‘For us it is an honor and a pleasure’
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‘For us it is an honor and a pleasure’

Honorary Doctorates at the vU University since 1930

Wim Berkelaar
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Foreword

The idea to write a book about honorary doctorates at the vu University came from former rector magnificus prof. dr. T. Sminia, and was adopted by the Historical Committee of the vu University. In 2005 the undersigned returned part-time to the vu University, after eleven years of ‘exile’ at various institutions. I returned to the old nest of the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, in order to take care of press contacts and information, and also to work on the book about honorary doctorates.

After my absence of several years I could again experience how friendly and helpful many people at the vu University are. I must, in the first place, thank Hugo van Kinschot and drs. Victor Brilleman, who were tireless as colleagues at the Archives department. Without them this portrait gallery would not have been possible. In addition to his initiative to let me write this book, I thank director prof. dr. George Harinck of the Historical Documentation Center for his collegial as well as critical reading of the manuscript. A special word of thanks is also due to university historian dr. Ad Tervoort, editor of the historical series of the vu University, who provided several useful intellectual suggestions about the Middle Ages and early-modern history. Hans Seijlhouwer, archivist of the Historical Documentation Center, was kind enough at a late stage to apply his computer knowledge. Finally, I am especially indebted to Marijke Vollmar of Communication Service, since she gave this book many faces by gathering the most attractive photos of all the honorary doctors in the period covered.

This English edition was initiated by the present rector magnificus prof. dr. L. M. Bouter. The publication was realized thanks to a generous gift of the Van Coeverden Adriani Foundation and the diligent work of translators Harry Boonstra and Gerrit W. Sheeres.

Wim Berkelaar, October 2007
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Introduction

The date for the first appearance of the honorary doctorate is not easy to determine. The time of the doctorate itself can be determined fairly closely – in the Middle Ages. The term ‘doctor’ was first used in our sense of the word in the Faculty of Law at the University of Bologna, one of the first universities in Europe. The term referred to a scholar in jurisprudence who did not necessarily give lectures. In the twelfth century the meaning shifted gradually, and those who lectured on civil law were called ‘doctor.’ A century later the meaning changed again. The term referred to an academic degree for those who had been educated in civil and ecclesiastical law. Outside of Bologna the term was used to designate someone who lectured. In Paris, another old European university, the term ‘doctor’ was probably introduced by theologians. A century later the term was also found in other faculties, such as medicine.1

A famous doctor in the late Middle Ages was the highly honored Desiderius Erasmus, who acquired the doctor’s hat on 4 September 1506 in Turin. Thanks to the medievalist Jan van Herwaarden we know that Erasmus had been delighted with the prospect of a doctorate for years, and traveled specifically to Italy to receive the degree. By this time he had already obtained a thorough theological education at the University of Paris, among other schools. Initially Erasmus had thought to graduate from Bologna, but that did not work out.

Because the highest official at the University of Turin was a second cousin of Pope Julius 11 (1503-1513) who was later much criticized by Erasmus, this city attained the goal. The efforts of Turin to bind Erasmus to the city demonstrated that it concerned a prestigious candidate. Erasmus defended himself effectively against the Turin faculty and was found worthy of the doctorate. The promotor (the person who presents the candidate for an honorary degree) carried out the customary promotion rituals of that day by showing Erasmus an open and a closed book, giving him the kiss of peace, and pronouncing a paternal
benediction. And even though Erasmus showed himself, in his letters, to be self-conscious about his place in history, he did admit that the doctoral hat provided him prestige. This was, however, only partly true. Successive popes honored his worth, but among theologians his doctorate gave rise to additional ridicule. In Turin, Erasmus’ promotion was to result in a long aftermath. Exactly 370 years after the date, on 4 September 1876, a memorial plaque was unveiled in Turin; on this occasion academics from the left claimed Erasmus as their liberal ‘forefather’ – a typical example of presumptuous contemporary appropriation.  

The Erasmus case, meanwhile, demonstrates that it was easier to obtain the doctorate at one university rather than at another. Moreover, the pope exercised his influence on a doctorate, either directly or through his envoys. During the Middle Ages, emperor and pope also had authority over the right to grant degrees and thus could create doctorates, with or without preceding examinations. Even though the pope gave up this practice in 1568, the emperor continued it. Thus the counts palatine in the Republic of Venice readily conferred the doctorate to many jurists, which was one of the reasons that the University of Padua attracted many foreign students and overshadowed Bologna.

These doctorates cannot be called honorary degrees, which are conferred to honor someone’s exceptional contributions to scholarship or society, even though Erasmus’ doctorate in 1506 resembled it somewhat. In the early modern period honorary doctorates remained the exception rather than the rule. Universities generally wished to guard their academic reputation. Thus the quality of the degrees was at times watched carefully, as can be demonstrated with an example from the University of Leiden. There concerned curators concluded in 1643 that students in the Faculty of Law were granted a degree too easily, which was considered damaging for the reputation of the university. 4 Whenever a university kept a close eye on the quality of regular degrees, honorary degrees were watched even more closely.

In Europe the recognition of honorary degrees became common in the second half of the nineteenth century. The occasion was used not only to pay tribute to the honorary doctor (who could be a prominent academic as well as a deserving outsider), but also to put the spotlight on the university-frequently to add luster to an anniversa-
ry. In the Netherlands this development proceeded in a similar manner. Those who, in their own way, had made a contribution to scholarship were occasionally surprised by an honorary doctorate. Such a person was school principal Arie De Jager; in 1850 he received an honorary doctorate from the linguist Matthias De Vries of the University of Groningen, because of the numerous literary publications that he had written through the years. Of course, the danger of inflation was always lurking; it certainly was tempting for universities to honor deserving scholarly contributions, but also to become connected with prominent figures from society (heads of nations, politicians, captains of industry). The esteem of the honoree could also elevate the prestige of the university. Only a good university could resist such a temptation.

Such resistance was not always demonstrated. Thus Queen Wilhelmina, who never was known for her scholarly qualifications, became an honorary doctor in literature at the University of Groningen in 1914. As if that were not enough, eleven years later she received an honorary doctorate in law – this time in Leiden. It tempted historian and critic Menno Ter Braak in February 1925 to write a satirical poem, ‘Two Kinds of Promotion,’ in the rebellious student magazine Propria Cures:

I must brownnose many profs,
I must swallow a thousand books,
Formulate twenty propositions,
And correct many grimy drafts.
I must get it printed and bound
(With a party for my friends).
Produce a shower of tips
And pay for a new tuxedo.
I must talk drivel for an hour
And paralyze my tongue.
And with all these hazards
Must keep my good humor.

She need to fear no prof,
Or read a single book.
She need not deal with dubious questions,
Nor touch a printer’s proof.
To get the doctoral degree
She needs do nothing...but be silent.
Because William the Silent was great,
When the nation was in peril,
And the country in commotion,
When my forbear was a farmer.\footnote{6}

When the honorary doctorate was conferred on Wilhelmina, the \textit{vu} University (\textit{Vrije Universiteit}) was still developing. Founded in 1880 by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), who wanted to engage in scholarship ‘free from the church, free from the state, bound only to the Word of God,’ the ‘\textit{vu},’ at its founding, counted only three faculties – theology, law, and literature. There was diligent study, but so far without much social status or recognition. In 1905 Kuyper himself had to step in as prime minister to confer legal recognition to the degrees of those educated at the university – with the provision that the \textit{vu} University establish a fourth faculty within twenty-five years.\footnote{7} Attempts to create a Faculty of Medicine were not successful, but just before the end of the ‘ultimatum’ period, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science was born in 1930. The continuation of the university was assured, and the golden anniversary could be celebrated.

Neither cost nor effort was spared for the anniversary. For three days the treasure chest was emptied to add luster to the anniversary. On the \textit{dies natalis}, 20 October 1930, the university was addressed, among others, by prime minister Ch. J. M. Ruys De Beerenbrouck, Esq., who emphasized ‘the value of a religious formation of countless confessors of Christ in the public arena of this day.’ The address took place in the Keizersgracht Church in Amsterdam, which offered ample space and lent a special atmosphere to the commemoration. The independent university also received felicitations from other universities. Even that honorable bastion of the University of Leiden declared itself delighted with the younger, independent sister institution. As its rector magnificus J. Ph. Vogel stated: ‘As Plato declared correctly, he who attacks religion, takes away the foundation of human society itself; and one must listen to those who do not want that in the High Council of the Sciences the earnest voice of religion is silenced.’ The \textit{vu} University seized the opportunity, for the first time in its existence,
to confer four honorary doctorates, three in theology and one in law.

In 1880 the senate had already wanted to grant an honorary doctorate to the German theologian Paul Geyser (1824-1882). Geyser had caused a ruckus in Germany by turning against the liberal theological climate of the day. As vicar in Chur, his orthodox sermons had caused so much commotion that he was no longer allowed in the pulpit. In 1861 he accepted a call to Elberfeld, were his preaching again raised a storm. Here he came in contact with kindred spirits from the Netherlands who visited him regularly. Geyser was enthusiastic about the founding of the vU University, where no liberal spirit would blow, and Reformed theology would flourish. However, he did refuse the offer of a professoriate. Then there was a discussion whether to offer him an honorary doctorate. On Monday, 1 November 1880 rector magnificus Kuyper proved himself a supporter, in the conviction that the vU University could use Geyser’s honorary doctorate to promote his ‘right’ for a position in the world of learning. Through the honorary doctorate Geyser would be strengthened in his struggle against the ‘influences in Germany that hinder his work.’

But the party did not happen. Curator L. W. C. Keuchenius (1822-1893) had earlier asked the curators’ meeting, ‘whether it is not rather strange that as long as there is not a single student who has become a candidate, to declare a candidate honoris causa.’ Keuchenius received support from his colleagues De Savornin Lohman and Van Beeck Calkoen. Professor F. L. Rutgers was not a supporter for conferring a doctorate on Geyser either, but for substantive reasons: a doctorate in theology was conferred much less frequently in Germany and had much greater significance. For that reason Rutgers urged calmness; he doubted if there was haste in this matter.8

That was the end of it. It would be nearly fifty years before the honorary doctorate at the vU University would again appear on the agenda. During the deliberations in the senate for the golden anniversary the professors did all kinds of proposals. Historian A. Goslinga was an enthusiastic proponent for a prize-contest; literary scholar J. Wille pleaded for a commemorative book; and theologian H. H. Kuyper favored the granting of honorary doctorates. All three proposals were adopted by the organizing committee for the anniversary. The committee favored the conferring of ‘a small number of honorary doctorates,’ and suggested that the senate should decide the question whether the
honorary doctorates should be conferred on persons who ‘have made themselves deserving through their contribution to the general cultural aspects of the Reformed movement, or on those who have gained laurels in Reformed scholarly areas, or on persons in either group.’ The senate did not deliberate this question. Article 33/4 of the constitution prescribed a decision by a faculty.

Shortly before the anniversary two faculties (the theological and the juridical) proposed four honorary doctors – three theologians and one man without an academic career, but with great fame and name: Hendrikus Colijn, who had been designated for an honorary doctorate in law. He was considered everywhere as the standard bearer of the Reformed world, since he had served as minister of Defense (1911-1913), as prime minister (1925-1926), and as negotiator with the International Conference of the League of Nations since 1927, and moreover, for the vu University he was of incalculable significance as director of the Society for Higher Education on Reformed Principles, that governed the university. Honorary promotor P. A. Diepenhorst had to admit to the senate on 30 May 1930 that Colijn had engaged in virtually no scholarly studies, but that ‘his position in the area of national and international politics’ completely justified the conferring of the honorary doctorate. The university had to act firmly and quickly – firmly because Colijn had initially expressed objection to an honorary doctorate from the vu University, with which he was so closely associated, and quickly because Diepenhorst did not rule out that a competing university might preempt the vu University and show off the prestigious former premier who enjoyed such international renown.

The three theologians might be less known outside the vu University, but they had made considerable contributions for the extension of the Kuyperian legacy. J. C. Rullman had instructed Reformed people in the history of the Reveil, the Anti-revolutionary Party, and the struggle for public funding for Christian schools. Moreover, with his Kuyper Bibliography (Bibliographie van dr. A. Kuyper’s werken) he had delivered a significant contribution to the canonization of the great helmsman. The same could be said about the Hungarian J. Sebestyén, who had proved with his double degrees in theology as well as philosophy that he could hold his own – even though he had spread Kuyper’s views primarily in his home country. The Reverend D. Bakker, inspired by Kuyper’s missiology, had traveled to Indonesia and had
made the far East familiar with the Reformed variation of Christian-
ity."

The four laureates were lauded in the Reformed press in a tone in
which (with all humility) self satisfaction was not hard to find. In pay-
ing homage, De Standaard and De Heraut published the complete ad-
dresses of both the honorary promtors as well as the honorary doc-
tors. In the same newspapers the founding of the Vu University was
literally lauded as a divine miracle. De Heraut of 26 October 1930 no-
ted that 'Our faithful God has heard our prayers. The mightiest oppo-
sition did not make the university disappear. In spite of all weakness
and struggle, failure and sin, He preserved, gave expansion, and in the
midst of our fears He drew nigh and said, 'Fear not!'

This is prose from a bygone era when each group had its own rit-
uals and customs and honored its own leading men (women hardly
counted at this time). This era has been called the period of 'pillari-
ization,' in which every social current (Roman Catholic, Social-Demo-
cratic, Communist, Protestant) had distinct groupings and organiza-
tions. In those days even the Liberals did not escape big words, as was
shown when an honorary doctorate was conferred on princess Juliana
in Leiden, also in 1930. After the princess had passed university exam-
inations in three subjects, she was summoned by Queen Wilhelmina
to devote herself to other tasks. The princess was in danger of becom-
ing a washed-up student – something that jurist W. J. M. Van Eysinga
(an ardent adherent of the royal House of Orange) wanted to avoid.
A decision was made to grant her an honorary doctorate in literature
and philosophy – a task assumed by historian Johan Huizinga on 31
January 1930. Mindful of the ancient bond between Leiden, the Neth-
ernads, and the House of Orange, he addressed the princess: 'In you,
Royal Highness, we honor the descendant of that House, whose lot
and whose deeds are interwoven with the entire history of our state
and our nation – we, who are the temporary bearers of all the spiritual
obligations laid upon us through the honor of belonging to the oldest
body of scholarship in the Netherlands. The University of Leiden now
again seals the ancient bond with the Royal House, which is valued
and dear to us, in order to show that its history is the nation’s history
and is a living entity, and its heroic origin from Leiden’s courage and
Prince William’s wisdom can still guide and inspire us even today.'

Juliana herself was of the opinion that she did not deserve the hon-
Introducing

orary doctorate – an opinion shared by the professor of ancient history at Utrecht (and social-democrat) H. Bolkestein. He expressed his irritation in the De Socialistische Gids, the academic monthly of his political party: 'The honorary doctorate is hereby diminished to an homage of (if possible) still less significance than knighthood, which is at least conferred on the basis of personal contributions – not on the achievements of ancestors.' Seen from that perspective the other early honorary doctorates from the vu University do not compare unfavorably. The four honorary doctors were kindred spirits – they had achieved some scholarly and societal success, no matter how hagiographic the work of some of them (Rullman) may be judged by the proverbial wisdom of retrospect.

After the exuberant celebration of the golden anniversary the vu University remained cautious with the granting of honorary doctorates. This was a disappointment for Dr. Abel Faze, who came to the senate on 26 November 1931 with the request for an honorary doctorate (he obviously evaluated his own achievements rather highly). The minutes noted diplomatically, 'He shall be notified that the principle and position of the University forbid the consideration of this request.' The only person who was considered for an honorary doctorate in the 1930s was the minister of Defense, as well as director of the Society for Higher Education on Reformed Principles, J. J. C. Van Dijk, who received the honorary doctorate in law in 1938. At the time this choice was not contested, but after the war this choice would probably never have been made; after 1945 a discussion erupted about the question whether van Dijk’s defense policy had been the reason for the quick capitulation to Germany in 1940.

Many people during and after World War II would have considered the period between the two world wars as a ‘world of yesterday,’ but the Reformed were not at all tired of this period. They were not concerned with the ‘Breakthrough’ – Doorbraak, an attempt to divorce political parties from religious influence. Several Dutch Reformed (Hervormde) intellectuals, among whom were Willem Banning and Gerardus Van Der Leeuw, played an important role in the Breakthrough, until they were seduced by the Social-Democratic Labor Party founded in 1945. The Reformed again formed their own pillar, which actually emerged from the war stronger rather than weaker. The vu University continued, for the time being, to be a part of this pillar. There was a
difference, however; until 1930 the center of gravity was located in the Faculty of Theology, but after 1945 the juridical faculty became dominant. Was this the reason that at the seventieth anniversary of the university the honorary doctorates were conferred only by the Faculty of Law? Whatever the reason, the theological element still weighed heavily in the granting of the degree to the brand new honorary doctors. The Swiss international jurist Max Huber might not be a Calvinist, but his Christian philosophy of life was regarded as the core of his juridical viewpoint. With the Czech juridical philosopher Josef Bohatec it was simpler – he had been busy his whole life with the study of Calvinism. Finally, in the case of the Anti-revolutionary self-made man Jan Schouten the case was even more clear. In 1950 he was considered a Calvinist incarnate.

Just as twenty years earlier, at the fiftieth anniversary, a location for the events was chosen outside the university – now the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam served as the décor to add luster to the assembly. During the fifties and sixties splendid buildings in Amsterdam served to confer honorary doctorates even more frequently. In 1952 the Royal Tropical Institute served as the décor to honor two South Africans. The 75th anniversary of the VU University was celebrated in grand fashion in the RAI exhibition hall where the only honorary doctorate of that year (the French theologian E.G. Léonard) was honored. With minor ceremonies, such as the conferring of honorary doctorates in the late fifties on the politician H.W. Tilanus (1958) and the biologist and director of the VU University, A.A.L. Rutgers (1959), the Woestduinkerk was the stage. However, with the next grandiose celebration of the 85th anniversary in 1965 the Concertgebouw was again rented.

Until that time the VU University was, at its core, still the same as before the war. Representatives of international Calvinism were honored. That among these there were supporters of the apartheid regime of South Africa was still not an obstacle at that time. After all, the honorary doctors Van Rooy and Van Der Merwe, who were awarded that degree in 1952, belonged to the ‘Netherlandic tribe,’ a concept that did not carry the freight at the VU University or elsewhere in the Netherlands that it would acquire in the turbulent sixties. In 1965 student pastor S.J. Popma pursued the issue of ‘the people behind the VU University.’ He noted that the bond between the university and its supporters had grown weaker. Even the ‘most dedicated enthusiast for the VU
University would no longer be able to recite the names of all the professors.' The student of 1965 no longer (as his predecessor of 1920) sang, ‘Kuyper, we honor you; Kuyper, we remain true to you,’ and Popma approved of this development. The students no longer came to the university exclusively from close-knit Reformed families, but often from the periphery of the church or had no church background at all. This sometimes resulted in ‘shocking language’ in the student newspapers, which could disturb the supporters. Popma wanted to reassure the supporters by putting a cold washcloth on their foreheads. Don’t worry! Everything is fine as long as these independent young people are met by professors with the same basic conviction. The professors might differ among themselves, as long as they are not indifferent. The vu University, as a university with a philosophy of life, was needed as much as ever in 1965. Even stronger: ‘If the vu University were not here, it certainly would have to be invented now.’

