology and views of science in the light of new social and cultural developments. Some of the Calvinist scientists claimed that biological evolution was acceptable as a scientific theory, as long as it was not part of a mechanistic worldview.<sup>7</sup>

Most Calvinist theologians, however, followed a different path. They shifted the debate about the relation of faith to evolution and geology to the subject of the authority of scripture versus the authority of science. In the 1920s a controversy arose in the Reformed Churches about whether the story of the Fall (Genesis 2–3) should be taken literally or not. The Reverend J. G. Geelkerken had doubted the literal-historical reading of this story. In the end, the Synod of the Reformed Churches of 1926 decided to suspend Geelkerken. Several Dutch newspapers associated the Geelkerken case, which was often reduced to the question “Did the serpent really speak?” with the Scopes or monkey trial that had taken place in the United States the year before. The Geelkerken case, however, did not concern the teaching of evolution in public schools but revolved around a discussion within the churches about the interpretation of scripture. After all, the Dutch Calvinists had their own schools for secondary education, and evolutionary theory was simply neglected in their biology textbooks until the 1960s.<sup>8</sup>

The consequences of the theologians’ attitude toward the sciences soon be-

MODERNE THEOLOGISCHE KWESTIES

Teekening voor „de Groene Amsterdamer” door L. J. Jordaen



DE BELANGHEBBENDEN

Caricature comparing the Geelkerken case in the Netherlands (“Did the serpent really speak?”) to the “monkey trial” in the United States in which a serpent and an ape are portrayed as “the interested parties” in “modern theological issues.” *De Groene Amsterdamer*, Sept. 19, 1925.

came manifest. In 1930 the Free University professor of dogmatics Valentijn Hepp visited Princeton Theological Seminary to deliver the Stone Lectures on the topic of “Calvinism and the Philosophy of Nature.” Hepp claimed that he did not accept the results of mainstream geology, and he approvingly referred to the work of George McCready Price. Nowadays the Canadian amateur geologist and Seventh-day Adventist Price is regarded as the founding father of twentieth-century young-earth creationism, but at that time support for Price’s “flood geology” was rather limited, even in the United States. It is therefore remarkable that Hepp recommended Price’s work, and he was not the only Dutch Calvin-

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ist who did so. In 1932 the Free University professor of Old Testament G. Ch. Aalders published an influential 552-page commentary on the stories of creation and the Fall in the book of Genesis. Criticizing modern geology and evolutionary theory, Aalders adopted several arguments from Price, and he stressed that catastrophes—especially the Deluge—provided a better explanation for the fossil record. By these and other publications, Reformed churchgoers became familiar with creationist arguments. And, as a result of pillarization, they could easily avoid a confrontation with mainstream science. Although most Calvinist scientists were critical of the views of Hepp and Aalders, a general discussion of the matter started only after World War II.<sup>9</sup>

### **Wider Acceptance of Evolutionary Theory**

After 1945, Calvinist scientists gradually became more influential in the neo-Calvinist subculture, and a new generation of theologians was willing to engage in a renewed discussion about the theory of evolution. This initiated a debate about creation and evolution among a wider public. Especially Jan Lever, professor of zoology at the Free University, and his colleague Jan R. van de Fliert, professor of geology, argued that one could accept the biological theory of evolution and at the same time believe in a providential God. Their ideas caused quite a stir among many nonacademic Calvinists, but in the course of the 1960s their views gradually found acceptance. In the same period, several leading Calvinist theologians adopted increasingly liberal views and shifted their focus to other theological issues. In 1967 the verdict of the 1926 Synod concerning Genesis 2–3 was retracted, and around 1970 the debate seemed to have died out. The Free University shed its explicitly Calvinist character and gradually became less distinguishable from other Dutch universities. Analogously, the Reformed Churches transformed from a segregative, orthodox church into an open, pluralistic denomination. Seemingly, the Dutch Calvinists had finally come to accept the Darwinian theory of evolution.<sup>10</sup>