In a certain sense the vu University did reinvent itself in the sixties. The windows and doors to the world were opened. Before, the emphasis had especially been on ‘praying for the world’; after the sixties it became especially ‘working in the world.’ This changed position could also be seen in the choice of honorary doctorates. The distinction for an honorary doctorate did not come only to the solidly Reformed literary scholar and critic C. Rijnsdorp, but also to the French sociologist Jacques Ellul, the development economist Paul Hoffman, and the black minister Martin Luther King. Even Prince Bernhard was deemed suitable for this list, at least in the newspaper Trouw (allied with the vu University). In the main editorial of 21 October 1965 the paper highly praised the six honorary doctors of that year: The vu University has manifested itself ‘in accord with what the founders and especially Abraham Kuyper originally intended with this university.’ Kuyper ‘did not want scholarship to be isolated from the life of the world, but to have an influence on all of human life, national and international-to take a stand in the midst of the current of time.’ If Rijnsdorp represented a ‘typical Dutch atmosphere,’ Ellul represented international Protestantism. The other honorary doctors, among whom Hoffman and Martin Luther King, represented ‘the great problems of this era, the struggle for international justice, freedom, and the true communal humanity of the peoples of the earth.’ The doctorate of Prince Bernhard would be ‘a synthesis of national and international aspirations.’
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It may seem remarkable that this qualification of 1965 was not seized upon by the students and then struck down. Looked at more closely, however, this is less remarkable than it appears. The ‘red years’ (so called by the philosopher Antoine Verbij) came in the seventies. This interpretation seems to be shared by historian A. Th. Van Deursen. In his recently published history of the VU University (*Een hoeksteen in het verzuild bestel. The Vrije Universiteit 1880-2005*), he sees the ‘shadow of Marx’ fall on the seventies. At that time the ghost of communism also roamed around the VU University. And even though it was only a minority that was bewitched by this ghost, this minority bestirred itself forcefully and politicized every proposal. It is no wonder that the honorary doctorates did not escape this influence. After all, in the eyes of the radical students, the honorary doctors were introduced by a small opaque clique. And if those honorary doctorates were also suspected of collaboration with politically right regimes, then there was the devil to pay. The senate was confronted with a significant student protest against an honorary doctorate for the first time in 1972. The ‘political’ student council of the VU University wrote an unprecedented sharp protest against the decision to confer an honorary doctorate on the Indonesian jurist O. Notohamidjojo, who was suspected of collaboration with the military regime of General Suharto.

The senate reacted to the protest with the discomfort of those who have never been challenged. The fact that the minister and fighter against apartheid, C. F. Beyers Naudé, had also received an honorary doctorate six months earlier was not able to temper the protest. It is telling of the changing relationships at the VU University that this time it was not the students who signed a protest against the proposed laureate, but members of the senate. However, for the time being the tide was against the opponents. But the radical students were also dissatisfied— for them the honorary doctors were not far enough to the left. This became evident at the centennial celebration in 1980, when as many as nine laureates were announced. At this anniversary there also was a reaching back to an old tradition – for the first time the honorary doctorates were conferred outside the new building of the VU University on the De Boelelaan, namely, in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. However, even though in the past the reports about such an event were full of appreciation and even respect, that had changed. The student paper *Pharetra*, founded shortly after the war and since
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turned left, saw an opportunity to critically evaluate the honorary doctors. The paper determined dapperly that ‘both the procedure for and the resulting recommendations of the honorary doctors confirm our impression that the centennial of the vu University is a cliquish affair of the professors.’ Of the nine nominees only liberation theologian J. Miquez Bonino and polemologist Frank Barnaby could charm the students. Moreover, said Pharetra, the nine honorary doctors (eight men and Mrs. Sophia Kruyt, honorary doctor in medicine) ‘were subject not only to a vu University regulation but also to a vu University t (vut – an acronym for early retirement) regulation. Their age once again accentuates the retrospective character of the honorary doctorate. There no longer was any idea of looking forward. The vu University is aging; it looks back and sees that it was good.’

However, that was not the intent of the honorary doctorates. With the honorary doctorate the various faculties of the vu University did not want to give expression only to their scholarly reputation but also to their involvement in society. Their relationship to liberation theology was striking. This relationship remained constant – in 1990 the Nicaraguan poet and (former) minister of Culture, Ernesto Cardenal, was given the degree. By then the Marxist alternative to capitalism, which had governed the twentieth century since the Russian Revolution of 1917, had gone bankrupt. Then something happened at the vu University that had never happened before – a former laureate (Jacques Ellul, 1965) protested against the conferring of the honorary doctorate on this revolutionary, since it would not be fitting for the vu University. But the vu University proved not to be one-sided. In 1988 it honored Russian psychiatrist Anatoli Koryagin. He had been imprisoned for years because he had helped political prisoners who had been considered psychiatric patients by the Soviet authorities.

Thus the university not only watched against one-sidedness, but it also wanted always to honor the Reformed roots of the university. This intent was desired in spite of the fact that the firm objective prior to the Second World War – that is, the practice of Christian scholarship, had been exchanged after 1960 for a more vague objective – Christians practicing scholarship. With the distribution of honorary doctorates, the representatives of that ‘Christian scholarship’ were not forgotten in recent decades At the centennial in 1980 the Reformed hero Hendrik Algra, former chief editor of the Friesch Dagblad and for years
a member of the Upper Chamber for the Anti-revolutionary Party, was granted an honorary doctorate. In 1995 that honor fell to the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, who wrote his work in the spirit of \textit{vu} University philosophers H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven. The less ideological honorary doctorates of recent decades still carry the hallmark of the \textit{vu} University – not only scholarly competence, but also social involvement is noted in most of the honorary doctorates. For example, in an honorary doctorate for the self-made meteorologist H. C. Bijvoet in 1975, or the one for chemistry assistant G. De Vries in 1995, the main criterion was ‘professional achievement without scholarly recognition.’ Bijvoet and de Vries had, without even having an academic degree, made a substantial contribution in their field and were rewarded with this honorary doctorate.

In the time before the centennial of the \textit{vu} University in 1980 there was a discussion in the College of Deans about the question whether the somewhat vague criterion ‘because of exceptional contributions’ should not be expanded to ‘because of exceptional social contributions in relation to the objective of the \textit{vu} University.’\textsuperscript{18} The decision was to work on this proposal after the centennial. The question whether guidelines for the honorary doctorate should be incorporated in the board constitution was denied by M. A. Daniels of the Office of Juridical Affairs. ‘The granting of an honorary doctorate is conducted in a totally different manner than the offering of doctorates, which as a rule arise out of the scholarly activity at the universities themselves.’\textsuperscript{19} That left open the possibility that the College of Deans itself could formulate guidelines. And that’s what happened. The College of Deans once more formulated the criteria for an honorary doctorate. Required is ‘a professional performance without formal scholarly acknowledgement,’ which comes to expression ‘in publications of generally acknowledged high quality, in multidisciplinary scholarly research,’ and in ‘deeds of social and/or cultural significance that are befitting the special character of the \textit{vu} University, or, as the case may be, persons in whose activities the special character of the university comes to expression.’ That last criterion was formulated much more precisely than the somewhat vague ‘according to exceptional contributions’ that had obtained before.

Those ‘deeds of social significance befitting the special character of the \textit{vu} University,’ resonated in the honorary doctorate of the Malay-
sian Irene Fernandez. In 2001 she became an honorary doctor especially because of her struggle for the oppressed in her country. Such was the case also with two recent honorary doctors, the Irish dentist Diarmuid Shanley and the British physician Ian Chalmers – both were selected in 2006 not only because of their professional knowledge, but were honored especially because of their social contributions. Shanley was honored for his role in the standardization of the practice of dentistry in the European Union, and Chalmers for his efforts to give the patient a greater voice in the medical field in general and especially in medical examinations.

Presently the VU University expresses its special character in social engagement. At first blush this is not very different from other universities. In Leiden and Utrecht people are also selected because of their social contributions, as were Nelson Mandela (Leiden, 1999) and Winnie Mandela (Utrecht, 1986.) The latter, it soon became clear, actually turned out to be a blunder. Winnie Mandela led a terror squad that ruled the townships of South Africa, and she even had given orders for murder. The VU University has never committed such blunders in its selection. At most, in the early years the ‘pillarization’ of the university could be reflected in the laureates, as in later years the interest in social sentiment. Obvious flirting with the powers-that-be or with the Royal House cannot be deciphered from the laureates – unless it is the unavoidable Prince Bernhard. But the Prince received the honorary doctorate in 1965, when his successful activities as a lobbyist for the Dutch business community were still regarded as proof of the creativity of Dutch business, which was partly responsible for the unprecedented explosion of prosperity after World War II. It became known a decade later that the Prince had accepted bribes from the airplane manufacturer Lockheed. In spite of that, the Nyenrode Business University did not bat an eye to brashly pay tribute to the Prince with a new honorary doctorate.

However, the VU University can call itself ‘special,’ not just for avoiding the above-mentioned blunders. Nor is the special character of the university expressed only in the social engagement of the honorary doctors. By granting an honorary doctorate to the American philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff on its 127th anniversary in 2007, the university demonstrates that the scruples about the Reformed tradition that held sway in the sixties and seventies, appear to have been over-
come. In his philosophical work Wolterstorff consciously provides intellectual enhancement to the tradition from which the vU University came. Thus the vU University, with the College of Deans leading, has completed the circle. The first time that the vU University granted honorary doctorates, on the fiftieth anniversary of its founding in 1930, the four honorary doctors, no matter how different from each other, felt themselves bound to the Reformed tradition. No matter how much has changed at the vU University in 77 years, the honorary doctorate for Wolterstorff proves that the Reformed inspiration never disappeared (totally), and even seems to have returned at the De Boelelaan.

With all of this, one must remember that through the years more than 61 candidates were reviewed for the honorary doctorate. Many of these candidates are, in spite of appreciation for their qualities and contributions, not worth mentioning. But several are worth noting. In September 1979, the Indonesian author Pramudya Ananta Toer was proposed as a candidate for the honorary doctorate by the student sub-committee of the Sub-Faculty of Social-Cultural Sciences. The problem with the proposal, however, was the absence of an honorary promotor. Such a person could not be found any time later either. Even a committee with the mandate to find an honorary promotor did not succeed. All of this caused great annoyance among the student sub-committee who accused the staff of unwillingness to pay tribute to the dissident author. The board of the sub-faculty attempted to pacify the hot-headed students. It desired, according to the minutes, ‘to emphasize the appreciation for the motives from which and the devotion with which the students have pleaded their cause in the council.’ To reject an honorary doctor because one could not find a promotor – such was rare. More often a proposed candidate could not hold his own against ‘opponents,’ or the nature of his service was not considered sufficiently scholarly for an honorary doctorate. For example, in 1994 the Faculty of Literature presented the literary critic Kees Fens. J. D. F. Van Halsema, professor of contemporary Dutch literature, was convinced that he need not provide ‘elaborate argumentation’ to persuade the College of Deans. His elaborate petition, which he nevertheless provided, bore no fruit. The notice in the account of the meeting of the College of Deans on 27 April 1994 briefly states, ‘The general picture is not persuasive; proposal not accepted.’ The former minis-
ter of Foreign Affairs, Max Van Der Stoel, presented by the juridical faculty, was rejected for a practical reason – that year he also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Utrecht. This settled the argument for the College of Deans, which was opposed to a ‘piling on of honorary doctorates.’ In 2005 Willem Breedveld, a journalist of Trouw did not make it. The Faculty of Literature nominated him, because he had made clear to a wide public ‘the importance and methods of politics, in light of historic developments, and in relation to the role of the media.’ However, without the support of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, he was no match against the author Gerrit Krol whose works had more relevance for scholarship.

The 61 honorary doctors who knew that they were among the chosen, should be doubly grateful – others had been weighed and found wanting. The honorary doctorate meant, in whatever manner, an acknowledgement of scholarly or other contributions – and sometimes a not insignificant support for those who were embattled or persecuted in their own country. Thus the honorary doctorate was like the effort of a significant party game. The university enhanced its profile by attaching great scholarly, political, and literary names to itself, and the honorary doctors left the solemn occasion with an elevated status. As long as such is the purpose, so long shall the honorary doctorate be granted. That is, forever – also at the VU University.

NOTES

(1800-1945) (Cambridge 2004) 123-161, see 158-9. With thanks to Ad Tervoort, who alerted me to this source.


8. Senate Archives vU University Amsterdam, Minutes 1 November 1880.


10. Senate Archives vU University Amsterdam, Minutes 30 May 1930.


18. Archives College of Deans vU University Amsterdam, Guidelines Honorary Doctorates vU University, Minutes 30 November 1977.


The reputation of Hendrikus Colijn (1869-1944), the farmer’s son from the Haarlemmermeer, who achieved the internationally highly esteemed position of prime minister of the Netherlands, has suffered substantially in the last few years. Since historian Herman Langeveld of the vu University published his two-volume biography of Colijn, the image of Colijn has become tainted as a man who did not shrink back from occasional war crimes. And he has become known as someone who did not grasp the signs of the times, such as the desire on the part of the people of Indonesia to achieve independence.

However, in his day Colijn was considered to be a great man. And no wonder: this self-made man was not only aide-de-camp of governor-general Van Heutz, but also an entrepreneur (with the Batavian Petroleum Company, which became Shell), party leader (of the Anti-revolutionary Party), minister (of Defense), and five times prime minister (in the twenties and thirties). Rather unknown are his efforts on behalf of the Society for Higher Education on Reformed Principles. Yet, these efforts do show his involvement in university education based on Reformed principles which in those days was still provided by the vu University without reservation.

Nevertheless, honorary promotor P.A. Diepenhorst did have to acknowledge that Colijn was not honored with an honorary doctorate in the first place because of his scholarly qualities. ‘Neither in-depth research, nor some ingenious discovery, nor discerning technical-scientific treatises, justify inducting Colijn into the ranks of “viri docti.” Rather, its justification is found in the entire aggregate of his life’s associations. However, this life is not an orderly finalized entity that strides along quietly without drastic transitions, on the contrary, it is full of turmoil and adventure, full of unexpected twists.’

Diepenhorst must have heaved a sigh of relief that he was able to
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present his speech. A few months earlier he had urged his colleagues in the senate that haste was required since other universities might latch onto the idea of wanting to show off with the celebrated former prime minister. That Colijn initially objected to the honor probably did not quiet Diepenhorst’s spirits. In Colijn’s word of thanks there is not a hint of his initial hesitation. On the contrary, he indicated that he was pleased that it was precisely this university that had granted him an honorary degree. The ‘principles underlying the work of the vu University’ had always been ‘a guide to him,’ he said in his expression of thanks. Colijn did admit humbly that his richly varied life had ‘not lent itself in particular to the scholarly pursuit of even one field of academic study.’ The university certainly must not have regretted this later on, but was pleased with the honorary doctor. Colijn’s rise to power had to begin as yet. From 1933 to 1939 he was prime minister four times – and not only prime minister of the Anti-revolutionary segment of the population. In the years of deep economic crisis he developed into the man in charge of all of Holland.

Colijn would keep the Netherlands occupied long after his death, yes, even until today he remains a topic of discussion. After the war his own party was embarrassed about his economic and political course. Not a trace was left of this embarrassment in the illustrious years of the 1960s. Colijn was condemned unequivocally because of his policies during the Depression. They were called rigid and heartless towards the poor. However, in the opening years of the seventies economic historian P. W. Klein brought about a change in perception. He postulated that the margins for conducting a viable economic policy were just as narrow in the thirties as they were earlier and later, and that Colijn therefore could hardly be blamed. Economic historian J. L. Van Zanden challenged that theory in the nineties, and following in his footsteps so did biographer Herman Langeveld. Once again they nailed down in the memory of the Netherlands the image of Colijn as a rigid and heartless economic theorist. Even so, that Colijn’s name is printed in our memory even in this century may be seen as proof of his stature.
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J. Sebestyén (1930)

That a Hungarian became a Calvinist at the beginning of the twentieth century is less surprising than might appear at first sight. For not only did Calvinism spread across Western Europe in the sixteenth century, it also made its influence known in this East European country. Calvinism since its beginning was an international affair, with the Netherlands as a nation that stirred people’s imagination, since the Reformed religion had free play there. Already in the seventeenth century Calvinists traveled back and forth. The same held true for the twentieth century. The Habsburg double-monarchy’s efforts to obtain worldly control over ecclesiastical matters was all the more reason for Hungarian Calvinists to seek refuge in the Netherlands. Jenő Sebestyén (1884-1950) was the most important one among them. He was born into a Calvinist family and decided to study theology. That he thought of the Netherlands, the Mecca of Reformed theology, is less remarkable than the city of his choice: not the VU University but Utrecht, which, with the exception of the Reformed Old Testament scholar A. Noordtzij, was entirely dominated by theological professors of the Dutch Reformed Church.

His choice did not preclude the fact that Sebestyén felt himself inspired by Abraham Kuyper. The latter already visited him in Hungary before the First World War. Kuyper was and remained a source of inspiration for Sebestyén who kept Kuyper abreast – in flawless Dutch – of developments in his own country. On 10 September, 1916, he wrote Kuyper, ‘My wife and I continue to remember you and your lovely daughters with a great deal of affection, and we hope to have the opportunity to meet you often in the future.’ But this was not to be. However, also as a consequence of Kuyper’s influence Sebestyén had begun to steep himself in Calvin. In his dissertation of 1910, which earned him his doctoral degree in Utrecht, he confronted Calvin’s thought with that of the ‘philosopher of the hammer,’ Friedrich Nietzsche. Thus Sebestyén may be counted among the many intellectuals who around the first World War were affected by the work of Nietzsche.

In his native country Sebestyén was to evolve into a Hungarian Kuyper. Like him he displayed an enormous energy. He was editor-in-chief of the first Hungarian Reformed weekly Kálvinista Szemle
(1920-1930), he held the same position at the theological magazine *Magyar Kálinismus* (1934-1938), and for a while even published a monthly, the title of which he derived straight from Kuyper’s newspaper, the *Hungarian Herald*. And even though he did not establish his own university like Kuyper – nevertheless, as a result of his influence the theological academy of Budapest grew into a center of neo-Calvinism. All in all, Sebestyén gave such form and content to Calvinism in his country that even today there exists a relatively flourishing Calvinistic minority.

No wonder that in 1930 the *vu* University found enough reasons to award Sebestyén an honorary doctorate. ‘To merely publicize Reformed theology would certainly not justify awarding an honorary doctorate,’ according to honorary promotor F. W. Grosheide. Sebestyén was also a great scholar who had breathed new life into ‘dead orthodoxy.’ Moreover, he accomplished this in a ‘truly scholarly fashion.’ Grosheide referred to the many publications that varied from *The Essence of Sin, Predestination and its Problems*, to *The Ethical Character of Sexuality*. His teaching of Reformed dogmatics was also mentioned, even though it was regretfully observed later that he never published a Hungarian translation of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*. His oral proclamation and exposition of said dogmatics did however evoke so much reaction in Hungary that during the interbellum period a number of curious Hungarians would enroll at the Theological School at Kampen and the Faculty of Theology of the *vu* University.

**D. Bakker (1930)**

Of all the four honorary doctors who were presented with their degree in 1930 Dirk Bakker must have been the least well known in the Reformed community of the Netherlands. As to name recognition he certainly could not stand the test of being compared with Kuyper’s bibliographer Rullmann and certainly not with Colijn. It seems that even the Hungarian Sebestyén enjoyed greater name recognition. Whereas today’s world resembles somewhat of a ‘global village’ and distance is quickly covered by plane and internet, the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the twentieth century were not only geographically, but also psychologically, enormously far away. Reformed people who vis-
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... ited the East Indies did so ordinarily as missionaries. Mindful of the words of Jesus as handed down by the apostle Matthew 28:19 (‘Go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you,’) missionaries went to the colonies to spread the gospel.

So also Dirk Bakker. Born into a Reformed family in Heerhugowaard, Bakker enrolled in 1883 at the recently founded vU University to study theology. Bakker appeared to follow the usual course. Following his examination as a ministerial candidate he was called subsequently to Apeldoorn, Broek op Langendijk, and Sneek. One might assume that he would have retired like so many ministers before and after him, and that at his death he would have been remembered with a grateful, but brief, ‘In Memoriam,’ had he not been deeply affected at a missionary conference in 1894, where Abraham Kuyper delivered an impassioned speech about the principles and necessity of missions.

When Bakker received a call five years later to Kebumen (Mid Java), he did not hesitate a moment, although he did ask vU University professor F. L. Rutgers for advice to assure himself that his mission would not be futile. Toward the close of the nineteenth century there was doubt that Reformed missions would resonate with the ‘orientals.’ However, Rutgers assured him that their hearts as well would long for the ‘born again’ experience. His mind having been put at ease by those words, Bakker left for the East Indies, where he was appointed instructor at the training school of the Reformed Churches in Yogjakarta whose aim it was to train ‘natives’ to proclaim the gospel.