### **A Second Wave of Creationism**

However, several small Reformed denominations remained orthodox and denounced the Reformed Churches and Calvinist organizations for capitulating to modernism and evolutionism. In these orthodox circles, the rise of creationism in the United States was noticed early on. On May 16 and 17, 1967, “concerned brothers” of the so-called *Vrijgemaakt-Gereformeerde Kerken* (Liberated Reformed Churches) organized a conference entitled “Creation-Evolution” to warn of the destructive impact of evolutionism in theology, ethics, and society and,

more specifically, of the ideas of Lever and Van de Fliert. The lecturers invoked arguments against evolution that were explicitly drawn from recent publications by Morris and Whitcomb. A young geology student and minister's son, Nicolaas A. Rupke, gave a lecture entitled "Redating the Past." Rupke had learned about flood geology in the early 1960s and had contacted the aging Price in the United States. He joined the Creation Research Society, conducted creationist research work, and published several papers in the *CRS Quarterly*. In the autumn of 1968, Rupke left the Netherlands for the United States, where he later abandoned his creationist beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

In the Netherlands, however, the story of creationism continued. In 1969 a translation of Morris's *The Twilight of Evolution* was published, followed one year later by A. M. Rehwinkel's *The Flood in the Light of the Bible, Geology and Archaeology*. From 1974 onward, original Dutch creationist publications appeared, which often relied strongly on the work of American creationists. One of the most prolific Dutch authors was the biologist Willem J. Ouweneel, affiliated with the Plymouth Brethren, a flamboyant speaker and a rigorous polemicist. His books were widely read by both evangelicals and Calvinists.<sup>12</sup>

Although these books became quite popular, they were also criticized by fellow believers. Some orthodox Reformed theologians distanced themselves, on the one hand, from the theistic-evolutionist views of people like Lever and Van de Fliert but, on the other hand, also from the creationism of Morris, Whitcomb, Rehwinkel, and Ouweneel. One of the strict Liberated-Reformed theologians warned against the danger of "unwittingly drifting from Calvinism into fundamentalism." In his view, young-earth creationism was not compatible with Reformed theology. For many church members this middle course was all too subtle. One of the leading Calvinist creationists, J. A. (Koos) van Delden, a mathematician by training, wondered why the theologians did not wholeheartedly accept flood geology. The creationists, Van Delden argued, continued the work that had been initiated by the Reformed theologians of the early twentieth century. It was, in any case, better to follow Morris than Lever or Van de Fliert.<sup>13</sup>

### Creationism Institutionalized

In the 1970s conservative Christians from several Reformed and evangelical churches joined forces in newly founded organizations. Particularly relevant were the activities of the evangelical broadcasting company, EO (Evangelische Omroep), founded in 1967, and the Stichting tot Bevordering van Bijbelgetrouwe Wetenschap (Foundation for the Advancement of Studies Faithful to the Bible), established in 1974. The latter founded the Evangelische Hogeschool (Evangel-



ical College) and published the creationist journal *Bijbel en wetenschap* (Bible and Science). Van Delden and Ouweneel were among the founders of these organizations. In subsequent years a new “evangelical-Reformed” network materialized around the EO. Although the traditional “pillars” gradually crumbled and society became increasingly secularized, the neo-Calvinist tradition was in a way perpetuated by this new movement. Moreover, the opportunities that the pillarized structure of society still provided were exploited to the full. Prominent spokesmen of the evangelical-Reformed subculture fiercely criticized the developments in the Reformed Churches and in traditional Calvinist organizations in the 1960s and 1970s. To their discontent, the Calvinist leaders did not oppose the “revolt” of the sixties. As conservatives regarded the intrusion of evolutionism in Calvinist organizations as a mark of secularization, they responded by adhering to the strictest form of antievolutionism possible. The EO and affiliated organizations focused explicitly on the dissemination of young-earth creationism, and their statutory principles were more outspoken than orthodox Calvinist organizations had been before.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s, the Dutch creationists gained much attention, particularly with an EO television series entitled *Adam of Aap?* (Adam or Ape?), presented by Van Delden, and with a public debate between creationists and evolutionists, presided over by Ouweneel, that was attended by more than a thousand people. The English-born pharmacologist Arthur E. Wilder-Smith, who actively spread the creationist message in many European countries in this period, frequently appeared as an expert in EO television programs. The creationists did not succeed in converting the Dutch population to creationism, but they were extremely successful in making strict creationism generally accepted by members of several orthodox Reformed churches and the conservative wing of the Dutch Reformed Church. Eventually, the EO attracted more than half a million members. In a survey article on “Creationism in the Netherlands” (1978) in *Acts and Facts* of the Institute for Creation Research, Ouweneel proudly proclaimed: “In the last four years or so, creationism has developed so rapidly in the Netherlands that without doubt this country is assuming the lead in creationism at present in Europe.” And in 1980 Van Delden wrote in *Bible and Science* that “the struggle with evolutionism lies behind us.”<sup>15</sup>