This, according to the honorary promotor G. Ch. Aalders, Bakker had done worthily during the 23 years (1906-1929) that he served the churches. ‘Of these nearly 23 years he shouldered, by far the longest time (no less than 18 years) the entire burden of the theological training of native assistants completely by himself.’ But, Aalders emphasized, it was not only for that reason that Bakker deserved an honorary doctorate. He had been engaged in the translation of the Bible into Javanese, and many publications that carried his name testified to a ‘proper view of the practice of missions.’

The remnants of Dirk Bakker’s passion for missions in today’s independent Indonesia are difficult to measure. It is certain that his mis-
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Vocational enthusiasm left its marks on the family, because both of his sons as well as a grandson continued in his footsteps. In addition they assured their father a place in history – not only in the second edition of the *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (1956-1961), but also in the prestigious *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (1999), which lists all great Christian missionaries.

**J. C. Rullmann (1930)**

Johan Coenraad Rullmann (1876-1936) was, much more than gentleman farmer and world citizen Colijn, the personification of the Reformed community which achieved its apex in the period between the two world wars. This in spite of the fact that Rullmann, by his own admission, was a ‘true child of the Amsterdam Réveil.’ However, Seccession and Dissent (*Doleantie*) found in amateur-historian Rullmann their true spokesman. Under the sway of his father, who as a pious member of the congregation regularly conducted services in the dissenting churches in and around Amsterdam, Rullmann followed the typical Reformed track by attending the Reformed Classical Training School (*gymnasium*) which was followed by studying theology at the *vu* University.

Having completed his studies Rullmann disappeared into the parsonage. However precise and sincerely he fulfilled his ecclesiastical duties, his heart was in writing the history of his own subculture. Every spare hour was used in the study of the leaders among whom Abraham Kuyper must be named first. Besides a three-volume bibliography of Kuyper, he published a series of apologetic works, among others, about the justification for the Secession and Dissent in the Dutch Reformed Church in the nineteenth century, and about his teacher F. L. Rutgers. In 2007 his writings appear dated, particularly because of the hagiographical tone that permeates especially his biographies of Kuyper and Colijn.

Still, already in 1930 there were reservations about Rullmann’s work. Historian A. A. Van Schelven even considered it a reason to object to the recommendation of Rullmann for an honorary doctorate. However, honorary promotor H. H. Kuyper defended Rullmann by pointing to the great amount of original research that supported espe-
J. C. Rullmann.
cially his nineteenth-century church history. This silenced Van Schelven. After all, he was less esteemed than his opponent who not only was elected rector magnificus that year, but who was also conscious of representing the invisible authority as son of the founder of the VU University.

Kuyper was also the person who presented Rullmann his doctoral degree. His speech on that occasion engenders a certain feeling of alienation in the light of today’s knowledge. Not only had Rullmann listened to the lectures of his honorary promotor as an admiring student, Kuyper also spoke with a curious sense of detachment about the work of the brand-new honorary doctor on behalf of the bibliography of ‘Dr. Kuyper,’ by which he meant his father. Kuyper thought that the most important reason for the recognition was found in the ‘warm affection’ which Rullmann’s historical writings showed for ‘the men God gave us in the 19th century to lead our people back to His Word. It was Rullmann’s life’s work to depict for our people the mighty work of God which He brought about in His Church through them. This task he has fulfilled honorably.’ Rullmann in turn considered it a ‘special privilege’ to receive his doctorate from the very hands of his teacher since Kuyper had taught him to think historically.

Historian and bibliographer Rullmann barely lived long enough to see the end of the pillarization which ended around 1960. The second edition of the Christelijke Encyclopedie, certainly a work that treasured tradition, did not even mention him. He was mentioned, however, in the much more modern Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme. In this way the prolific author and creditable bibliographer, who had received so much recognition for his inextinguishable zeal in 1930, was given due credit after all.

Jannes Johannes Cornelis Van Dijk (1871-1954) was the only person considered for an honorary doctorate during the nineteen thirties. Between 1929 and 1949 he was director of the Society for Higher Education on Reformed Principles and besides that he held many other functions that varied from being the chairman of the Psychiatric Hospital Association ‘Vrederust’ in Bergen op Zoom, to being a mem-
J. J. C. Van Dijk (with his back to the camera) being congratulated by honorary promotor V. H. Rutgers.
ber of the Council of Commissioners of the daily *De Standaard*. In his professional life Van Dijk had been, at one time, minister of Defense between 1921 and 1925, a position which he held again when the news reached him about an honorary doctorate on 1 July 1938. The senate had asked his excellency respectfully if he would be amenable to this honor. This respect had no basis in fact, because Van Dijk considered an honorary doctorate a ‘great honor,’ as he informed them by return mail. He received his degree from the hands of professor V. H. Rutgers. The motivation for the doctorate was written, as appears from the secret proposal in the senate’s archives, by Rutger’s colleague, P. S. Gerbrandy, who had been professor of law since 1930. Gerbrandy pointed to the ‘lengthy and significant work by Van Dijk on behalf of the rule of law.’ This work had shown him to be ‘a jurist,’ – not a bad characterization for Van Dijk who was a law school dropout. However, the rule of law was not the most important reason to award Van Dijk an honorary doctorate. Rather, it was found in his defense of ‘the legitimacy of our national defense.’ By doing so, according to Gerbrandy as stated in the official jargon of the thirties, ‘he had not avoided the more profound questions this elicited, but had treated them systematically and thoroughly, and, driven by a powerful conviction, he had always shown to seek the rule of law as the only and conclusive basis of a national defense.’ Honorary promotor Rutgers put if more succinctly and cogently, ‘He has dedicated his life to national defense which to him was never more than maintaining the rule of law.’ According to Rutgers Van Dijk also deserved his honorary doctorate for non-scholarly reasons, namely, his spiritual affinity with the vU University and his own Christian faith. The basic principles of the vU University, according to Rutgers in his promotion speech, ‘derive from the Word of the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who provides certainty of faith. This is basic also for minister Van Dijk whose public life testifies to it; his close association with the vU University is proof of it.’

Following the war Van Dijk’s reputation was finished. Not only was he considered a representative of the ‘conservative’ Anti-revolutionary Party of the thirties, but he was also held responsible for the ‘failed’ defense policy prior to the Second World War. National historian Loe De Jong in 1969 opened the offensive on Van Dijk in his book *Voorspel* (*Prelude*) which was the first volume of his magnum opus *Het Konink*.
rijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog (The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War). He criticized the inadequate efforts of the successive Colijn cabinets to bring the national defense up to the required standard. According to De Jong, the Netherlands paid a heavy price for this in May 1940. Anti-revolutionary Hendrik Algra, who could not know that ten years later he also would receive an honorary doctorate, took up his pen and wrote a spirited defense in the periodical *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde* of his fellow party member who had died in 1954. According to Algra Van Dijk pleaded for a strong national defense from the very first in his political career, which began in 1921. He rejected De Jong’s sketch of Van Dijk. According to Algra De Jong’s sources had been one-sided, he had been unfamiliar with the *Parliamentary Proceedings*, and was inadequately acquainted with the political relationships of those days. ‘Whoever studies the work of J. J. C. Van Dijk and treats the proceedings of the Dutch Parliament as the most credible source and consults them constantly, will gain a deep respect for the capability and militancy of this honest and tenacious man who labored under the most difficult of circumstances. Such was Algra’s judgment.

**MAX HUBER (1950)**

The honorary doctorate that international law scholar Max Huber (1874-1960) received from the hands of professor Gesina Van Der Molen on 20 October 1950, was not his first one. Huber had received the same distinction already in Lausanne, Oxford, and Paris. What was so special about Huber that the Faculty of Law of the vu University also decided to propose the Swiss? Four reasons were listed: through his publications Huber had provided a scholarly basis for international law; in addition, he was said to have given form to his ideals by functioning as judge and chairman of the Permanent Court of International Justice in the Hague, and as such to have imposed upon himself the highest demands of responsibility and justice. Even if these three reasons might have been adduced by the other universities, the fourth one appears to be exclusively reserved for the vu University. Huber was considered a kindred spirit ‘in the broader sense of the word.’ The faculty appreciated greatly the fact that he ‘specifically, also as chair—
Max Huber.
man of the Red Cross, always voiced his Christian convictions openly and frankly, wherever it might be appropriate.'

He had not learned his Christian convictions at his mother’s knee. Huber was born in 1874, the son of a Swiss industrial tycoon. He studied law in his native Zurich and was influenced by the peace plea *Die Waffen nieder (Disarm)* (1889) of the pacifist author Bertha Von Suttner. After his studies he became a world citizen who traveled the continents. Around the turn of the century Huber traveled to Russia, America, Australia, and China. From there he was called back to his native city, Zurich, in 1902, at the age of 27, in order to assume a professorship in constitutional and international law.

Five years later Huber visited the Netherlands. He participated in the Second Hague Peace Conference of 1907 as the Swiss delegate. This work so captured him that throughout the entire interbellum period he continued zealously to advocate peace. If not as a delegate to peace conferences, then certainly as a member of the League of Nations or as a judge of the International Court of Justice. As if this were not enough, Huber joined the Red Cross and devoted himself to refugees and displaced persons.

In the meantime the Christian faith had become the motivating force in his life. A serious illness in 1922, rather than his international activities, made him turn (again) to the Bible. According to promotor Gesina Van Der Molen his conversion greatly affected his view of the law. If, prior to his conversion, his idea of the law was based on the balance of power, afterwards he emphasized normative law – based on the Ten Commandments.

In her *laudatio* Van Der Molen acknowledged that Huber could not be considered to be a Calvinist ‘in the strict sense of the word.’ Yet, she appreciated Huber as ‘one of us’ since he ‘accepts the Word of God as the sole foundation for building an international rule of law.’

Huber accepted his fourth honorary doctorate with the usual expression of thanks in which he referred to his earlier acquaintance with the Netherlands, the land where international law was a reality. In the margin of the speech Huber delivered, which is kept in the archive of promotor Van Der Molen, the passage about his Christian concept of law is marked – it shows quite plainly how much she valued this.

For Huber the fourth doctorate was not routine. He prepared him-
self meticulously and bombarded Van Der Molen with questions. Would he have to present himself to the rector magnificus on the day before the ceremony? What was considered appropriate attire? Was he expected to respond immediately following the *laudatio*? And how long was his speech to be? Max Huber’s questions teach us that receiving an honorary doctorate never becomes routine – not even if one is a collector.

**JOZEF BOHATEC (1950)**

Of the three laureates who received an honorary doctorate in 1950, the Austrian theologian and philosopher Joseph Bohatec was the least well known. This fact had not escaped Doede Nauta, professor of canon law and church history. In the newspaper *Trouw*, in which he wrote about the life and work of Bohatec, he mentioned why Bohatec did not elicit a jolt of recognition in the supporters of the vu University. ‘At the very least Bohatec is not a person who is cut out to seek popularity. In no way does he possess the qualities of a popular speaker. His writing style, however clear, lacks all elegance and warmth that can make an author enthralling.’ A pithy judgment which, however, is right to the point. Bohatec was a typical scholar from the German speaking region: thorough, but dry, scholarly, but with little sparkle. Already before the First World War Bohatec made a name for himself as an authority on the French reformer Calvin. In 1909 he wrote about the latter’s ideas of God’s providence, followed some years later by a study about the confrontation between Reformational thinking and that of the seventeenth century rationalist René Descartes.

In 1913 Bohatec became professor of systematic theology in Vienna, which, in the words of Nauta, was ‘an outpost of Protestantism in the midst of a Roman Catholic region.’ Honorary promotor Herman Dooyeweerd also emphasized ‘the great reputation’ of Bohatec’s lectures. According to Dooyeweerd Bohatec played a role ‘that can hardly be overestimated’ in the revival of Calvinism in Central Europe. But Dooyeweerd also pointed to something else: In the thirties Vienna was subject to great pressure by popular movements and was weighed down since 1938 by the *Anschluss* of Austria to Nazi Germany. In that period Bohatec is said to have been a ‘man of great stature.’ Dooye-
J. Bohatec listening to the *laudatio* of honorary promotor H. Dooyeweerd.
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weerd emphasized the thirties so much because this was when he really got to know Bohatec. After the creation of the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy in 1936 the 60-year old nestor Bohatec became an immediate and enthusiastic member. His study about Calvin and the state which was published the following year made a deep impression on Dooyeweerd. Conversely Bohatec was no less impressed by Dooyeweerd’s study that had just been published entitled, *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee* (*The Philosophy of Law*). The style of this book is rumored today to be very heavy. It is therefore even more remarkable that shortly after its publication in 1935, Bohatec spoke of ‘the pleasure’ with which he had read the book.

Ever since, promotor Dooyeweerd and honorary doctor Bohatec have been brothers in arms. This is not to suggest that the honorary promotion was a kindness shown to friends. Bohatec had so much scholarly content and was so very much in line with Reformed thought that his promotion was more than justified – even though he may not have been very ‘mediagenic,’ to use a modern term.

**Jan Schouten (1950)**

Whoever thinks of Jan Schouten (1883-1963) in 2007, thinks of a bygone era. Jan Schouten, chairman of the Anti-revolutionary Party (ARP) in parliament during the years 1933-1956, and a fearless member of the resistance during the war who without question deserves the title of ‘hero,’ was the kind of Reformed fellow the likes of which has become extinct in the Netherlands. He was a self-taught man whose career was a variation on the old expression, ‘from paperboy to millionaire.’ Or, in his case, from deck-hand to director of the Boaz Bank in Rotterdam. Before the war Schouten served under the sacrosanct Colijn. But even then already there were indications of an independent spirit and a strong personality.

After the war his leadership talents came to light unmistakably. Emaciated upon his return from the concentration camp, he spoke the memorable words: ‘I have not changed.’ Schouten opposed the idea of a Breakthrough between the various political and social ‘pillars,’ and wanted to retain the existing order from before the war. He was not the only one who wanted this. Dutch constituents after 1945 tended
J. Schouten listening to the laudatio of honorary promotor A. M. Donner.
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to vote mainly along traditional lines. Only later, during the turbulent sixties when the ‘conservative’ part of the ARP was vilified as part of the old ‘decaying’ order, was Schouten considered to be an oldfashioned person who had not understood the signs of the time.

There was no talk of such vilification in 1950. On the contrary, as proudly as Schouten held up his head, so proudly the political parties still functioned. Under his leadership the Anti-revolutionary Party sought its strength in isolation. Without much success, but that did not diminish his reputation. Schouten was the undisputed leader for the Anti-revolutionary segment of the population, even though he lacked the charisma of his predecessor Colijn. The fact that his promoter on 20 October 1950 was the youthful jurist A. M. Donner is rather fascinating. André Donner and Schouten had been closely associated during the war. The young law student had been involved with the underground resistance newspaper Trouw. In 1945, with Colijn having died, Schouten had assumed the leadership of the now aboveground ARP. Schouten also, in lengthy hour-long speeches, suppressed the breakthrough idea which had also won some sympathy in Anti-revolutionary circles. ‘We were given,’ according to Donner, ‘a re-education course in Anti-revolutionary statesmanship, with as starting point that order can be restored only by retrieving the principles of yesterday and by building on them.’

Donner must have gained great appreciation for the arguments of his political leader which were based on principle. In his speech at the presentation of the honorary doctorate he recalled Schouten’s firm position after the liberation. ‘When after the liberation others were captivated more or less by the spirit of the times of a romanticism that had emerged during the occupation, which also in the political realm led to a flirtation with everything that was called new and that looked differently from anything else, Mr. Schouten from the outset did his utmost to call our people back to the realities of Dutch national life and to the principles of a healthy and balanced form of government.’

Also after the war, according to Donner, Schouten, as leader of the opposition, let himself be guided by the conviction that without the Word of God the nation would fall victim to ‘the impulse for renewal and the lust to experiment on the part of its leaders.’ Donner’s promotion speech shows once again how much this doctorate was intended to honor the great leader of one’s own pillar. But Schouten also be-
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longed to the rest of the Netherlands, as minister of Education, Arts and Sciences F. J. Th. Rutten explained after the ceremony, by presenting the new honorary doctor with the insignia of a royal honor making him a Commander in the Order of Orange Nassau. Rutten praised the uva University ‘which for 70 years has served scholarship in such an illustrious manner and has shaped many generations of students from whose midst many national figures have come forth.’ The daily Trouw, voice of the Reformed community, was proud. ‘Schouten,’ the newspaper wrote in an editorial by its chief editor on the day after the promotion, ‘is the embodiment of Calvinism in the Netherlands. In his person he demonstrates the faith and character of Calvinism at its best.’ The newspaper also mentioned with delight that Schouten’s political adversaries had also attended the ceremony. ‘Not because we want to boast or because we are so self-confident,’ the paper hastened to add, ‘but because we believe that yesterday others also have seen and experienced something of the strength of the Reformed faith in the life of our nation.’

A. J. VAN DER MERWE (1952)

While the senate had great difficulty to grant Joh.C. Van Rooy an honorary doctorate, there were no objections to candidate Abraham Johannes Van Der Merwe (1897-1978). This happened in spite of the fact that this theologian, as minister of the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk) in Cape Town, might be considered a mainstay of the apartheid policy. However, at the time this presented no great opposition at the uva University, even though some in the senate spoke derisively of the regime.

Van Der Merwe was appreciated especially as a theologian. The minutes of the senate that deal with this honorary doctorate state that ‘during the last ten or fifteen years he has taken an ever stronger stand against emerging Barthianism and surging Methodism.’ And historian G. J. Schutte, connaisseur par excellence of Netherlands-South African relationships, added to this in 2005: he was also president of the Van Riebeeck-Commemoration Committee. This was important to the uva University. At the beginning of the fifties, president-curator J. Donner had taken a seat on the Honorary Committee that organized
A.J. Van Der Merwe (in the center) with J. Waterink (with two decorations on his toga).
the festivities in honor of the fact that three hundred years earlier the United East Indies Company (voc) under Jan Van Riebeeck had set foot on land in South Africa.

Especially his efforts in this regard, more so than his theological work, were emphasized by historian professor A. Goslinga, in his speech to the laureate. He took his listeners along to 1652 when Van Riebeeck’s ship the ‘Dromedaris’ put out to sea to South Africa – with the Dutch Authorized Version of the Bible (Statenbijbel) on board. A Van Der Merwe followed in his footsteps. Goslinga mentioned that the Van Der Merwe family would blossom into 23,000 souls in three hundred years, of which honorary doctor Van Der Merwe was one. ‘Among your people you may be counted as a representative figure. Your own people will only prosper if they remain true, in spite of changed circumstances, to what they received in the 17th century from the mother country.’

Van Der Merwe considered his honorary doctorate not only as a tribute to South Africa but also to the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk. He expressed the wish that this ceremony ‘may deepen the consciousness of the hidden unity that exists between the Netherlands and South Africa.’ This wish would continue to be fulfilled for quite some time, for until the sixties the apartheid regime would find a warm defender among the Reformed people of the Netherlands.

Joh.C. Van Rooy (1952)

In January 1951 the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the vu University advocated that an honorary doctorate be awarded to a South African. This ‘to solidify the ties between the Netherlands and South Africa in general and the Calvinistic segment of the people in particular.’ Dr. W. J. Kolkert, previous director of the Christian School for Higher Education (hbs) in Amsterdam and an active member of the Netherlands-South African Society, had whispered this to them.

Kolkert recommended a number of names – each with accompanying credentials. He was no admirer of J.C. Van Rooy (1890-1935) who was president of the League of Brothers (Broederbond) an association whose aim it was to promote Afrikaner unity and language, and he wondered what probable promotor J. Waterink, professor of peda-
Joh. C. Van Rooy (left) congratulated by A. Goslinga.
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gogy, thought about this. Waterink saw no problems, but would have
to put forth every effort to convince the senate of Van Rooy’s nomina-
tion. The latter’s presidency of the Broederbond was seen as a formida-
able obstacle. Jurist I. A. Diepenhorst and theologian G. C. Berkouwer
considered Van Rooy a mainstay of the South African apartheid poli-
cy.

Waterink had to exert great effort to convince the senate. By hon-
oring Van Rooy the ‘brothers of the Dutch’ (‘broedervolk’) would be
honored. Besides, Waterink added slyly, there had been no objections
the previous year to delegate the rector magnificus to the University of
Potchefstroom, which, after all, was the center of Afrikaner national-
ism. ‘So, why are there now objections to national figures?’ The sug-
gestion that the Broederbond could be associated with national-social-
ism Waterink rejected outright. The league had been created in 1918
before Hitler (1919) joined the NSDAP. During the Second World War
Van Rooy had been a member of an advisory committee of general
Smuts who fought on the allied side – so what could he be blamed
for?

Waterink used heavy artillery to convince his opponents. The ob-
jections showed how ‘British propaganda’ worked. The South African
government was said to spend more money per capita on the black
population than the British government in its protectorates. Berkouw-
er kept muttering that: ‘he did not share Waterink’s optimism regard-
ing the Kaffir politics.’ But Waterink’s verbal volley was successful: in
the end Van Rooy was granted an honorary doctorate unanimously.

On 20 October 1952 Waterink delivered his laudatio. In it he ex-
pressed appreciation of Van Rooy as an ‘educator of the people,’ who
by his chairmanship of the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associa-
tions had driven our kindred Afrikaner people into the flow of nations.
Van Rooy, who had studied theology at the vU University showed him-
self to be extremely happy with his honorary doctorate which, he said,
he accepted with pride and joy. It turned into quite a party with many
prominent people in attendance, among whom the mayor of Amster-
dam, the rector magnificus of the University of Leiden and, of course,
members of cultural associations and committees for relations be-
tween the Netherlands and South Africa. Most of them remained una-
ware of the struggle in the senate.
Only one honorary doctorate was awarded in 1955. Remarkable indeed, because this anniversary year (the VU University existed 75 years) might have been an excellent pretext for nominating a number of candidates. Which happened indeed. Besides church historian D. Nauta, who nominated his French colleague Émile Léonard (1891-1961), medical historian G. A. Lindeboom and professor of Old Testament G. Ch. Aalders had stepped into the breach on behalf of Paul Tournier and Douglas Johnson respectively.

Tournier was a Swiss physician who practiced medicine from the perspective of his Christian faith. Tournier saw man as God’s creature and considered body, soul and spirit as a single entity. Douglas Johnson had been secretary of the Intervarsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions for decades and should be considered more of an evangelical than a Reformed theologian. Both candidates were rejected by the senate even after repeated ballots. Church historian Maarten Aalders assumes in his study 125 Years Faculty of Theology at the VU University (125 jaar Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid aan de Vrije Universiteit) that the candidates were most likely not enough Reformational and too fundamentalistic in their view of Scripture.

For that reason only Léonard received a doctor’s degree. The senate had no reservations about him. Émile Léonard came from an unimpeachable background. He had made a name for himself as a historian of French Protestantism, after already having gained a reputation with a brief historical summary of Normandy. Léonard published Le protestant français in 1955; it was a solid survey of that part of France which in the sixteenth and seventeenth century certainly was weighed down by Roman Catholic France – although Calvin was born in Northern France. Léonard proved himself to be more than a mere historian of his own denomination by publishing Remarques sur les ‘sects’ in that same year (1955).

He was not only enamored with religious history. The history of warfare also fascinated him, which became apparent a few years after he had been crowned at the VU University. In 1958 he occupied himself with the problems of armies in the eighteenth century. Admittedly, his interests ran wide. Nevertheless, he received his honorary doctorate as a historian of Protestantism. However, his greatest work was yet to come. Between 1961 and 1964 Léonard published his mag-
E. G. Léonard with honorary promotor D. Nauta.
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*num opus*, a three volume survey of the history of Protestantism from the Reformation until the twentieth century. When this was finished Léonard, who in the meantime had reached the age of 73, could rest on his laurels.

Meanwhile the **vu** University, where his honorary doctorate had not been accepted without considerable debate, could now, ten years later, look back upon a good move. The University had not gone wrong with Léonard, the productive historian. The fact that he was also sound in the faith was an added bonus.

**H. W. TILANUS (1958)**

When H. K. J. Beernink, received the news that Hendrik Willem Tila- nus (1884-1966) was to receive an honorary doctorate in law at the **vu** University on 20 October 1958, he immediately took up his pen in order to pay homage in *Trouw* to his predecessor as chairman of the Christelijk-Historische Unie (**chu**) in parliament. Beernink enumerated the contributions of Tilanus one by one. He was said to have served outstandingly in the military by not only serving the army as an artillery officer, but also as a teacher at the Royal Military Academy in Breda. During his long parliamentary career he was always ready to go to bat for Christian education. And as chairman of the **chu**, which he led from 1939 until 1958, he served Dutch society admirably.

But Beernink considered Tilanus’ greatest contribution to be his successful opposition against the Breakthrough, that is, the call to have their Union be absorbed by a larger people’s party that was not based on Christian principles. ‘That he led the Union in the difficult post-war period in such a way that no one doubted the positive Christian character of this political faction also was a great contribution,’ Beernink wrote. He closed his article with the exclamation: ‘Doctor Tilanus, may you wear your doctor’s hat honorably for many years!’

It may be assumed that Beernink had read the report of the jury which promotor I. A. Diepenhorst had written already. Diepenhorst also saw as Tilanus’ greatest contribution that he (‘firm of principle and ecumenical politician that he was’) by keeping the **chu** together ‘as a segment of the population that had its own structure,’ had strongly promoted ‘the cause of the Reformation in the Netherlands.’
H. W. Tilanus follows the registrar. At the right are prime minister W. Drees and minister of Education J. Cals.
It sounded nice, too nice. The forceful leadership of the party leader had been questioned considerably especially during the fifties, in particular by C. Gerretson, professor of colonial history in Utrecht. Gerretson found Tilanus too weak, especially where it concerned the confrontation with the republic of Indonesia. Whereas Gerretson found it hard to swallow that the Dutch East Indies colony had been lost, he considered the sober minded Tilanus not nearly forceful enough over against the rebellious Indonesian leader Sukarno. Nor could Gerretson forgive Tilanus for having opened the door (although reluctantly) for the cabinet of the ‘red’ W. Drees. What he thought of the honorary doctorate of his political leader is not known, exactly a week after the ceremony Gerretson died.

It is not likely that Tilanus had forgotten the storms that arose regularly during his political leadership. In his word of thanks he reacted modestly to the praise of his promotor. He was ‘deeply conscious of the mistakes and shortcomings that are part of my daily labors.’ The sincere Christian, Tilanus, showed himself to be ‘humbly thankful to Him who gives man strength for his life’s work.’

A. A. L. Rutgers (1959)

On the threshold of the sixties the vu University honored a representative of one of the old families that had made the university great. Abra- ham Arnold Lodewijk (nickname: Bram) Rutgers (1884-1966) was the son of F. L. Rutgers who next to Abraham Kuyper had stood at the cradle of the university in 1880, and who together with him organized the Reformed exodus from the Dutch Reformed Church six years later.

For that reason it was only natural that Bram Rutgers would study at the vu University. Having completed his studies in mathematics and physics Rutgers worked for some time as teacher of ‘natural history’ at the Marnix College in Rotterdam. But adventure called. Rutgers left for the Dutch East Indies in 1910. There he began as botanic assistant and soon worked his way up to become Director of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in Buitenzorg. This position already indicated that Rutgers was more than a biologist. His managerial abilities became obvious. His network in the Anti-revolutionary community did the rest. In 1928 Rutgers became governor of Surinam, a position he
A. A. L. Rutgers, listening to the *laudatio* of honorary promotor L. W. G. Scholten.
would hold for five years. In 1933, having lived in the colonies for 23 years, Rutgers returned to the mother country. For a short time he was a member of the Dutch Lower Chamber for the Anti-revolutionary Party before he joined the Council of State, in 1936.

Rutgers spent the war years in captivity and had to experience that his brother Victor died in captivity in 1945 in Bochum. The sixty-year old was looked upon in 1945 as an elderly statesman and as such he was valued greatly. First he became a Royal Commissioner for the province of South Holland, while ending his career as vice-president of the Council of State. Today we would say, as ‘viceroy of the Netherlands.’

It was this constitutional career which would produce for this original biologist an honorary doctorate in law on 20 October 1959. He received it from the hands of jurist professor L. W. G. Scholten, who had shared both good and bad times with Rutgers. They knew each other from the Anti-revolutionary Party and had both been imprisoned during the German occupation. Having summarized his contributions as governor, member of the Dutch Lower Chamber and vice-president of the Council of State, Scholten concluded by eulogizing Rutgers’ firm stand during the war – the war which was caesura as well as benchmark in the lives of both. ‘During the occupation you were one of the defenders of the justice that we were born with, because the century was put in our hearts, when you spoke loudly on behalf of the church at a time when the voice of the State could not be formulated. And by speaking for the church you have served constitutional law in the best possible way. At that time you acted as a brave and honest patriot, as a good Christian.’

**Jacques Ellul (1965)**

Of all six honorary doctorates that were proposed in 1965 the French jurist and sociologist Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) was, without doubt, from a scholarly perspective the brightest light. He was the author of a multifaceted oeuvre of which his three volume study about technology stands out. The first volume, *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle (Technology or the Onset of this Century)* was published in 1954 and established his reputation. The book contained a severe criticism of the shady side
J. Ellul receives the cape from J. Lever. Honorary promotor S. Gerbrandy looks on approvingly.
of the wildly developing technology. This would lead to an efficiency devoid of the soul. Novelist Aldous Huxley, author of the anti-utopian novel *Brave New World*, introduced *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* to the Anglo-Saxon world which became the reason for Ellul’s world fame.

But it was not that far yet in 1965. Ellul was well-known, but he still stood in the shadow of thinkers who at the time caused a furor, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault and Claude Levi-Strauss. Ellul’s book, so explicitly critical of the social structure, had reached the vU University already – but this especially because the sociologist wrote his book ‘in isolation,’ as the rector magnificus of the vU University, professor R. Schippers, informed Ellul. Protestant Ellul performed his work in Catholic and also secular France. Honorary professor S. Gerbrandy also emphasized this in his *laudatio*. He called Ellul ‘one of the great men of our day.’ Ellul was great especially because he used his knowledge and experience in order to serve mankind. And ‘to serve’ means, to point to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

Jacques Ellul who was born in 1912 and died in 1994 was an extraordinary scholar. In his younger years he was captivated by Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. The book was, as he would explain later, ‘the first shock that gave me an explanation of the world.’ The need Ellul felt for a universal explanation of the world is also shown from the second source from which he drank – the Bible. Ellul saw no contradiction between Marxism and religion. On the contrary, to him they were complementing philosophies. Whereas Marxism analyzed society, Christianity described the *condition humaine*, in which love, grief, and death have their place. Ellul’s *oeuvre* can be seen as a stubborn variant of the criticism of society which was also articulated by the *Frankfurter Schule* which was becoming popular at the time: a capitalistic society bent on profits would alienate man from himself. With the honorary doctorate the vU University in 1965 emphasized the Protestant moralist Ellul, but it also was open to his criticism of society. From that perspective Ellul became the first indication of a new wind that would blow in the seventies and eighties – a wind from the left.
Efrain Jonckheer (1917-1987) became prime minister of the Netherlands Antilles on 20 October 1965, at the age of 48. He received a birthday present which he never would have anticipated and which he never would receive again – an honorary doctorate. His promotor, professor W. F. De Gaay Fortman who was very familiar with the Antilles having spent part of his youth there, made sure to mention this in his speech.

Of course, Jonckheer did not receive his honorary doctorate for naught – not even for being prime minister in the sixties. The degree was granted him in view of his role in the pursuit of independence from Curaçao. Jonckheer, as prime minister, had been one of the signers of the Statute of the Kingdom which afforded the Antilles relative independence. ‘The Statute did not agree in every part with what you had championed until that time,’ De Gaay Fortman observed in his speech. This was putting it rather mildly. The fact is that Jonckheer had fought hard against the then governor A. A. M. Struyken, who as the representative of the Government of the Kingdom threatened to overrule the decisions of the Antillian council of ministers. Jonckheer won the day after a fierce struggle during which Jonckheer skilfully undermined the position of Struyken (‘the governor has no opinions of his own’). This struggle does not diminish the fact that Jonckheer was a loyal partner of the Dutch government who demanded political space, but also worked within that space. This was the reason why De Gaay Fortman praised him by mentioning that Jonckheer acknowledged the ‘boundaries’ of the statute and had helped to turn the relationships of the kingdom ‘within those boundaries’ into ‘a positive reality.’

The honorary doctorate was not without its opponents: jurist G. Van Ginsbergen had submitted a strong protest in a letter to promotor De Gaay Fortman on 28 December 1964. According to Van Ginsbergen Jonckheer had ‘in no way personally lent his assistance’ to the Statute of the Kingdom. ‘There is nothing else about him that could be mentioned that would qualify him for any academic honor.’ Because De Gaay Fortman did not react to this, Van Ginsbergen wrote a letter to Elseviers Weekblad in which he made his protest public. ‘In intellectual circles in the Antilles the plan to promote a small businessman who
E. Jonckheer receives the cape from J. Lever.
wished to get a wry smile. But, Van Ginsbergen himself could not laugh it off. He blamed the vu University for involving itself in ‘a peculiar way’ in the politics of the Antilles, now that they faced elections again in the mid sixties.

The honorary doctorate probably had little impact on those elections, but it is a fact that Jonckheer and his coalition were able to continue to govern after the 1966 elections. He resigned in 1968 in order to become minister plenipotentiary in the Hague. Jonckheer’s loyalty to the Netherlands was to cause him a big disappointment later. In 1969 serious riots erupted in the islands. By royal decree Jonckheer was nominated as successor to the discredited governor Cola Debrot. But, forced by the riots, the government had to retrace its steps. As a member of the old-established, white, Protestant elite, his nomination would be oil on the fire. The ruling cabinet De Jong envisaged new demonstrations and tried to persuade him to forgo his nomination. Jonckheer, who at that moment was minister plenipotentiary of the Antilles, knew he had the support of the government of the Antilles, and claimed that only the ‘revolutionary’ party Frente Obrero opposed him. But the cabinet persisted and canceled his nomination, bitterly frustrating Jonckheer. His subsequent nomination as ambassador of the kingdom to Venezuela would never be able to gold-plate the bitter pill.

Cornelis Rijnsdorp (1965)

‘I would characterize myself as a living, believing person, who works as long as it is day, and who tries to give an answer to the questions that confront him in life, using the entire apparatus that has been put at his disposal in the course of a long life.’ As simple and modest as Cornelis Rijnsdorp describes himself here, so he seems to have been in daily life – simple and modest. The man of letters and reviewer, who was as much at ease writing literary critiques for literary journals as well as the daily Trouw, was the only autodidact among the six honorary doctors of the vu University in 1965.

Rijnsdorp was born in Rotterdam in a Reformed family, the youngest of six children. He attended Advanced Primary Education (ulo) after which he started working in an office – ordinarily the terminal.
C. Rijnsdorp receives congratulations from honorary promotor G. Kuiper.
for someone of his background. But not for Rijndorp. As a Christian variation to Franz Kafka he remained true to clerical work, but at the same time he also gave shape to his literary aspirations with great persistence. And although he did not write any world-shocking prose like Kafka, yet with his novels and critiques he educated the Reformed community about literature – which was quite a contribution, according to the literary faculty. Rijndorp was awarded the honorary doctorate ‘on the basis of excellent contributions in the area of literature, in particular what you have done by providing responsible information to the Christian public in the Netherlands, and for shaping it in the area of literature, and more generally culturally.’

Promotor G. Kuiper, professor of literature, praised Rijndorp as an ‘influential person’ who exercises criticism ‘in an extremely careful manner, who approaches each phenomenon, each author circumspectly and honestly, wanting to do full justice, always involving your deep, Christian philosophy in your judgments, in a dedicated effort to follow the way the Lord has shown us also in this.’ For Rijndorp the 20th of October was ‘an unforgettable day,’ as he let rector magnificus De Gaay Fortman know, ‘You have surrounded us with care and everything was organized excellently including the beautiful roses in our hotel room.’

Although the honorary doctorate came in the autumn of his life (Rijndorp was 71 years old when he received his honorary doctorate) his most influential period was yet to come. It began with the merger of the newspapers of the Diemer concern (among which De Rotterdammer) with Trouw. From now on Rijndorp no longer wrote exclusively about literature, but about anything the editor thought was suitable for him – whether philosophy or psychology. Although Rijndorp remained a marginal figure outside of Protestant-Christian circles, within the Reformed community he enjoyed great fame. So great that in 1974 the committee of ‘Rijndorp 80 years’ was established by De Gaay Fortman, historian George Puchinger, and theologian Okke Jager. On his birthday on 19 September 1980, Rijndorp was given a reception followed by a dinner in the building of the Christian broadcasting corporation NCRV where Rijndorp had presented so many radio lectures throughout the years. The ULQ boy had grown into a modest institution thanks to his diligence, talents, and persistence.
When the senate at the suggestion of the Faculty of Economic Sciences decided to award His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard (1911-2004) an honorary doctorate on 20 October 1965 ‘on the basis of the excellent services which you have rendered the national economy of the Netherlands,’ the VU University could not know how much the prince would become the talk of the town less than ten years later because he had been too broadminded in his efforts on behalf of the ‘national economy of the Netherlands.’ The Lockheed affair, with the prince accepting bribes from the American aircraft manufacturer, would come to light later, in 1976.

Promotor professor F. De Roos mentioned in his speech that the Netherlands had changed considerably economically after the Second World War. Had it been for the most part an agricultural country before the war, after 1945 it had become a nation of commerce. Commerce does not happen all by itself; markets have to be found. In finding them the prince had shown himself ‘indispensable.’ De Roos read the names of the countries that the prince had visited regularly since 1950. ‘They meant, for your Royal Highness, periods of very close contact with industry in these countries which has been exceptionally fruitful for our country.’

The honorary doctorate of the VU University was not the first one the prince had received. In 1947 he received the first one of a total of eight honorary doctorates. The University of Utrecht awarded the prince an honorary degree in law, which had been influenced especially by his role in the Second World War. A few years later Bernhard became an honorary doctor of technology in Delft. In the years that followed the internationally oriented Bernhard was discovered by foreign countries. Various universities in Montreal, British Columbia, Michigan, and Basel awarded him the prestigious honor. All these honorary doctorates for the prince certainly were not only given out of respect for his many contributions – however large they may have been. No, the granting also happened because a prince gave more standing to the university. Although Bernhard was not of royal blood, at least the university would reflect something royal. The VU University was well acquainted with this aspiration. The senate acknowledged ‘with great appreciation’ the news that the prince would be present at the pres-
Prince Bernhard listening to the *laudatio* of honorary promotor F. De Roos.
entation of the degree and it used the opportunity to invite Queen Juliana also for the gala evening that was to follow the ceremony. The senate would also like Bernhard to speak a word of thanks on behalf of all the honorary doctors of that year and emphasized that he was free to say ‘whatever was on his mind.’ This the Prince did. He said he spoke as ‘a world citizen, as one person among three billion others.’ He expressed his alarm at the rapid population increase in the world and the unjust distribution of incomes. Since business is ‘in principle not a benefactor of humanity,’ Bernhard directed his arrows at politics. A ‘multi-lateral system’ would have to be created with ‘groups of governments’ guaranteeing the political risks businesses would run. The advantages of such a system would be, the Prince outlined in clever words, that in such a way businesses would dare to invest in the Third World and thus a ‘code of good conduct’ could be established, which would safeguard the citizens against foreign domination. The words that could be heard at the VU University on that Wednesday, October 20 1965, were noble words and well-meant, although somewhat idealistic. In the year 2007 it is difficult to read those words without reservation. But, such is wisdom after the fact.