Aware of their relatively strong institutional basis, the Dutch creationists turned their minds to Europe. The first European Creationist Congress was organized in August 1984, in Heverlee, Belgium, hosting creationists from various European countries, followed by two more conferences in 1986 and 1988. In subsequent years several congresses were organized in other countries. How-



ever, the Dutch creationists did not conquer Europe. On the contrary, even in the Netherlands the discussion died out.<sup>16</sup>

### Intelligent Design in the Netherlands

In the meantime, the seeds were planted for the third creationist wave during the 1990s. In 1994 the physicist Arie van den Beukel published a book with the title *Met andere ogen* (With different eyes), in which he relied heavily on Michael Denton's *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, which is now considered a seminal work of the intelligent design movement. He argued that there was no hard evidence for evolution by natural selection and that therefore accepting evolutionary theory was nothing but an act of faith. Three years later, he wrote the introduction to the Dutch translation of Michael J. Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*, in which "irreducible complexity" in biochemical systems is presented as evidence for intelligent design. His writings attracted the attention of prominent and respected members within the evangelical-Reformed community who were dissatisfied with the young-earth creationist views common among their fellow believers. They welcomed intelligent design as an acceptable and scientifically justified means of reconciling their orthodox religious views with belief in an old earth.<sup>17</sup>

One of the first to endorse intelligent design as a valid alternative to young-earth creationism was Ouweneel. However, of greater importance were the conversions of Cees Dekker, a physicist who specialized in nanotechnology, and Andries Knevel, a former president of the EO. Dekker had never been convinced by young-earth creationism, but, being an evangelical, he was nevertheless influenced by it. He first publicly expressed his sympathy for intelligent design in his inaugural address as a professor at the Delft University of Technology in 2000. Referring to the works of Van den Beukel, Denton, Behe, and Phillip Johnson—cofounder of the Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture—he claimed that "there is remarkably little scientific support for such an important theory as Darwin's evolutionary mechanism" and that "evolution, defined as the explanation for the origin of life and the origin of biodiversity, is a dogma that, after careful examination, barely has any support." The same year, the mathematician Ronald Meester, in his inaugural address, stated that "on a popular level Darwin is still very much alive, but on an academic level, there are many, many doubts." He too referred to the works of Van den Beukel, Denton, and Behe. Dekker and Meester learned about each other's interest in intelligent design, and together with a group of fellow Christians, including the philosopher René van Woudenberg, they held monthly meetings to discuss topics relating to science and religion. Inspired by the discussions at

these meetings, they compiled an edited volume on intelligent design that was published in 2005, *Schitterend ongeluk of sporen van ontwerp?* (Glorious accident or traces of design?). The volume, to which Dekker contributed three articles, Meester and Van Woudenberg two each, and Van den Beukel one, was strongly anti-Darwinian in content and tone. They referred repeatedly to the books of Behe, Johnson, and William Dembski, another leading figure in the American intelligent design movement.<sup>18</sup>

By then, intelligent design had fully entered the public arena. In March 2005, Maria van der Hoeven, a Catholic member of the Christian-Democratic party CDA and at the time minister of education, culture, and science, wrote on her weblog that she had had an interesting conversation with Dekker. She was particularly impressed by the way he reconciled science with religion and admitted that she felt unable to believe in “chance.” Two months later, she stated that “it should be understood that evolutionary theory is incomplete and that we are still discovering new things” and that she hoped to start a dialogue between scientists and intelligent design proponents. Both scientists and politicians, however, heavily criticized her proposition, which led her to withdraw her plans. However, at the launch of the book edited by Dekker and his colleagues, on June 8, 2005, she was still hopeful that she would be able to organize a public debate. In her speech at this event, she expressed her wish to foster greater mutual respect between people with different philosophical backgrounds. The incident attracted international attention. A *Science* article asked ironically whether the Netherlands was becoming the Kansas of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

In October 2005 Dekker was invited to deliver a presentation at the “Darwin and Design” conference in Prague. According to Dembski, this conference “clearly demonstrated that the intelligent design controversy is not just an American phenomenon; it opened many doors to colleagues in Europe with whom the intelligent design community will be working extensively in the years to come.” However, early in 2006, Dekker started to question the scientific merits of intelligent design openly. He was particularly disappointed about the fact that intelligent design did not result in any practical applications. He also claimed that he had been inappropriately associated with the movement. Soon, Dekker described himself as a theistic evolutionist. In August 2006 he wrote the foreword to the Dutch translation of Francis Collins’s *The Language of God*; he stressed that he basically agreed with Collins’s views that creation and evolution are reconcilable. In 2009 a Dutch book that advocated theistic evolution appeared with a laudatory foreword by Cees Dekker.<sup>20</sup>

SHORT

### A Dutch Wedge

Dekker was followed in his tracks, first to intelligent design and later to theistic evolution, by Andries Knevel. Knevel started working for the EO in 1978, and by 1993 he had become one of its three codirectors. During the 1990s, he had been drawn to intelligent design by the works of Van den Beukel, the reading of which he described as an awakening that made him conscious of other positions in regards to creation. Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* caused the greatest shock. Knevel suddenly realized that he did not have to be a young-earth creationist to be a good Christian. He visited several American Christian scientists, including William Dembski and Walter Bradley, fellows of the Center for Science and Culture. Soon after, he abandoned his young-earth beliefs and accepted intelligent design.<sup>21</sup>

Knevel spoke favorably of intelligent design at the book launch of Dekker's *Schitterend Ongeluk*. Three days later he claimed that he regarded intelligent design as an acceptable means to reconcile science with a belief in the book of Genesis. However, other creationists did not feel the need to embrace intelligent design. Van Delden, who had stuck to his original young-earth beliefs, thought it foolhardy of Christians to regard intelligent design adherents as allies to their cause. Soon Knevel learned that intelligent design did not promote the reconciliation he had hoped for. Instead of reconciling Christian faith with science and "affectively attacking the Darwinian bastion," intelligent design engendered serious fractures within the Dutch evangelical-Reformed community.<sup>22</sup>

However, from the creationists' perspective, worse was to come. Dekker had started to question the scientific merits of intelligent design and called himself a theistic evolutionist. Knevel respected Dekker deeply; gradually he followed Dekker's shift, and by 2009 he had become a theistic evolutionist himself. On February 3, 2009, Knevel read out a prepared statement in an EO television program in which he announced that he was no longer a young-earth creationist or an adherent of intelligent design and that he regretted having misled his viewers. Many EO members, however, felt insulted by Knevel's confession because they thought he had presented his views as the result of improved judgment. Furthermore, they felt that "their" EO had wandered off the straight path. Bert Dorenbos, director of the EO between 1974 and 1987, described Knevel's statement as "an insult to God" and "an act of aggression." In response, Knevel apologized for the arrogant way in which he had presented his convictions and emphasized that his views were not those of the EO. The damage, however, had been done. In an open letter, Dorenbos detested the path the EO had taken

under the guidance of people like Dekker, Knevel, and Ouweneel. Indeed, the EO was entirely divided on the issue of creation. In the United States, Phillip Johnson and his co-workers at the Center for Science and Culture had intended intelligent design to function as a wedge splitting the log of Darwinian naturalism and secular culture. Ironically, in the Netherlands intelligent design had worked as a wedge within the evangelical-Reformed community, by functioning as a halfway house and facilitating the transition of some of its prominent members to a theistic evolutionist position.<sup>23</sup>

### The Darwin Year

The timing of Knevel's confession was not coincidental. The debate between creation and evolution had been put back on the agenda by the Darwin year commemorations. On January 6, 2009, Knevel had hosted a television show on the EO that featured a theistic evolutionist, Dekker, an atheistic Darwinian philosopher, and a young-earth creationist. By then, the young-earth creationists with an evangelical-Reformed but increasingly also with a pietistic-Calvinist or Pentecostal faith had regrouped and had initiated projects to counterbalance the impact of these festivities and to inform the public of an alternative to evolution. One project in particular garnered a lot of media attention. In November 2008, Christian newspapers reported that Kees van Helden, the president of the creationist group Bijbel en Onderwijs (Bible and Education) was rallying financial support to print an eight-page pamphlet with the title *Evolutie of Schepping. Wat geloof jij?* (Evolution or creation: What do you believe?). The leaflets were to be distributed in the mail to every household in the Netherlands around February 12, 2009, the two-hundredth anniversary of Darwin's birth. The project was backed by a committee of recommendation consisting mainly of reverends and pastors from various Protestant denominations and thirty creationist organizations from the Netherlands and Belgium. One of the supporters of the project was Johan Huibers, who in 2007 had finished building a replica of Noah's ark, which he used as a traveling exhibition to deliver the word of God. In 2012, having sold the first ark, he finished the construction of a much larger ark that had the dimensions mentioned in the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