Paul G. Hoffmann (1965)

It happens seldom that an honorary doctor does not come to receive his degree in person. The promovendi are notified a long time in advance that they have been chosen and may look forward to a special day in the presence of their family, friends, and dignitaries. No wonder that the honorary doctors are almost always present, unless prevented by sickness or other difficulties. The American Paul G. Hoffmann, however, offered a normal and therefore unusual reason for his absence – work came first. His work: being administrator of the ‘Special United Fund’ of the United Nations for economic cooperation. W. Gibson Parker, a lower ranking official of the United Nations, received the degree as his representative. Hoffman was awarded the degree, according to his promotor professor W.J. Wieringa, because of his efforts to make it possible for developing countries to manage their own affairs.

That he was not able to accept his honorary doctorate in person did
Gibson Parkes, substitute for honorary doctor Paul Hoffman, shakes hands with honorary promotor W. J. Wierenga.
not leave Hoffmann unaffected. A year after the ceremony he wrote rector magnificus W. F. De Gaay Fortman, ’One of my greatest disappointments in the past few months was my inability to be with you, because I knew it would be a memorable occasion.’ This certainly was the case, in spite of promotor Wieringa. This historian of economics undoubtedly had many good qualities, but public speaking was not one of them. Yet on 20 October 1965 he did present a thorough picture of Hoffmann’s involvement in the Third World. This was devoid of paternalism or philanthropy, according to Wieringa. Hoffmann was both sober minded and concerned – and thus gave meaning to the biblical norm of justice.

The brand-new honorary doctor had a long record of service in the area of economic assistance. He began his career after the Second World War by lending a helping hand to the Old World as administrator of economic cooperation. This position, according to Wieringa, was the lead-up to the much more difficult task that was to follow in the fifties as delegate at the General Assembly of the United Nations at the Economic and Social Council. Wieringa emphasized in his speech that Hoffmann’s work was defined by the norm of biblical justice which also was considered of paramount importance by the vu University. Although Wieringa did not use the word explicitly, his speech ended with a plea for ‘stewardship,’ a concept that was used later by Christian-democrats of all sorts.

Wieringa’s speech was delivered almost simultaneously in New York by minister Th. H. Bot of Development Cooperation, who added, not too tactfully, that in the Netherlands an honorary doctorate, unlike in the United States, was seldom awarded and therefore had to be considered an extraordinary honor. Hoffmann’s reaction has not been recorded. In his word of thanks the economist repeated courteously what he wrote a half a year later to De Gaay Fortman: that he would have liked to have accepted the degree in person in Amsterdam.

**Martin Luther King (1965)**

To become an honorary doctor is a matter of honor. Whoever is chosen for this usually shows himself very pleased and responds by return mail. Not so the Reverend Martin Luther King (1929-1968).
Since, as a leader of the black people in America, he delivered his famous *I Have a Dream* speech to thousands of his fellow-sufferers on the steps of the Lincoln Monument in Washington on 28 August 1963, he had become a famous personality. His dream of equality between black and white had also left an impression at the *vu* University. So much, in fact, that the Faculty of Social Sciences decided in November 1964 to award him an honorary doctorate, to be presented by sociology professor G. Kuiper. The senate did not have to think long about this recommendation. On 9 December 1964 rector magnificus professor R. Schippers notified King of the award, ‘in recognition of your admirable achievements on behalf of those who are struggling to gain their rights and dignity.’ Schippers was wise enough to assume that the name ‘vu University’ would not immediately ring a bell with world citizen King. For that reason he requested an American minister who was his student to tell King about the institution. Unfortunately, at the moment Schippers wrote his letter King was in Oslo. His secretary promised to relay the message, but no answer was forthcoming. Therefore the rector magnificus took up his pen once again two months later on 24 February 1965. He added to his praise for King and elaborated more fully on the reason for the honorary doctorate. Now it read that King would be honored personally, but that the honorary doctorate was also meant ‘to lend support to the crusade against racial discrimination in which you are so actively involved.’ As one of the oldest Christian universities in the world with contacts in Indonesia, South Africa, America, and Canada, the *vu* University deemed itself to be the right institution to support King’s ‘crusade.’

Once again Schippers received no reply for months. Via the Dutchman J. C. Hoekendijk, professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York since 1965, the rector magnificus learned on 22 June 1965 that King accepted the honorary doctorate and intended to be present at the ceremony. Promotor Kuiper showed himself happily surprised in a letter, but kept hoping for ‘even one sentence’ of the laureate himself, ‘for we understand very well that you have other things to do which are more important than writing letters.’ And indeed, King had no time, not even for this one sentence. But, no matter, the University cheerfully publicized the news. However, if the University thought that everything had been arranged for this event, it was sadly mistaken.
Martin Luther King with cape.
Generally speaking outrage and furious reactions followed, especially from America and South Africa where the ‘negro problem’ was very much on the mind of whites. So, for example, Sj. Steunenbrink from Houston (‘as a Dutch immigrant physician from Holland who was brought up in a Reformed home, I learned this week that your university intends to offer Dr. Martin Luther King an honorary doctorate’) asserted that King moved in communist circles, an assertion which he supported with American newspaper clippings. ‘It is a well-known fact here that many of his closest associates are red and belong to the atheist minded.’ Rev. De Koekkoek, a Dutchman who also lived in America, wrote along the same lines: King was said to be a ‘fanatic,’ who advocated ‘violence’ and called people to ‘break the law,’ and, last but not least, was supported by the communists. ‘Does the Free have to go out of its way to honor such a man?’

Professor Schippers took all the time he needed to answer the critics. He observed dryly, ‘We differ substantially in our appreciation of the work of Dr. King.’ In his clarification he wrote that the struggle against racial discrimination ought to be ‘the calling’ of every Christian. He indicated not to be much impressed by the criticism that King was assisted by communists. ‘Christians in our country were accused by the Germans of the same thing during the Second World War. Nevertheless Christians and communists often had a good working relationship in their opposition to the Nazis.’ According to good Reformed practice, Schippers did not budge an inch. His position, based on principle, was facilitated by the interest shown in the Netherlands for this honorary doctorate. Queen Juliana had asked in a conversation with her confidant De Gaay Fortman and King’s confidant Hoekendijk if King ‘could spare some time for her after the ceremony.’ Schippers skillfully seized on this proposal. To take the wind out of their sails, especially of critics in the United States, he suggested to King to have his picture taken with the queen at the palace. Those pictures would then have to be published in the American press. It would be a nice counterbalance to pictures which featured King in the company of people who were dubbed ‘communists’ in the American press.

The ceremony in which Kuiper publicly praised King’s ‘excellent contributions in the struggle of those who were denied justice or were without justice, which is to say all races not receiving equal rights,’ was a great success. King was the dazzling central figure. Several people
who were present indicated afterwards to have been deeply impressed, among whom King himself. Also now his reaction came indirectly. His assistant, Andrew Young, spoke words of thanks for the hospitality and kindness shown, and also his wife, Coretta King, showed her appreciation. It must be granted that a news item in Trouw on that same day cast somewhat of a pall over the event. ‘Why honor this man?’ Dutch-American Paul Schrotenboer, chairman of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, asked in an interview. After all, King was known as an advocate of ‘civil disobedience’ – and was civil disobedience now supposed to lead to civil rights?

After 20 October the protests continued to dribble in for a little while. The most important protest came from the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa, which called the award not in keeping with the principles of the university. Professor of New Testament Herman Ridderbos, of Kampen Theological School, defended the vU University in his Gereformeerd Weekblad (Reformed Weekly) and in unambiguous language disapproved of the action of the South African church.

With this the storm about honorary doctor Martin Luther King abated. And then, on Thursday, 4 April 1968, King was assassinated. The vU University, through De Gaay Fortman who (in the meantime) had become rector magnificus and A. Krikke, chairman of the Student Council, indicated its shock. On Friday, 5 April, Fortman delivered a speech in which the bewilderment and bitterness about the event was quite obvious. In order to keep King’s memory alive, Fortman and Krikke thought that a plaque should be placed next to the plaque that commemorated those of the vU University who had fallen during the Second World War. But this proposal failed because of lack of money and a general lack of interest. Nevertheless, this time all was not lost that was delayed. On 5 April 1982, exactly fourteen years after the suggestion was made, rector magnificus professor H. Verheul unveiled a plaque made by artist Fenna Westerdiep. With this the bond between the vU University and Martin Luther King was reaffirmed.
The Indonesian Todung Sutan Gunung Mulia was the only person to be granted an honorary doctorate in 1966. This had not been the original plan. Mulia was to have been the seventh honorary doctor in 1965, had it not been that he declined politely. In a telegram of 27 May 1964 to the rector magnificus Mulia stated, briefly and tersely, that he thought it ‘a great honor for which he was thankful’ but that he wanted postponement ‘pending the cultural agreement’ between the Netherlands and Indonesia. In a letter he further explained his position. Mulia emphasized to be ‘very much surprised’ at the award, ‘I do not know to what I owe this honor, I only see God’s hand in it.’ His letter gave evidence once again how sensitive relationships with the Netherlands were for its former colony. Mutual recognition of higher education had thus far failed to materialize due to the strained relationships, so that mutual honorary doctorates were also of little significance. In Indonesia during the unpleasant dictatorship of Sukarno, the pater patriae, it was hardly considered a commendation in 1964 to return home from the former mother country with an honorary doctorate.

Promotor professor J. Verkuyl’s reaction was one of disappointment, but he understood Mulia’s decision. He used the opportunity to come with another proposal: might it be feasible to promote someone from Central Java together with Mulia who came from the Batak region? ‘For advancing communications with the churches and institutions of Indonesia it seems to me that such a gesture would be especially important.’ But in spite of repeated efforts by Verkuyl, Mulia’s nomination remained the only one. However, the latter let it be known in January 1966 that he was able to accept the honorary doctorate now that relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia had improved. Mulia concerned himself emphatically with the tone of the invitation, which was necessary in view of the strict visa regulations of dictatorial Indonesia.

Finally, 20 October 1966 arrived. Mulia received from Verkuyl his honorary doctorate for ‘instructing and stimulating the Christian community in Indonesia.’ In his laudatio Verkuyl sketched Mulia’s career. He was the first Indonesian who graduated in 1933, with a doctoral thesis that carried the intriguing title, Het primitive denken in de moderne wetenschap (Primitive thought in modern scholarship). Mulia, who
T. S. G. Mulia with rector magnificus W. F. De Gaay Fortman (left) and L. Algera.
himself came from a culture in which magical thought prevailed, criticized the way in which modern anthropologists described so-called primitive thought.

Mulia had a career as a government official, but in addition remained active in the church. He initiated the establishment of the Indonesian Council of Churches in 1950, which, according to promotor Verkuyl, was ‘a first’ in Asia. Furthermore, he was chairman of the Indonesian Bible Society and compiled, in cooperation with others, a three volume encyclopedia about Indonesia. In the curriculum vitae that Verkuyl submitted to the senate he wrote, ‘Mulia is one of those Christian laymen who assumed a key position in the development of the churches and in the relations between church and society. Every country has such laymen. The fact that he was such a figure in Indonesia for so many years, and still is, has been a great blessing for the church as well as society.’

**MARINUS RUPPERT (1970)**

Seldom has a candidate for an honorary doctorate been submitted to the senate with such praise as Marinus Ruppert (1911-1992). In a letter to his colleagues of the juridical faculty of 11 March 1970 I.A. Diepenhorst extolled the next laureate. Diepenhorst called Ruppert’s record of service ‘exceptional.’ To start listing all his activities was a nearly impossible task: serving, since 1932, the Dutch Christian Agricultural Workers Federation which he guided as chairman through the difficult years of the German occupation; appointed chairman of the CNV, the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions, in 1947, a role which he combined with commissionerships and membership in the Upper Chamber of Parliament for the Anti-revolutionary Party. In 1959 he became a member of the Council of State. Ruppert has failed ‘in none of his functions; in several he was the dominant figure,’ according to Diepenhorst.

Furthermore, as Ruppert, a self-educated person, gave evidence of an astounding ‘knowledge of the law’ and he was able to hold his ground with regard to social-economic issues, architecture and urban and rural planning – a quality which he had exhibited, according to Diepenhorst, in his capacity of curator of the University of Utrecht.
M. Ruppert receives congratulations after the ceremony.
Ruppert is said to have spent a ‘considerable amount of time’ planning the construction of the new university complex, De Uithof. Diepenhorst also described him as an excellent debater. ‘I know many debaters in the Netherlands, but no one who sets forth the ideas of his opponents more honestly, and no one who, without getting needlessly excited, attacks his opponents with such astonishing strong-arm tactics as his natural talent, whom I hereby recommend for an honorary doctorate.’ But, if this were not sufficient, Ruppert was honored first and foremost as a scholar. Besides articles, papers, and brochures Ruppert published a two volume study on the Dutch labor movement (*De Nederlandse Vakbeweging*) in 1953. This study was considered his principal work.

The senate, with rector magnificus De Gaay Fortman as chairman, did not have to think long to decide to grant Ruppert an honorary doctorate ‘on the basis of excellent scholarly contributions.’ De Gaay Fortman had been a lecturer for years at the management training school of the CNV and knew Ruppert well. The new honorary doctor was said to have called attention, in his publications, to three issues: the social issue, described by De Gaay Fortman as the issue of equitable appreciation of work, the work issue, the issue of work as a human activity, and the ‘issue of the relationship of one person to the next in occupation and business, in enterprise and society.’ In his practical activities Ruppert demonstrated his ideals by founding the management training school, by devoting himself to a ‘reformation’ of society, and by calling attention to the role of the Christian labor movement in the world.

In his speech Ruppert showed himself to be both surprised and pleased that he received an honorary doctorate from the VU University. Surprised, because he was not aware of his own contributions. But also pleased, that he, being a Lutheran, would receive an honorary doctorate from an originally Calvinistic university. Ruppert did not hide that initially he had had difficulties with the VU University and especially with professor of philosophy Herman Dooyeweerd with whom he had sparred in the past about Christian-social politics. But there were also ‘many members of the senate and the entire scholarly community’ to whom he felt indebted because in ‘many ... ways they had helped in the reflection and the forming of opinions about questions that the labor movement faced.’ On 20 October 1970 each listen-
er knew for whom this appreciation was meant in particular: his honorary promotor De Gaay Fortman, formerly director of the management training school of the c.n.v. Thus ‘Gaius’ not only put Ruppert in the limelight, but he himself was put in the limelight by his promovendus.

O. NOTOHAMIDJOJO (1972)

The honorary doctorate for the Indonesian jurist Oeripan Notohamidjojo (1915-1985) had all the marks of a solution to an embarrassment. That could be seen already from the date of the ceremony – 4 September 1972. While all honorary doctors till then were awarded their doctorate on the anniversary of the university (20 October), a special public meeting was organized for Notohamidjojo. Notohamidjojo was initially a history teacher in the education institute in Solo. In 1948 he began to study law, and after earning his degree he became director of a Christian teachers training school in 1956. This he expanded into a special university, based on a Christian foundation.

In the curriculum vitae put together by the senate, Notohamidjojo was described as ‘a man with broad interests and great erudition,’ who attempted to plant the gospel in Java ‘as a young rice plant.’ However, behind this façade was hidden a very different reality. Already in 1966, with the awarding of the honorary doctorate to T.S.G. Mulia, the name of Notohamidjojo had been mentioned. The always active professor J. Verkuyl had suggested that Notohamidjojo also receive an honorary doctorate, and thus not to offend the Reformed in Central Java. That did not take place at that time, because Notohamidjojo was involved in divorce proceedings, which was a stumbling block for the vu University. After this, Notohamidjojo began work on a dissertation under Verkuyl’s supervision, which, however, was never completed; illness and home-sickness made him return to Indonesia in 1970.

However, the vu University did not just give up its attempt to promote him with a doctor’s degree. The philosopher C.A. Van Peursen proposed that Notohamidjojo be graduated on the basis of his articles. That would be much better than to just elevate him to an honorary doctorate: ‘an honorary doctorate degree, as proposed by some, is not a solution, and would only create feelings of inferiority.’ But nothing
O. Notohamidjojo pictured at Schiphol airport.
was achieved with those articles, and thus the honorary doctorate was again brought to the fore. In a letter to the senate in 29 March 1971, Professor Verkuyl wondered ‘what we can still do in order to furnish him with that to which he is entitled, that is, the dignity and worth of a doctor’s title.’ Verkuyl thought of the honorary doctorate as ‘service to a friend with whom I have been connected for so many years.’

The senate was interested in an honorary doctorate. D. C. Mulder, appointed as professor in religious studies in 1965, also exerted himself for an honorary doctorate. But this did not take away that Verkuyl’s letter had created irritation. The jurist professor H. J. Hommes wrote the rector magnificus W. F. De Gaay Fortman that the ‘nonsense’ about Notohamidjojo should be done with. That Notohamidjojo’s dissertation had never appeared was, according to Hommes, because of Verkuyl’s ‘single-mindedness and moral pressure.’ The advice to let Notohamidjojo write the largest part of his dissertation in Indonesia was rejected by Verkuyl, and had irritated Hommes.

However, because the senate as a whole zealously advocated the honorary doctorate for Notohamidjojo, it became a reality. His qualifications were measured broadly: his dedication for a Christian university in Java, his scholarly writings in the philosophy of law, the studies about the state, and his practical contributions to provide a legitimate place for Christianity in the Javanese culture. Professor De Gaay Fortman was to function as promotor. Thus everything seemed ready. Until the Student Council of the vU University (SvU) found out about the imminent promotion three weeks before. The Council wrote a sharp protest against the decision, since ‘the choice is for someone who, verbally and in writing, has shown himself to be a defender of the ‘Orde Baru,’ the so-called ‘New Order,’ of the generals in Indonesia,’ which has controlled Indonesia since 1965. The Student Council considered the honorary doctorate not only as a provocation to itself, but especially to ‘the democratic forces in Indonesia.’ The Council pointed out slyly that in September 1965, with the coup of General Suharto, 249 students had been removed from the Christian university, ‘with the cooperation of Mr. O. Notohamidjojo.’ Trouw picked up the protest and reported it in the issue of 16 August 1972 under the title, ‘Sharp criticism of the vU University honorary doctorate.’ The senate reacted indignantly to this ‘personal attack’ on Notohamidjojo, an attack, moreover, ‘that teems with lies.’ The Student Council, how-
ever, continued unperturbed with the protest, to the irritation of the conservative Reformed, who accused the senate of being ‘afraid’ of the protest and ‘not being worth a nickel.’ The new rector magnificus I. A. Diepenhorst, defended himself fiercely against these reproaches.

The protest continued for some time. The Student Council did not consider itself sufficiently heard by Ad Valvas, the weekly newspaper of the vu University which, according to the council, had succumbed to the censure of the senate. They therefore published a separate Indonesia-Newspaper, in which they called it a disgrace that the same university which a few years earlier had given an honorary doctorate to Martin Luther King, the fighter against oppression and discrimination, had now honored a defender of oppression with a degree. The protest was of no avail and the award process continued.

Back in his country, Notohamidjojo wrote excitedly that his honorary doctorate had provided his university with the needed esteem. He had received countless congratulations and had been invited by the Inspector General of the Police to become a member of the National Council of Defense and Safety. Rector magnificus Diepenhorst answered that he heard this news ‘with great satisfaction,’ but that was all. Notohamidjojo was to write the vu University several times and kept them informed about his poor health. The next rectores magnifici answered politely. But the name of honorary doctor Notohamidjojo will have called up mixed feelings with many people. His honorary doctorate was the first that can be called very controversial. This honorary doctorate demonstrated that the vu University had entered another, revolutionary era.

C. F. Beyers Naudé (1972)

The idea to confer an honorary doctorate upon the South African minister, Christiaan Frederik Beyers Naudé (1915-2004), did not arise from the circle of the Faculty of Theology, but from the outside. E. Emmen of Kairos (an institute that, put neutrally, kept itself busy with the ‘question of the people groups in South Africa’) proposed to the theological faculty already in 1970 to confer an honorary doctorate on the white minister. He proposed a selection of arguments that were all
Honorary doctorates

contained in the sentence: ‘The Reverend Beyers Naudé can be considered the central, leading figure in South Africa, who, on the basis of his Christian theological conviction, with complete devotion, has made himself highly meritorious for the rapprochement of the people groups and races in South Africa.’