However, by the time the leaflet was actually distributed, the move into the public sphere was already in part transforming into an internal debate. After Knevel had publicly disavowed creationism and intelligent design, Van Helden urged Knevel in a news report to restore his faith in biblical creation. Later that year, various creationist books were published to argue not only against the alleged shortcomings and immoral consequences of evolutionary theory but also



In 2009, at the start of the Darwin year, the Dutch creationists distributed this leaflet to almost every household in the Netherlands.

against the heresy of Knevel, Ouweneel, Dekker, and other “liberal” interpreters of the Bible. But the antievolutionary wave did not decay entirely. Van Helden started a civil initiative to collect signatures in support for “equal time” in education. The translation of a book by the Swiss creationist group ProGenesis, with the title *95 stellingen tegen evolutie* (95 theses against evolution), was promoted by posting the ninety-five theses by the entrance of the Free University—imitating Luther who allegedly posted his theses in 1517—because they blamed the formerly Calvinist university for having introduced evolution to the churches in the 1960s. In 2010 a group of creationists under the auspices of the young-earth organization Oude Wereld (Old World) founded *Weet magazine* (Know magazine), which was designed to resemble an ordinary popular scientific maga-

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zine. In 2012 it had about eight thousand subscriptions. The same organization also published several creationist books, including a translation of the German creationist textbook by Siegfried Scherer and Reinhard Junker, *Evolution. Ein kritisches Lehrbuch*. Although other publications and initiatives had attempted to stimulate the dialogue between science and religion, the Dutch Darwin year ended with a creationist movement that was stronger and more visible than it had been for decades.<sup>25</sup>

### The Belgian Catholics and Evolution

In contrast with the creationist responses in the Netherlands, the Darwin year festivities did not inspire any negative religious reactions in Belgium. Instead, Catholic representatives and opinion makers considered the Darwin year an ideal opportunity to resume a rational dialogue between science and religion. Most argued that creation and evolution complement one another and that there exists no competition between science and religion. Cardinal Godfried Danneels, at the time the highest in rank in the Belgian hierarchy, described the relation between the two domains as the tracks of a railway that run in parallel and touch only in infinity. However, the editor of an influential Catholic weekly complained that “Darwinism” had become much more than a scientific theory and had turned into an ideology. Radical Darwinists, he claimed without providing any names, derive the most horrible moral directives from “natural selection” or “the survival of the fittest” on how to treat the ill and the weak or how to improve the human species. Although he distanced himself from creationism, he nevertheless resorted to arguments that are common in creationist discourse.<sup>26</sup>

The predominantly positive attitude toward evolution is in part explainable by the way in which, historically, evolution had been appropriated by Belgian Catholics. After Darwin’s theory had been introduced in Belgium, there was a brief period when it was “vehemently belittled.” However, already in 1875 the *Société scientifique de Bruxelles* was founded, followed by the publication of two journals, the *Annales de la société scientifique de Bruxelles* in 1875 and the widely read *Revue des questions scientifiques* in 1877. Jesuits were deeply involved in these initiatives, and they soon took the lead in defending Catholic evolutionism in Belgium. Around the turn of the century, this pro-evolutionary attitude took root at the Catholic University of Louvain, where a group of intellectuals supported the compatibility of faith and evolution, in both their lectures and their publications. Some of them even defended evolutionism through popular addresses, thus introducing evolution to the general public. In the 1930s most Belgian Catholic intellectuals accepted evolution, and later this pro-evolutionary stance became



entrenched by the increasing popularity of the theistic evolutionary views of the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin. By 1960 evolution had become incorporated in the curriculum of Catholic secondary comprehensive schools. The introduction in 1963 of a biology textbook that was used in the sixth grade explains at the outset that, “while the natural sciences are based upon experimental observations, theology depends on the fact of revelation. One should keep in mind that, if the natural sciences and theology each remain on their respective domain, there can be no contradiction.” Other biology textbooks from that period contain similar passages.<sup>27</sup>

### Creationism in Belgium

Strict creationism is almost exclusively found within non-Catholic denominations. Probably most common is Islamic creationism. In 2007 copies of the *Atlas of Creation* by the Turkish creationist Harun Yahya were delivered free of charge to schools, universities, and the editorial offices of several newspapers. Harun Yahya seemed to have gained at least some support in the Muslim communities. In February 2008 a talk show debate on national television featured Nordine Taouil, an imam from Antwerp. He stated that he believed that Allah had specially created the human species and that Adam and Eve really existed. He repeated the old creationist chestnut that evolutionary theory is but a hypothesis and maintained that scientists from the United States, Europe, and the Arabic world had convincing evidence that proved the theory wrong. Taouil explicitly referred to Harun Yahya. Islamic creationism, however, is not exclusively attributable to the influence of the Turkish creationist. In November 2009 it was reported that creationism was being taught at Lucerna College, a state-funded free school founded by Turkish immigrants. Witness reports of teachers and the materials used in religious education revealed that in religious classes, evolutionary theory was described as “an illogical belief that is not based on any scientific evidence” and that tests required pupils to render counterexamples to natural selection.<sup>28</sup>

Studies confirm that Belgian Muslim pupils have great difficulty accepting evolution. A study in Brussels, the Belgian capital, showed that one in five students rejected human evolution. Of this 20 percent, most were Muslims. A small study in Antwerp demonstrated that almost all young Muslim believed that Allah has created humans, whereas only one in ten Catholic and six in ten Jewish students endorsed creationist beliefs.<sup>29</sup> Mostly, creationism is taught locally at small, religiously inspired, but state-funded schools. In recent years, the media have reported the teaching of creationism in orthodox Jewish and Prot-



estant schools. Evolutionary theory is also one-sidedly criticized and presented with a nonscientific alternative in some anthroposophical secondary schools.<sup>30</sup>

Active antievolutionism constitutes only a marginal phenomenon in Belgium. The best-known creationist organization is Creabel. It was founded in 1991 by Jos Philippaerts, who holds a PhD in chemistry, and some fellow believers with the assistance of David Rosevear, a British creationist of the Creation Science Movement. It soon had three hundred members. They published a creationist magazine and provided lectures in Baptist, Pentecostal, and evangelical churches. Catholic parishes were approached through Chris Hollevoet, a Catholic geologist. By the end of 2008, Creabel appeared on the list of organizations that supported the Dutch creationist leaflet campaign, and Philippaerts continues to lecture on creationism today, usually for friendly churches and organizations. On rare occasions he appears in the national media, where he is usually presented as a curiosity. In October 2011, Creabel celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a two-day symposium.<sup>31</sup>

Compared to the Netherlands, in Belgium creationism is no more than a marginal phenomenon. It is tempting to ascribe the difference between the two countries solely to their different religious backgrounds. Belgium is traditionally Roman Catholic, and, historically Catholics have taken less issue with evolution. The Netherlands can be regarded as a Protestant country, and creationism is predominantly a Protestant matter. This explanation certainly has merit, but it needs qualification. Although creationism is mostly associated with Protestantism, there are many versions of Protestantism that do not favor it. In Scandinavia, for instance, creationism has not gained a strong foothold in the national Lutheran churches or society. In the Netherlands itself, many Protestants cannot be regarded as creationists. Clearly, Protestantism does not directly imply creationism. The relation between Catholicism and evolution is not straightforward either. Historical research has shown that Catholics too had trouble accepting evolution, a process that has often been affected by local or national factors. Today, many Catholics in the United States (35 percent of Catholics in one survey) do not agree that “evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on Earth,” and in Catholic Poland a creationist movement exists as well. Also, in recent years a conservative Catholic newspaper in the Netherlands has begun to tackle Darwinian evolution.<sup>32</sup>

This is not to deny that Protestant creationism is far more common than Catholic creationism, but an explanation in terms of Protestantism versus Catholicism needs to be supplemented by aspects of the concrete situations. It is

possible that Protestantism offers only a fertile soil for creationism in combination with a particular relation between church and state. Only in a religious free market, as it exists in the United States—and, to a certain extent also in the Netherlands—will Protestantism give rise to creationism as a substantial social-religious phenomenon. In a context of religious and social pluralism, groups of believers may attempt to build their identity around strict antievolutionism. In the Netherlands this was reinforced by the pillarized structure of society in which religious and ideological organizations were accommodated by the state. However, as a consequence of this structure of society, the debates among the orthodox themselves were often more heated than those with the outside world, and the three “waves of creationism” that arose during the twentieth century can all be interpreted as reactions to modernizing tendencies within the orthodox Protestant subculture.

## NOTES

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7. Flipse, “Origins of Creationism,” 119–120.

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