Professor C. Augustijn answered for the faculty that they also had much appreciation for Naudé. However, an honorary doctorate in October 1970, as proposed by Emmen, did not seem wise, because at that time the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was to make a pronouncement about Naudé, who had set himself up as a critic of apartheid in his church, which was the ideological pillar of the regime. It seemed better to Augustijn to grant Naudé an honorary doctorate at the following lustrum in 1975. However, in July 1971 missiologist professor J. Verkuyl began to involve himself with the issue. In a letter to his colleagues he pleaded for a speedy granting of the degree. Now that the oppression in South Africa was increasing, it was time ‘to choose sides openly and to stake their reputation on it.’ Verkuyl did not conceal his opinion that an honorary doctorate for Naudé would show much more courage than the one for Martin Luther King in 1965, a political honorary doctorate more or less comparable. An honorary doctorate does cost something, Verkuyl told his colleagues. Somewhat dramatically he announced, ‘that means that we go outside the camp, and that we are willing, with Beyers, to bear his revilement for Christ’s sake.’

Among the theologians of the vu University there were some who thought that Beyers Naudé could better receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Utrecht. Verkuyl opposed this vehemently: ‘Everyone who knows about South Africa knows that there are all kinds of relationships between the vu University and Beyers Naudé. If an honorary doctorate does not originate from the vu University, but, for example, from Utrecht, then the reaction in South Africa will be that the vu University has ignored him, and that fact will undermine the moral support that results from an honorary doctorate.’ However, the honorary doctorate was not conferred that year. A year later, in the summer of 1972, Verkuyl again turned to his colleagues. They should really do it now, because Beyers Naudé was under pressure from the South African government more than ever. This time Verkuyl could be satisfied; a majority of the senate agreed with the honorary doctorate
C. F. Beyers-Naudé listening to the *laudatio* of honorary promotor G. C. Berkouwer.
for the director of the inter-church and ecumenical Christian Institute which, under Beyers Naudé, fought the racial divisions in church and society. Beyers Naudé, or so the motivation read, had deepened Christian theology on three points: he had confronted society with the gospel; with that aim he strove for societal reconciliation and justice; and, finally, he had successfully fought against the racial prejudice that had gripped the various churches in South Africa. Rector magnificus W. F. De Gaay Fortman had, so he wrote, the privilege to announce the decision to the candidate.

This display of joy could not hide the serious discord about this honorary doctorate that existed within the university. The awarding had been an issue that could have gone either way: of the 46 votes in the senate, 20 were for granting it, and 17 against, and 9 blank ballots. This lack of unity was reason for medical historian G. A. Lindeboom, to protest against the process exactly two weeks before the ceremony was to take place. He thought that the same stipulations should be followed with proposed honorary doctorates as with appointments for professors – two thirds of the votes should be necessary to elevate someone to an honorary doctorate. ‘If such requirements are not demanded, then an honorary doctorate could become a completely worthless affair, if not a farce then probably a tragedy.’ In the case of Beyers Naudé, Lindeboom doubted if one could speak of ‘exceptional scholarly contributions.’ The South African received the honorary doctorate because of social engagement. Lindeboom thought this an unusual affair, which was reminiscent of the torpedoed honorary doctorate for the physician Paul Tournier in 1955. Tournier was denied the honorary doctorate because his theological work was considered of little scholarly interest. His success as an ‘evangelistic preacher’ did not weigh heavily. And now Beyers Naudé would be honored because of his social contributions? Lindeboom could not see it. ‘The whole handling of this business and the final, poor result is, in my opinion, exceedingly dissatisfying.’

Rector magnificus I. A. Diepenhorst reacted immediately. He mentioned that until that time it definitely had not been necessary to have a two-thirds majority for honorary doctorates. The decision to grant Beyers Naudé the honorary doctorate was made democratically, and is ‘binding.’ The notion that political considerations were at the bottom of the honorary doctorate, Diepenhorst called ‘an unsubstanti-
ated position.’ The honorary doctorate evoked very different reactions from others as well. When the South African ambassador wrote that it was impossible for him to accept an invitation, the Kairos task force quickly put together a short pamphlet about the life and work of Beyers Naudé.

Professor G. C. Berkouwer awarded the degree, and in his speech did not conceal that the honorary doctorate could be interpreted in South Africa as a campaign against that country. Berkouwer therefore emphasized Beyers Naudé’s sincere reflection upon the gospel that every person is seen as a child of God – regardless of color.

Naudé regarded the award as an acknowledgement of his Christian Institute. In his expression of thanks he included an impassioned call for recognizing the black man, by society as well as by the church. Beyers Naudé remained grateful for the honorary doctorate long after the ceremony. In several letters to the rector magnificus he described how many congratulations he had received from the people – but not from the government, because in 1978 he was penalized with a ‘banning order’ for five years. This order meant that Beyers Naudé was put under house arrest and was not allowed to meet more than one person at a time. The University Board protested repeatedly against this measure – although not loudly enough according to the progressive group in the University Council. However, this opinion did not do justice to the vu University. Rector magnificus H. Verheul, informed about the difficult financial situation of Beyers Naudé, proposed in a confidential letter to open the bank account of the treasury of the College of Deans, in order to support Beyers Naudé and his wife. At the end of 1982 the university was able to give Beyers Naudé 4,200 guilders.

But the suffering was not over; in 1983 his house arrest was continued for three years. This time the banning lasted only a short time; in 1984 the injunction was lifted – to the joy of the vu University. The vu University continued to follow him with warm sympathy. After the abolishing of apartheid in 1991, the contact slowly decreased. His death at the age of 89 in September 2004 did not, therefore, receive much attention at the vu University.
The physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich Von Weizsäcker (1912-2007) was, one would say, an ideal candidate for an honorary doctorate from the vu University in the seventies. He was not just very learned. In 1942, when just 30 years old, Von Weizsäcker was appointed as professor in theoretical science in Strasbourg, a position that he would hold for three years, before he was appointed to the same position at the prestigious University of Göttingen in 1946. In 1957 he became professor of philosophy in Hamburg, and in 1969 he became director at the Max Planck Institute – an institute that he himself had created for the purpose of doing research on the society of the future. Certainly a scientific career that the vu University could put on stage.

Von Weizsäcker, a Christian, also fulfilled the ecumenical demands of the time. In 1975, when the vu University caught political scarlet fever, Von Weizsäcker was acceptable to the left as well as the right. To the left, because he asserted himself as a ferocious opponent of nuclear armament, to the right because he could not be caught in crypto-communism. Moreover, since the vu University in 1975 already profiled itself with an honorary doctorate for the Roman Catholic champion of the poor, Dom Helder Camara, it could again step outside, not only as a scientific but also a progressive-Christian university.

Von Weizsäcker certainly had to come from afar to fulfill all these expectations. He was born in 1912 in an aristocratic milieu. His grandfather was prime minister of Württemberg, his father secretary of state for foreign affairs in the Third Reich. Between 1984 and 1994 his brother Richard, who was eight years younger than he, was president of the Federal Republic of Germany. Von Weizsäcker was something of a convert. He began his career as assistant to the famous physicists Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr, and initially participated enthusiastically in the development of nuclear weapons. It has been suggested that Von Weizsäcker prevented Hitler from gaining control over that weapon, but the scientist always denied that. Whatever the truth, after the war Von Weizsäcker rejected his faith in progress.

Just as his Russian colleague Andrej Sacharov, the father of the Russian hydrogen bomb, Von Weizsäcker began to point to the dangers of nuclear weapons to humanity. For that reason the vu Universi-
C. F. Von Weizsäcker at the rostrum at the vu University.
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Ty awarded him an honorary doctorate in law. Promotor professor I. A. Diepenhorst presented Von Weizsäcker the doctorate because of ‘exceptional scientific and juridical contributions for western society and the development of war studies or peace studies to which he offered illuminating contributions from his scientific knowledge.’

Von Weizsäcker completely fulfilled expectations in a profound lecture after the graduation; he called fear the basis of the Cold War and of the arms race. In his opinion love of neighbor was the only answer that could overcome that ‘angst.’ That love of neighbor could be effected only by God. Whoever seeks the truth can consider that at the same time as an encouragement to seek God. Von Weizsäcker consciously used ‘seeking’ and ‘believing’ interchangeably. To the listeners this must have sounded like music in their ears: seeking – believing, that was exactly what the VU University leaders did in the seventies.

H. C. Bijvoet (1975)

‘The Buys Ballot of the 20th century’ – that is how a student described Herman Bijvoet (1918-2000). Bijvoet was self-educated in everything. He was born on 2 February 1918 in Bloemendaal. According to himself, he already recorded the temperature daily while in high school. His acquaintance with professional meteorology dates from the thirties, when he was in military service in Soesterberg. The high school student could not (yet) turn his hobby into his profession and he began to work in a hardware store in Amsterdam.

But his passion could not be ignored; Bijvoet volunteered at the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI), for which he voluntarily made observations. During the war he had his own weather station in Leersum. This diligence paid off on 15 September 1942. On that day Bijvoet received an appointment from the KNMI, bypassing academically educated meteorologists. The institute was closed in September 1944. Hiding from the Germans, Bijvoet did not sit still; he developed a diagram for use in the weather room. This was the first of a series of practical inventions which made weather forecasting easier.

The 1953 flood disaster in Zeeland was nearly a traumatic event for Bijvoet. He had tried to send a distress signal by radio when he saw vi-
H. C. Bijvoet.
olent weather was on the way. But the sender was off the air. Later Bijvoet developed a scale which made it possible for him to forecast the wind; in 1965 this was followed by the so-called Bijvoet method for signaling violent storms.

Bijvoet received recognition in the seventies. In 1970 he became a Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion, and five years later honorary doctor at the vu University. The honorary doctorate was the high point of his life, a recognition from the academic world for the special gifts and achievements of this self-educated man. P. Groen, professor of oceanography and meteorology was the honorary promoter on 20 October 1975, and presented the laureate with his doctorate. ‘Bijvoet surprised everyone with a charming, brief speech which he delivered without notes.’ Thus wrote rector magnificus I. A. Diepenhorst to C. F. Beyers Naudé, who had become honorary doctor at the vu University three years before. Whether the honorary doctorate was a factor or not, it is a fact that a year later, Bijvoet became general manager of the knmi, a position he occupied until his retirement in 1983.

**DOM HELDER CAMARA (1975)**

At the proposal of pedagogue professor J. W. Van Hulst, the Brazilian bishop Dom Helder Camara (1909-1999) became an honorary doctor at the vu University on 20 October 1975. Helder Camara had earlier traded in his comfortable seat in the archbishop’s palace for a sober existence as a priest for the poor. In the seventies and eighties Helder Camara was often portrayed as a sympathizer of so-called liberation theology. This theology fought for the poor in the Third World, and sought (and found) common ground with revolutionary secular ideologies – above all with the (neo) Marxism that enjoyed great popularity among young intellectuals.

Actually, Helder Camara did not go that far. But he did, as Van Hulst wrote in his comprehensive recommendation to the senate, take a critical position over against capitalism, and wanted to give a voice to the poor. That was only one of the contributions that Van Hulst attributed to Helder Camara. Besides waging war on poverty and raising the consciousness of his people, the archbishop was also active on behalf
Dom Helder Camara speaking to the vU University audience.
honory doctorates

of the Indian tribes and in the battle against illiteracy. ‘Thus his activity was aimed especially at the child, the youth, the family,’ according to Van Hulst. That may be true, but the most apparent reason for his nomination appears to lie in the warm sympathy for Helder Camara’s battle against injustice. This was a battle that promoter Van Hulst had fought himself; between 1940 and 1945, as director of the Christian teacher training school on the Plantage Middenlaan in Amsterdam, he saved the lifes of tens of Jewish babies by taking them from their cribs, opposite the deportation center for Jews during Second World War (the Hollandsche Schouwburg).

Van Hulst was fully aware of the political implications of his honorary speech. ‘With this honorary doctorate for you we continue the line after Martin Luther King and Beyers Naudé.’ In other words, the vu University had chosen again – this time for the oppressed, for liberation movements and their leaders. Helder Camara, seeing poorly, was greeted with stormy applause when entering the hall, and delivered a glowing address, in which he leveled charges against the super powers because of their arms race, and called for a combining of ‘moral powers.’

In Trouw, Rev. J. J. Buskes (himself an honorary doctor of the University of Amsterdam since 1957) hailed Helder Camara as ‘the great carillon player of Brazil. The day of his honorary doctorate is for me and many others a feast day.’ Buskes wrote about his battle and his lifestyle. Helder Camara lived more soberly than any minister or learned professor in the Netherlands could imagine. Buskes assumed that the laureate would have difficulty with the ‘dinner’ in the Amstelhotel, even though it was announced as a ‘meal.’ History does not tell us whether Helder Camara indeed had difficulty with that or whether he allowed himself to be feted for this occasion.

José Miquez Bonino (1980)

On 26 November 1979 the staff of the Faculty of Theology came together to discuss the honorary doctorate which would be proposed for the centennial in 1980. The decision was for the Argentinian José Miquez Bonino (1924), professor at the ecumenical theological seminary in Buenos Aires. Bonino was a so-called liberation theologian
which explains why he was chosen. In the seventies and eighties, liberation theology from Latin America became the rage in Western Europe. It also echoed in the theology of the Netherlands, where a remarkable solidarity with the rejected of the earth was prevalent in those years.

In a letter to the College of Deans, professor of dogmatics J. Veenhof summed up the four reasons why Bonino deserved the honorary doctorate. Bonino worked as a Protestant in a predominantly Roman Catholic world, and he was an advocate of the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church as well as the rapidly growing evangelicals in South America. Veenhof paid special attention to Bonino’s ‘treatment of Marxism,’ fully realizing that among the supporters of the VU University, Marxism would be a hot potato. Bonino did not hold to a ‘direct coupling of the Christian faith and Marxism.’ His appreciation was combined with criticism. Veenhof emphasized that the honorary doctorate for Bonino could not be without obligation. ‘It could give direction to our search for a relevant theology,’ even more so because Bonino wrote accessible books that were suitable for a wider audience. Finally, Veenhof also thought about Bonino himself. The honorary doctorate would provide support for him, and for the Protestant minority in Argentina. Veenhof concluded his recommendation with ‘...it is the intent that professor dr. H. M. Kuitert shall function as promotor.’

At the time many people must have pricked up their ears to hear that professor of ethics Kuitert would be the honorary promotor for the liberation theologian Bonino. The conservative Reformed saw new proof here of the modernism of Kuitert, who had prompted difficult controversies earlier by openly doubting the infallibility of the Bible. But the Reformed on the left also had reservations. Was Kuitert, the formidable critic of a too close relationship between faith and politics, the appropriate man to present the doctorate? On 17 October 1980, three days before the ceremony, Kuitert gave a full account in the Gereformeerde Weekblad. He praised Bonino, who did not simply connect faith and politics, as was often done by liberation theologians. But Kuitert was also critical; he thought that Bonino leaned too easily towards Marxism. He had not completely escaped the danger that ‘Christianity had become another word for resistance.’ According to Kuitert, Christianity was more; as the title above his article he could
D. C. Mulder presents the cape to J. Miquez Bonino. Honorary promotor H. M. Kuitert is looking on.
have used one that he later gave to his book – *Everything is politics, but politics is not everything*.

Even though the theologians on the left, in spite of Kuitert, were satisfied with the honorary doctorate, this could not be said of the conservative Reformed. One of them, J. M. Mantel, cited from the only book of Bonino translated into Dutch (*Theology of the Oppressed*), to show that the *vu* University should never have granted the degree. Rector magnificus professor H. Verheul (speaking for the College of Deans) hastened to say that the honorary doctorate did not mean agreement ‘with all the thoughts that the person has published.’ Christians in the Netherlands did not have to act like those in South America, but they should not make common cause ‘with what is politically not right.’ For the rest he directed readers to Kuitert’s article in *Gereformeerd Weekblad*. With that the affair was finished. Bonino was quietly promoted to honorary doctor, and, in later years would regularly remind the Netherlands, which caught the (peace)sickness ‘Hollanditis,’ of the lesson that peace is never obtainable apart from righteousness.

**YAP THIAM HIEN (1980)**

The idea to confer an honorary doctorate in law on the Indonesian lawyer and human rights activist Yap Thiam Hien (1913-1989) did not come from the jurists but from a professor of geography, G. A. de Bruijne. After consultation with the chairman of the Indonesian Council of Churches, he turned to rector magnificus, professor D. M. Schenkeveld on 17 April 1978. He asked whether Hien, who ‘as a Christian in Indonesia has defended a large number of political prisoners for many years,’ might not be considered for an honorary doctorate. An honorary doctorate for him would be completely in line with the honorary doctorates awarded to M. Luther King, Beyers Naudé, and Dom Helder Camara.’ A week later Schenkeveld reacted enthusiastically. He advised De Bruijne to consult with the jurists. Having learned from the affair surrounding the honorary doctorate for Notohamidjojo in 1972, Schenkeveld wrote: ‘I hope that Mr. Yap does not have dark secrets in his past which surely would be discovered by certain people from the University.’

The jurists of the *vu* University hardly needed to be persuaded. With
Yap Thiam Hien.
I.A. Diepenhorst as spokesman, the lobbying for Thiam Hien was continued half a year later. Diepenhorst wrote the College of Deans: ‘It would enhance our university if it, in this way, wanted to honor a pioneer for the maintenance of human rights in Indonesia, which at present conducts itself so poorly.’ He acknowledged that there were no outstanding scholarly contributions to law. ‘However, there is a genuine, completely selfless intent for the struggle for rights and righteousness that deserves great appreciation.’

The choice was very sensitive for Indonesian politics. Thiam Hien was born in Indonesia in 1913 in Atjeh, and was educated at the former University of Law in Batavia, after which he studied law in Leiden. During the war of independence he chose the side of the nationalists, but at the same time argued for reconciliation with the Netherlands. During the reign of Sukarno (1945-1965) he already championed human rights. But this caused problems for Thiam only after General Suharto came to power, especially when he began to defend members of the (alleged) communist coup attempt. In the following years he was arrested twice and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

More suffering came ten years after the promotion. On 27 December 1984, just before midnight, his wife was attacked and seriously wounded. The thoughts of the \( \text{vu} \) University immediately turned to a political attack, even though an ‘ordinary crime’ was not excluded. Sometime later, Thiam Hien himself announced that it was an ordinary crime. But this does diminish the dangerous situation in which all Indonesians, but certainly also human rights activist Yap Hien Thiam, found themselves.

**Sophia Kruyt (1980)**

With the centennial of the \( \text{vu} \) University on the horizon, the Faculty of Medicine began to move. Nearly one and a half years before the anniversary, the faculty created an honorary doctorate committee, so that the senate would not forget the faculty. The committee was immediately swamped with recommendations. Two names were finally chosen. In addition to dentist F. E. R. De Maar, physician Sophia Kruyt (1913-1995) came to the fore.

Kruyt was born in Mojowarno in the Dutch East Indies. She came
from a family of missionaries who had been working mostly on East Java. Moreover, her mother was the first female missionary doctor in that area. Sophia Kruyt followed in the footsteps of her mother, although it did not seem that way immediately. She studied pharmacology in Utrecht and worked as a pharmacist after her return to East India. But the improbable was about to happen. In her free time she studied medicine. During the war she was imprisoned and came under the sway of the independence movement. She felt so attracted that in 1946 she took on Indonesian nationality.

As a physician, Kruyt specialized in gynecology. She combined her obstetrics clinic with the care for babies and young children. She also created an institute for family well-being which concerned itself with the well-being of over-burdened mothers, unemployed fathers and neglected children. The *curriculum vitae* that the vu University composed in 1980 mentions that in the predominantly Islamic world her work incurred suspicion and created fear for the (further) spread of Christianity. The dictatorship of General Suharto, which suppressed Islam with an iron fist, had less difficulty with her work; on Independence Day (17 August 1977), she received a certificate of appreciation in East Java for her efforts on behalf of 'people and family well-being.'

Kruyt was happily surprised with the award from the vu University. She wrote honestly that she knew the vu University only from stories of friends, but nevertheless, she did not feel like a stranger in this Jerusalem. Just as honest was the first sentence in her list of publications: ‘Nothing in scientific work.’

Kruyt was the first woman honorary doctorate at the vu University. Surprised, she wrote rector magnificus H. Verheul: ‘Finally, one more question which intrigues me personally, namely, did I notice correctly that before me not a single woman has received an honorary doctorate from the vu University?’ There was no reaction to this question. Kruyt was allowed to speak words of thanks for all nine honorary doctors which she did with animation. ‘Not one of us’ she declared, ‘had ever dared to think and we still ask ourselves – why us?’ She seemed to mean – why me? Several months after the ceremony she wrote Verheul that she was ‘still deeply impressed with everything that the vu University has done for me.’
Sophia Kruyt.
Frederik Egbert Remko De Maar (1912-1997) was a dentist with a passion. Born in Groningen, he went to study dentistry in Utrecht in 1930. After completing his study, he settled in the Hague. In 1949 De Maar was called up for compulsory military service in the Dutch East Indies. He fulfilled that duty as assistant in the Dental Institute in Utrecht. In 1954 De Maar took a position as director of the dental division of the Museum of the University of Utrecht.

It was this position, which De Maar filled from 1954-1977, that procured him the honorary doctorate from the Vu University. In a letter to De Maar on 10 January 1980, the College of Deans formulated its rationale as follows: ‘The honorary doctorate will be awarded to you for the manner in which you have been successful in gathering a unique collection of important historical objects related to dentistry that provide an overview of the development of the past four centuries, and that is valuable for the education in all sub-faculties of dentistry in the Netherlands.’

De Maar could not have been completely surprised. He had already been honored in England and France because of his historical collection, his numerous articles about the history of dentistry, and for his many administrative activities. Moreover, in our country he had become a member of the Dutch Society for the Advancement of Dentistry. No matter how often De Maar had been honored, he showed himself grateful for the honorary doctorate. He was gladly willing to present a lecture about his work, a few days after the ceremony. De Maar had, in the meantime, also established a dental practice in the Hague. That work, according to him, did not lend itself for a presentation. The University Museum was more suitable, ‘although to me a visit to the museum appears more interesting.’

The promotion ceremony made a great impression on De Maar, who, also on behalf of his wife, called it ‘one of the most impressive memories of our life.’ Honorary promotor P. A. E. Sillevis Smit, professor of prosthetic dentistry, was also satisfied with his honorary graduate. He was elated with the lecture about historic dentistry which De Maar had delivered several days after the graduation, where not only staff but also students had been present.
F. E. R. De Maar.
The task-force for War and Peace Studies at the vU University (founded in 1973) waged an unusually forceful lobbying effort for an honorary doctorate. The proposed doctorate was for the British physicist Frank Barnaby (1927), who became director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (sipri). On 25 June 1979 the task-force submitted ‘a detailed proposal’ in a letter to the College of Deans to grant Barnaby an honorary doctorate. This proposal arrived at the Faculties of Mathematics and Physics and of the Social-cultural Sciences. The task-force, through professor of physics Egbert Boeker, pulled out all the stops. Boeker lauded Barnaby’s contributions for sipri, ‘an internationally known scientific and political institute, which, through its empirical studies delivers an invaluable contribution to global consciousness of the dangers of armament, and a general recognition of the science of war and peace.’

The recommendation was supported by professor B. V. A. Röling, Dutch patriarch of polemology (the study of war and peace), and the Anti-revolutionary professor of law in Leiden, P. H. Kooijmans. Röling also praised Barnaby as a careful researcher and expert in disarmament. He also wrote that the honorary doctorate would be beneficial for ‘his’ science – ‘the still young peace studies is experiencing difficulties. It is suspected by many as politics in disguise. It also lends itself easily to subjective evaluations of international events. The sipri is, therefore, significant as an international institute that watches extremely carefully that its information and analysis is not scientifically contestable, and the fact that a scholar with the reputation of dr. Barnaby provides leadership there.’ Kooijmans needed fewer words: he praised Barnaby’s empirical research and his ‘social contribution that he has, in an unremitting manner, demanded the attention of the world for the dangers connected with the arms race.’

Barnaby, who was greatly honored, wished that Mient Jan Faber, secretary of the Dutch interchurch peace movement IKV, and Laurens Hogenbrink from the Office of the Dutch Reformed Church be invited. This pointed to his engagement with the International Peace Council, of which the two men were prominent representatives. The honorary doctorate was awarded at the time when the peace movement approached its zenith – a year before the first great peace demon-
F. Barnaby receives the cape. Honorary promotor E. Boeker is looking on.
Honorary Doctorates

Demonstration on the Museum Plaza in Amsterdam, where hundreds of thousands gathered against the threatened placement of 48 cruise missiles in the Netherlands. Among the demonstrators were several employees of the VU University, among whom Barnaby’s promotor, Egbert Boeker. Scholarship and politics were not to be separated at the VU University in 1980 – no more so than fifty years before that. In 1930 the favorite old warhorse Colijn received an honorary doctorate, and now the apostle of peace Barnaby did. Much had changed in fifty years – but actually nothing had.

A. G. M. van Melsen (1980)

With the awarding of an honorary doctorate to Andreas Gerardus Maria Van Melsen (1912-1994) the VU University remained close to home. In a variation on the title of the memorial book Scholarship and Accountability (Wetenschap en rekenschap) published at the centennial, dealing with one hundred years of scholarship at the VU University – Van Melsen also carried out ‘scholarship’ and gave an ‘account’ of his work. All his work was in the context of faith and scholarship. As his third name suggests, Van Melsen was born in a Catholic milieu. He was born in Zeist in 1912. He studied mathematics and physics and philosophy at the University of Utrecht, and was graduated in 1941 with the dissertation, ‘The Philosophical History of the Theory of the Atom.’ Van Melsen was appointed professor of philosophy at the Catholic University in Nijmegen, and from 1954-1966 was special professor of philosophy in Groningen. Van Melsen’s work was a cross-fertilization of ideology and scholarship, and thus it is no wonder that he became chairman of the ideological Catholic Study Center in Nijmegen.

Van Melsen received his honorary doctorate because of his ‘contributions to the description of the history of the natural sciences, to the philosophy of nature, and to the insights and the forming of public opinion about the responsibility of the natural sciences, especially from a Christian point of view.’ The promotor was rector magnificus H. Verheul, who was also professor of physics at the VU University.

When professor C. A. Van Peursen of Leiden (who was also professor of philosophy at the VU University), found out about the recom-
mendation (which had already been made in June 1979), he immediately jumped in. On his own Van Peursen promised Verheul his support for the proposal, because Van Melsen had not only unlocked broad perspectives on philosophical and religious questions from the natural sciences, but also earned his spurs as philosopher. Van Peursen continued in his non-gripping prose which he had patented: van Melsen’s contributions do not lie so much ‘in the area of profound study of certain subjects, but rather in the broad lines that he draws – all of material reality reaches a higher degree of the content of reality...in living nature, and this again in spiritual nature. Then creation can be focused on its Creator. Van Melsen has developed this theme in countless directions, but always in a fresh manner, and for a broad public.’

This recommendation, added to Verheul’s proposal, was sufficient to promote Van Melsen to an honorary doctor. He acknowledged the recommendation with ‘deep appreciation and great joy.’ He wrote that he had ‘felt closely related to the v-u University in various phases of my life and work.’ Van Melsen was moderately optimistic about the future of confessional universities. Since the pillarization had passed, there was only ‘a limited place’ for such universities in 1980. Since he was not a proponent of pillarization, this development did not grieve him. He did believe that a community of faith, be it Catholic or Protestant, could not do without a university. Van Melsen said to historian G. Puchinger: ‘Every university must give an account of the problems which come to the fore in the development of the sciences and their application and of their social consequences. To regard the vision of the Christian faith as no longer particularly relevant, seems to me, even for those who do not believe, a premature conclusion (to put it very carefully). For that reason it is good that there are some in the universities who pay special attention to those issues.’ The interview must have been read with pleasure in the College of Deans: an honorary doctor who combined scholarship and accountability effortlessly, and who could also give a persuasive argument for it.
A.G.M. Van Melsen receives a cape in the presence of honorary promotor H. Verheul.
The honorary promotor of the French historian Georges Duby (1919-1996) was professor W. J. Wieringa, professor of social economic history at the vU University. It was he who offered Duby the doctorate and delivered the address. However, the driving force behind the honorary doctorate was professor A. H. Bredero, professor of medieval history.

He wrote the lengthy recommendation to grant Duby an honorary doctorate, which Wieringa would publish in shortened format. Bredero mentioned Duby’s many-sided interests; as professor of medieval history in Aix-en-Provence (1951-1970) he would make a name for himself as the social-economic authority on the high Middle Ages. In a two-volume work Duby sketched an image of the French countryside in the Middle Ages, based on a large number of diverse sources. His research was closely connected with the historians around the journal *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. They preferred to study centuries, not events, because they were searching for developments in the long, not the short term. After 1970, when Duby occupied the chair of Medieval Studies at the prestigious Collège de France, Duby enlarged his area of study and conducted so-called history of thought more often. He wanted to know how people thought collectively in certain periods, for example, about love and about religion.

Speaking of religion – Bredero acknowledged ironically in his recommendation that honorary doctorates are not awarded ‘because someone bases his life on the gospel of Jesus Christ.’ But he did note that ‘in the work of Duby there is a perspective that shows affinity with the purpose of the vU University.’ Without ‘theological normative presuppositions’ Duby paid attention to folk religion and thus broke through the ‘ideological contradictions’ that the theme of religion calls forth. Bredero thus pointed to the strongly anti-clerical tradition of the *Annales* historians who tended to emphasize the pagan elements in the Christian tradition. The argument was that Duby’s Christianity was only coincidental in granting the honorary doctorate – but still a fact that should not remain unmentioned.

And Duby? He wrote that he was pleased with the honor. ‘Je vous prie de bien vouloir agréer, Monsieur le Recteur, l’expression de mes sentiments très respectueusement dévoués.’ Later he would be more neutral about the many expressions of honor with which he was over-
G. Duby receives the cape. Honorary promotor W. J. Wierenga is looking on.
whelmed through the years. In his autobiography *History Continues* he wrote, ‘To the extent that one becomes older and is quietly pushed aside by the younger generation (such is life), one ends up unnoticed in chilly, solemn halls, where the old ones sit properly in a row and, anointed with honors they are parked like cars in a lot, where they are loaded with tassels, swords, and laurels, fulfilling the role of important figures in the liturgies of the intellectual powers. Acting is no longer their most important task. What is called ‘wisdom’ in polite words, what else is it but a loss in creative activity? The only thing that is allowed them is the advising of those who are allowed to act.’ However, in his own case this prediction is not completely true; also after his honorary doctorate he continued to publish steadily – until death caught up with him in 1996.

A. B. FRIELINK (1980)

When one mentions at a birthday party that he is an accountant, one can expect a glassy-eyed response. Accounting, a profession full of statistics, of debit and credit, and gain and loss calculations, does not happen to appeal directly to the imagination. But this profession also, without which no organization can exist (be it a professional organization or a business) knows of progress and therefore of pioneers. Such a pioneer is Abraham Barend Frielink (1917). Born in Amsterdam, Frielink, after his high school completion, went to work at the accounting office of Preyer & De Haan in Amsterdam. He earned his accounting diploma soon after the Second World War at the Netherlands Institute of Accountants (NIVA), where he later also taught briefly.

It already became clear a year before he finished his studies that Frielink had great talent; in 1947 he published the article, ‘The theoretical bases of administrative organizational studies.’ In an explanation of its proposal, the economics faculty of the vU University wrote that this article, ‘in the following decades would be the fundamental starting point for the theoretical as well as the practical expansion of studies in administrative organization and accounting.’ Attached to the proposal was a list of books and articles that Frielink had written through the years – although one must not have an exaggerated idea of those ‘books.’ Some had seventy, some twenty, and some even five
A. B. Frielink just before receiving the diploma.
pages. Nevertheless – in the field of accounting Frielink stood on a lonely height, especially because he soon tackled the approaching field of information science. In 1947 the education in accounting was still the concern of NIVa, but ten years later this discipline came under the wings of the university. In 1957 Frielink was appointed as lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, and in 1965 as special professor in the ‘methodology of automatic processing of information.’

The Faculty of Economic Sciences, which had its own professor in accounting – professor J. W. Schoonderbeek – decided already in November 1979 to award Frielink with an honorary doctorate. On 10 January 1980, when the issue had also been settled in the senate, a letter was sent to the laureate, in which the grounds for Frielink receiving the honorary doctorate were laid out. The reasons mentioned for the honorary doctorate were the manner in which he had approached ‘the questions about the theoretical and systematic basis of accounting,’ and had penetrated the basic outlines of this profession and of information science.

Frielink was overwhelmed. In the letter five days later in which he accepted the award, he wrote, ‘This caught me unaware, and for the moment I confine myself to the response that I will accept the honorary doctorate offered to me with great pleasure.’ Afterward Frielink wrote that the ceremony on 20 October 1980 had pleased him very much. He closed his expression of thanks with the wish that ‘the Free’ would experience ‘further blossoming.’

H. Algra (1980)

The journalist and historian Hendrik Algra (1896-1982) can be regarded as one of the last representatives of the, now vanished, Reformed world. For more than one reason it can be considered appropriate that at the centennial of the vU University he was awarded an honorary doctorate. Algra might lack the genius of the founder of the vU University, but he walked in many of his footsteps.

Born as the son of a farm laborer, Algra worked himself up to school teacher through self-study, and in his free time he attained certificates in History and Dutch Language. Algra was politically active at an early age. Barely twenty years old, in 1916 he already delivered an address
with the title, ‘What does the name Anti-revolutionary mean?’ It was the beginning of all the numerous activities that Algra would develop through the years. There are too many to mention them all. Among them was his membership on the board of the Federation of the Young Men’s Societies on Reformed Foundation, and later he became a member of the national board. After the Second World War Algra delivered impassionate speeches at the annual national conventions, filled with confrontational rhetoric about ‘the iron cohorts of Christ,’ who were ready to serve the coming Kingdom. Algra also achieved national fame as a member of the Upper Chamber for the Anti-revolutionary Party, especially in the sixties when he formulated an eloquent indictment against the author Gerard Kornelis van het Reve, whom he accused of blasphemy.

In Reformed circles they pointed, not without pride, at the respect that Algra had achieved as a historian. There is a well-known anecdote that the most famous historian of the Netherlands, Johan Huizinga, who, while in Sint Michielsgestel (where the Dutch elite was imprisoned during the war) had enjoyed Algra’s presentation on the theme ‘The particular way of the Dutch people.’ Algra was indeed a credible historian. One must note, however, that his history books (*Dispereert niet* – an historical overview of the Dutch people, and especially *Het wonder van de negentiende eeuw* – on the revival of the Dutch orthodox Protestants) were not just factual history. These books (co-written with his brother Ale) were not intended only to recall the past, but also to edify and strengthen today’s faith.

Algra derived most of his renown from the Christian newspaper *Friesch Dagblad*, of which he was editor-in-chief from 1935-1977, and for which he wrote a leading article every day. It was this journalism that prompted the Faculty of the Social Sciences to propose Algra for an honorary doctorate. According to honorary promotor E. Diemer, professor of communication science, Algra ‘had made exceptional contributions in the area of journalistic commentary and opinion. Having virtually universal interest, Algra wrote about actual events and developments, especially but not exclusively in politics and social issues. He wrote especially for the information and guidance of the Protestant segment of the population, and always tried to guide his writing journalistically in the light of a clear vision, nurtured by the gospel.’
H. Algra with diploma and cape while honorary promotor E. Diemer looks on.
Algra, who was flooded with requests from his Frisian supporters to be present at the ceremony in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, told the rector magnificus professor H. Verheul that many noted that the **vu** University was much more ‘Christian’ than they had expected. Algra then added, ‘Then I always add that also at the meal there was prayer and reading from the Bible, just as we are used to in a Christian family.’

**John Horder (1985)**

When the future honorary promotor professor J. van Es, professor of general medicine at the **vu** University, asked the English candidate, John Plaistowe Horder, (1919) for a *curriculum vitae*, Horder answered with a story of his life in which humor and seriousness alternated. Horder remarked that the first twenty years of his life were spent exclusively on the study of languages – ‘the only form of education considered good in my family.’ About the exact sciences, let alone medicine, he had no clue. Only in 1939, when he was twenty, did Horder go to study medicine in Oxford. This was interrupted by the war – ‘I served in the army during the war, without glory.’ In 1945 he picked up the study again, but without experiencing much enjoyment. He blamed his poor scientific background, but also missed a vision in his medical teachers, who lacked broad general development. Horder became a general physician with the intent of becoming a psychiatrist. For the first time in his medical life he found joy in his work. He began to work as a doctor in the center of London. There he saw that nearly all financial resources went to the hospitals, and not to the ‘ordinary’ family doctor.

Horder had two aims as a doctor. He wanted professional education for family doctors, and he strove for a revolution in a science that was mostly concerned with the physical. Horder wanted more attention for the psychological and social factors that determine health or illness. His pleas did not fall on deaf ears. Not only in England, but also in other European countries the necessity for separate medical training for family doctors was recognized. Horder’s career went into high gear; for several years he lectured at the prestigious London School of Economics and for one year he was guest lecturer at the
J. P. Horder.
University of Nottingham. The fact that Horder received an honorary doctorate from the vu University can be ascribed to the interest that it (as one of the first universities) had seen the importance of medical training for family doctors. Nevertheless, Horder’s coming in October 1980, passed quietly. Soon after the honorary promotion, he delivered a guest lecture for a virtually empty hall. *Ad Valvas*, which interviewed him the following day, assumed the lecture was the reason that Horder exhibited an ‘impression of tiredness’ during his interview. Obviously, there was not as much interest in his plea to weigh psychological and social factors as causes for illness, as he (and the vu University) wished.

**René Girard (1985)**

On 1 November 1983, S. A. Varga, professor of French literature, contacted the board of the Faculty of Literature with the proposal to award an honorary doctorate to literature and philosophy professor, René Girard (1923). Girard was born in France, but professor at the American Stanford University. ‘Girard is a scholar of international fame, who places the products of our human culture in a Christian perspective,’ according to the summary explanation of Varga. He struck the iron when it was hot – several months earlier Girard had presented several guest lectures at the vu University. Gert J. Peelen reported on this in the June 1983 vu *University Magazine*. ‘At first he speaks standing behind the lectern, continually shuffling his papers. But after a few minutes he leaves that place, walks back and forth, marches, slinks, moves, and motions in front of the audience which looks and listens breathlessly.’

Nine months later, in 1984, the literary faculty presented the proposal through honorary promoter, professor Varga. The proposal was accompanied by copies of articles from the vu *University Magazine* issue, *Trouw*, and *Ad Valvas* to indicate how much interest Girard evoked. No wonder, because in those years his ideas captured worldwide attention and had a clear Christian undertone. Girard owes most of his reputation to his view that imitation (‘mimesis’) is a chief feature of culture. According to Girard, man is subject to a dark force—an excessive desire to be like others. Man finds his idol in the other whom
he wants to imitate. To the extent that the idol becomes greater, the desire also grows to be like that. The rivalry that then arises, ends, after a period of attraction and rejection, in chaos and conflict. Ancient as well as modern culture are characterized by this violence, according to Girard. Christianity breaks through this pattern. In the ancient Roman myth, Romulus kills his twin brother, before he founds the city of Rome, while God sends Cain away after the murder of Abel and leaves his descendents the Ten Commandments. Unlike in pagan cultures and religions, the sacrifice is not sacred but the sacrificed one (Abel) is displayed as an example. Jesus, who prevented the stoning of an adulterous woman spoke to a group of anonymous offenders as individuals with a conscience, who must account for themselves. For Girard Jesus embodies the counterweight against a culture that continues to be inclined to violence.

In 1985 Girard was an ideal candidate for the honorary doctorate from the VU University. Challenging and innovative enough to capture the intellectuals on De Boelelaan, but at the same time paying tribute to Jewish-Christian civilization, he connected seamlessly with the open and ecumenical institution that the VU University had become since the seventies. The university was eager to find out that Girard would be in its midst. A month before his arrival at the anniversary, the Reflection Center (Bezinningscentrum) of the VU University organized four lectures about the work of Girard, to be delivered by the expert Rev. R. Kaptein, from Hengelo.

Girard himself was eager to come to the university. After he had been informed of the award, he wrote the rector magnificus professor P. J. D. Drenth, that he was ‘très heureux.’

A week after the ceremony he wrote, in English (as a French American Girard knew his languages), that the honorary doctorate and his visit to Amsterdam had been an unforgettable experience. The same was true for the VU University; seldom did an honorary doctor attract so much attention from the press as did René Girard both before and after 20 October 1985.
R. Girard.
'Neither foreign, nor domestic, nor civil, nor ecclesiastical politics played a role in nominating Indonesian Oe. H. Kapita for an honorary doctorate in 1985,' church historian Maarten Aalders observes in his recently published study, *125 Years Faculty of Theology at the vU University*. This is correct. Kapita was exclusively and solely valued for his knowledge of the Indonesian island of Sumba, a knowledge that he had acquired as a classical self-taught person. Kapita was born about 1908. ‘About,’ for in the *curriculum vitae* which the vU University received from him, he was not able to indicate his precise date of birth. Kapita enjoyed five years of schooling before attending the 2-year so-called Normal Course (teacher’s training) in Pajeti. On 1 January 1926 Kapita assumed the position of principal of a school for natives in East Sumba. Kapita held this position for two and a half years. In 1928 he became assistant to the cultural anthropologist dr. L. Onvlee, who had received his doctorate on his thesis *A Few Sumba Stories (Eenige Soembasche vertellingen)*. In the terminology of cultural anthropology Kapita became Onvlee’s ‘fieldworker’ in Sumba. As his *curriculum vitae* reads, he called together the seniors of his village, butchered a chick ritually – a custom without which no discussion could ever be launched – and tried, once contact had been established, to obtain information about the literary language that was used when invoking ancestors, when offering the sacrificial prayer, and during rituals of religious feasts.

Kapita was in Onvlee’s employ for more than twenty years. But also after he left, to occupy positions on the island, the association with Onvlee continued. Even better, following his retirement, Kapita became his assistant again. Together they translated both the Old and the New Testament into Sumbanese. These translations were called his most important work in the letter of recommendation of professor G. Dekker of the theological faculty. Dean Dekker emphasized that Kapita was a ‘typical example’ of ‘someone with great scholarly proclivity who because of circumstances of birth and course of life never had the opportunity to receive a university training and to obtain titles that way.’ That is the reason the faculty thought it fitting and obvious to confer this honor on Kapita.

Kapita reacted in a three-page letter in Sumbanese. Honorary proctor D.C. Mulder, professor of religious studies, translated this let-
Oe. H. Kapita.
Honorary Doctorates

ter and summarized it for the College of Deans. Kapita said that he accepted the honor of a doctorate *honoris causa* ‘in all humility and with thanks to God.’ The a-political character of this honorary doctorate saved the *vu* University therefore from a serious controversy – even though there was some grumbling. In *Ad Valvas* Wim Crezee recalled that about 1980 students of the Faculty of Social Science had nominated the then imprisoned Indonesian author Prammudya Ananta Toer for an honorary doctorate to no avail. And now Kapita was honored who had not committed himself about ‘the Suharto regime and the dominant role of the military’ in Indonesia. However, the editors had to correct their criticism quickly and had to admit that in 1980 Prammudya Ananta Toer may not have received an honorary doctorate, but that the human rights activist Yap Thiem Hien did receive one. Being satisfied in part, yet grumbling somewhat *Ad Valvas* acknowledged that Hien’s honorary doctorate could be seen with a little goodwill as being an extension of the political doctorates granted Martin Luther King and Beyers Naudé. But, the weekly added, Hien had assumed a ‘compromising attitude’ towards the authorities.

At any rate, Kapita did not like compromises. The translator and disseminator of the Bible had other arrows left in his quiver. Following the ceremony he thanked the rector magnificus P. J. D. Drenth for the excellent care received before and after the big day, and he expressed the wish, ‘May this be an important encouragement for anyone who is involved in bringing Christ’s Gospel, especially in Sumba, where many still do not understand and accept God’s Word and Love.’

**Anatoly Koryagín (1988)**

In 1988 a spirit of euphoria prevailed in Western Europe about Mikhail Gorbachev, the ever-smiling Soviet leader with the birthmark, often covered by a stylish hat. But, however much hope for a lessening of the tensions between the free West and the communist East Gorbachev engendered with his idea of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) – dissidents continued to languish in prisons, labor camps, and psychiatric institutions. These institutions belonged to the standard arsenal of suppression techniques of the communist regime since the revolution of 1917. Confining dissidents in psychiatric
institutions did not start, however, until the era that has been named after the secretary-general of the Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982). During his administration people with dissenting opinions were diagnosed as being ‘schizophrenic’ – a clever term which would lock up troublemakers effectively. Because, as the efficient lie of the communist rulers went, someone might appear to be normal from the outside, the psychiatrist ‘knew’ (and made the diagnosis) that the ‘patient’ in question was mentally ill. What the ordinary citizen was unable to see, the guild of psychiatrists could recognize.

With that crafty legitimization many dissidents in the seventies were locked up in psychiatric clinics and drugged. The best known among them was Vladimir Bukovsky whose fate even inspired the Dutch Robert Van Voren and Henk Wolzak to establish the Bukovsky-foundation which committed itself to dissidents in the ‘second world’ – which meant Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Bukovsky, but also other less well-known victims of the repressive system, fell into the hands of Soviet psychiatrists, who in servitude to the party or because of an urge for a better position made themselves available for such practices.

However, not all. Anatoly Koryagin (1938) was one of the few psychiatrists who opposed these practices. In 1977 he joined a critical task-force of colleagues who began to discuss these abuses in the practice of psychiatry. He was arrested in 1981, and condemned to the heavy sentence of seven years imprisonment and five years of exile – to be served in a camp in Perm, along the Volga. Koryagin offered resistance to the authorities also in prison, which cost him two extra years of prison. Besides, his academic degree was taken away from him.

Koryagin’s fate attracted much attention in the West and this attention would eventually set him free. In the Netherlands the above mentioned Bukovsky-foundation drew attention to his case, while in other countries actions were launched as well. Koryagin was nominated an honorary member of the World Psychiatric Association and was a candidate in 1986 and 1987 for the Nobel Peace Prize. Pressure from abroad, combined with domestic changes led to the release of the psychiatrist in February 1987, who went to live in Switzerland in April of that year. Exactly a year after his release, the Faculty of Law, upon the proposal of dr. R. P. Th. Jurjens, recommended Koryagin as a candidate for an honorary doctorate. It was acknowledged frankly that
A. I. Koryagin with diploma.
that the psychiatrist would not be granted the honorary doctorate for his scholarly contributions. It was emphasized that the VU University ‘from its special responsibility for the exercise of scholarly activities’ champions ‘the oppressed and those without rights.’ Promotor was professor N. W. De Smit, professor of forensic psychiatry and working for the study group Health Law.

Koryagin took note of the decision ‘with a feeling of sincere appreciation and gratitude for this high honor.’ Not only because his work on behalf of human rights was valued so highly, but also because now he would receive back the title which his mother country had taken away from him.

The speech De Smit delivered on 20 October 1988 may justly be called a laudatio. De Smit mentioned in detail Koryagin’s contributions and said that ‘the Netherlands and the VU University had been able to follow his work only moderately.’ Koryagin’s word of thanks was a mixture of sober reflections about the technical capability and the moral deficiency of man. He himself, he said, had ‘always considered it a natural duty of the human, rationally gifted being, to assist his fellowman when he suffers from violence and illness. This is the duty even more for the person who chose humanism as a profession. This was and is the creed of my life.’

D. HOOGENDOORN (1990)

‘What are you telling me now, me an honorary doctorate, how is this, what did I do?’ Those are the words physician Dirk Hoogendoorn (1914-1990) spoke when then professor N.F.Th. Arts told him that the VU University had decided to grant him an honorary doctorate in medical science. It says something about Hoogendoorn’s modesty – he had, in his own estimation, only done his work. And, at first sight, this was true. Hoogendoorn, born in Bodegraven, attended the Christian Classical Training School (gymnasium) in Utrecht and studied medicine in Utrecht between 1933 and 1940. After his examination as a physician he started practicing as a family physician in Wijhe in 1941. He stayed there until 1972.

From out of this quiet village Hoogendoorn unfurled a series of activities. First of all, he earned a doctorate in 1948 with a thesis about
diphtheria. The thesis was judged to be *cum laude*. But Hoogendoorn’s real importance for medical science was not found in the subject, but in the statistical methods that he applied to his subject. Ten years after his thesis, in 1958, Hoogendoorn began to do obstetrical research for the Netherlands Family Physicians Association (*Nederlands Huisartsen Genootschap*). He asked four hospitals for their medical data, something that had hardly ever happened before, and made them part of a new system. Hoogendoorn’s work led to the establishment of the Foundation for Medical Registration, *smr*. He was associated with that foundation as an advisor and also worked, in the meantime, at Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*). He became the moving force behind medical registration and, according to his promotor Arts, he showed himself in his activities to be ‘helpful, honest, very intelligent, hardworking, persistent and demanding of himself and restrained.’

Hoogendoorn showed himself appreciative of the recognition which he considered to be ‘a great good and the crown on a part of his life’s work.’ Illness made expressing his word of thanks difficult. A mere two months after the ceremony Dirk Hoogendoorn died. In his obituary notice the family proudly mentioned that Hoogendoorn had not only been made an Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau, but that he also had been ‘endowed with’ an honorary doctorate from the *vu* University. In view of the remaining unsatisfactory registration of medical data, the honorary doctorate for pioneer Hoogendoorn did not come a moment too soon.

**LIEK WILARDJO (1990)**

Professor E. Boeker, dean of the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy, was to present the degree to his Indonesian colleague, Liek Wilardjo (1939) on 22 October 1990. A year and a half earlier, on 6 March 1989, Boeker had argued in favor of granting Wilardjo an honorary doctorate. He wrote the secretary of the College of Deans that he had studied two articles by Wilardjo. ‘It appears to me that he may be a candidate for an honorary doctorate in view of his level and focus.’

So it happened that Wilardjo stood in the assembly hall in October 1990, although he was not recommended only for his work in physics.
Cover of *Ad Valvas* with the honorary doctors of 1990. From left to right: C. Sprey, E. Cardenal, L. Wilardjo and D. Hoogendoorn.
Liek Wilardjo was born in Java. He studied physics in Yogyakarta, and, as a talented and underprivileged student received a Fulbright scholarship to continue his studies in the United States. He graduated from Michigan State University. Physicist Wilardjo also appeared to be a convicted Christian. This too made him appealing to the VU University. Honorary promotor Boeker acknowledged, ‘Dr. Wilardjo shows himself to be a typical kindred soul of the VU University.’ He taught at a Christian university and was active in the Indonesian branch of the World Council of Churches. Wilardjo wrote rector magnificus professor C. Datema that he felt ‘a surge of happiness’ when the news reached him. But he wondered if he deserved the honor, although he could not refute the arguments that were presented.

The last week of October 1990 was a busy week for Wilardjo. He addressed the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy, was interviewed by two Indonesian journalists, and enjoyed ‘a wonderful reunion dinner’ with Dutch and Indonesian friends at the Hendrik Kraemer Mission Institute of the Dutch Reformed Church in Oegstgeest. ‘All in all our stay in Holland was very good and our work and activities fruitful.’

C. Sprey (1990)

Sometimes it happened that various faculties would combine their forces to nominate someone for an honorary doctorate. This happened when a case was made for granting C. Sprey an honorary doctorate in biology. Two faculties, Earth Sciences and Biology, wrote the College of Deans in March 1989 proposing C. Sprey for an honorary doctorate. The reason became clear quite readily from their written presentation – Sprey, director of the Provincial North-Holland Waterworks,
had cooperated closely with both faculties since about 1975, in order to assure the responsible drinking-water distribution for the province. Over the years the vU University had provided the Waterworks with a number of scientific researchers who published articles about the coastal dunes and ecosystems. That Sprey was able to span the traditional gap between the water production department (the so-called blue sector), and the ground management department (the green sector) was emphasized specifically in the presentation. ‘Sprey succeeded in establishing a change in the attitude of the coastal dune waterworks with respect to the environment and the role of scientific research.’

It had been a long journey for Sprey to finally arrive at water management. He was born in Batavia. He spent his years of discretion (from his twelfth until his seventeenth) in concentration camps during the Japanese occupation. He left for the Netherlands in 1946 where he received military engineering training at the Royal Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. He served in the military for over twenty years in various capacities, among others as chief instructor of the engineering school for officers and NCO’s and as ‘staff officer special operations,’ as official jargon called it. In the meantime Sprey had earned his engineering degree at the Institute of Technology of Delft, and in the early sixties he was involved, for the army, in the construction of a radiological laboratory of the the Dutch Organization of Applied Scientific Research (TNO) in Rijswijk.

In 1969 Sprey made the change to the Provincial Waterworks. By his own account Sprey functioned more as a manager than a researcher. He left the research to six students of the vU University who, usually annually, did research via the Waterworks. Sprey was quite pleased with his role of mediator between business and science – ‘Other waterworks do not have such a beneficial cooperation with science.’ Honorary promotor professor W. H. O. Ernst emphasized in his speech of 20 October 1990 not only Sprey’s importance for the Dutch natural sciences, but also dwelled on his efforts for the planning and distribution of safe drinking water in developing countries.

In the build-up to the honorary doctorate Sprey made a remarkable offer – the Provincial Waterworks offered to provide the flower display for the Dies Natalis, an offer the vU University gratefully accepted. In another respect Sprey used the occasion of his honorary doctorate for advertising purposes; his speech Drinking-water and Conservation.
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Conflict or Synthesis (Drinkwater en natuurbeheer. Conflict of synthese), delivered after the granting of the doctorate, was published in a beautiful edition by the Provincial Waterworks.

Ernesto Cardenal (1990)

When it became known that the Nicaraguan poet, priest, and minister of Culture, Ernesto Cardenal (1925), was chosen in 1990 to receive an honorary doctorate in literature, something happened that had never happened before: an earlier honorary doctor of the vU University took to his pen and wrote an indignant protest. This honorary doctor was the French philosopher Jacques Ellul. In his letter to the rector magnificus professor C. Datema, he unburdened himself mercilessly about Cardenal, and expressed his 'bewildement' at 'the scandal' that of all people Cardenal, whom Ellul considered to be a fellow traveler of communism, had been granted an honorary doctorate. 'Cardenal est un hypocrite, menteur et propagandiste,' the Frenchman – who had been honored exactly 25 years earlier (in 1965) – judged.

The rector magnificus went for advice to literary scholars Mineke Schipper and Bettine Siertsema. They were the ones who had proposed to grant Cardenal an honorary doctorate. Schipper and Siertsema formulated a polite though platitudinous reply in which they steered clear of Ellul’s frontal attack. In an accompanying letter to Datema an indignant Siertsema let him know that she thought it better not to pursue Ellul’s insinuations. ‘He is so simplistic and disagreeable.’ Ellul, having been confronted with the evasive reply was not about to give up and repeated his accusations to Cardenal himself.

Ellul was not the only one to object to the honorary doctorate. E. Roemers (‘deacon in Utrecht’) also protested. Cardenal belongs to a regime that does not hesitate to silence dissidents. He mentioned, as an example, archbishop Obanda Y. Bravo who was refused access to the media by the Sandinista government. ‘Anyone who still has any sympathy left for sphere sovereignty, the basis on which the vU University is built, will furiously object.... It is a shame that Abraham Kuyper is no longer alive, for he would without doubt have opposed this honorary doctorate vehemently, appealing to ‘the foundation of our Reformed principles’ which are diametrically opposed to the pragmatic... \[...\]
E. Cardenal.
principles which Cardenal has displayed for the past ten years.’ An appeal to the founder of the university and the core concept of Reformed practice still remained sensitive in Buitenveldert, in spite of the rapid secularization. Datema asked the secretary of the board, to whom the letter was directed, to notify the letter writer that the College of Deans had decided after ‘careful consideration’ to grant the honorary doctorate and to inform him of the motivation for the honorary doctorate.

Cardenal was nominated because of his ‘indefatigable efforts on behalf of the cultural development of the poorest of the poor in Nicaraguan society.’ This might not have taken away the objections. However, the rector magnificus knew himself to be supported by the many recommendations which promotor Mineke Schipper had presented to the Board. Thus, for example, no one less than the famous British playwright Harold Pinter (author of the play The Caretaker, performed also in the Netherlands many times), who wrote that Cardenal was ‘a poet of immense distinction and authority.’ He was not the only foreign supporter of the honorary doctorate. The British literary scholar John Lyons put Cardenal on the same level as the communist poet Pablo Neruda. Cardenal, Lyons wrote, was influenced by the poets he translated in his younger years: Allan Ginsburg, William Carlos Williams, and especially Ezra Pound – a poet who otherwise was in disrepute after 1945, because of his sympathy for fascism. Also as a minister Cardenal’s heart of a poet continued to beat, according to Lyons, for as minister of Culture he made available affordable books for everyone.

Professor P. J. D. Drenth who had had a few questions about the award was now ‘convinced.’ He wrote honorary promotor Mineke Schipper that he was impressed by Cardenal’s ‘vision of society, culture, and education,’ which he believed to have been ‘inspired by evangelical motives, and the manner in which he, as minister of Culture, has translated and applied this vision in practice.’

Apart from that Cardenal came quite close to refusing his honorary doctorate. He was not at all interested in a ‘circus’ as he told Hans Snoek, a theologian and journalist whom he had befriended, who was associated with the Baptist Seminary in Managua. Cardenal despised media attention, as Snoek told Gert J. Peelen, editor of the vu University Magazine. Even he, Snoek, had received a ‘blunt rejection’ when he had asked for an interview. Cardenal consented at long last and ex-
plained once again why he had hesitated so long to accept the honorary doctorate. 'In all honesty, I do not like the idea of a long journey and all the hustle and bustle associated with an honorary doctorate. Besides, I always feel uncomfortable on occasions like that. The person of Cardenal becomes too central, while all the people who basically have spread Nicaraguan culture remain nameless.' In spite of all that he accepted the degree because 'it is an important recognition of Nicaragua and the revolution.'

Nicaragua and the revolution – following the Sandinista revolution of 1979 the country remained for progressive-Christian Netherlands, as well as for leftist Holland, the land of promise for at least a decade. That a romantic shroud of a poet-minister clung to honorary doctor Cardenal, who qua outward appearance (a French beret) resembled an older version of revolutionary hero Che Guevara, did not diminish the magic.

The Amsterdam ring of canals people – the cultural elite – also took note that poet-minister Cardenal was elevated to doctor. But the attention could have been so much greater if Cardenal could have appeared in the, at that time much watched, book program *Hier is... Adriaan van Dis* that was televised between 1983 and 1992. Honorary promoter Mineke Schipper had proposed to Van Dis to have Pinter, who also would be present at the honorary promotion, appear together with Cardenal on his program. But Van Dis sent word to her that shooting would not take place in October when the honorary doctorate would be awarded, but only toward the end of November 1990. In addition Van Dis, who wanted to concentrate on his writing, informed her that he wanted to isolate himself from the outside world in order to finish his new book. Thus nothing became of being able to see a premier performance of an honorary doctor at the vu University on Dutch television. If we may believe him, Cardenal, who disliked publicity, did not regret this.

**Njabulo Ndebele (1995)**

Black South African Njabulo Ndebele (1948) was to deserve an honorary doctorate for more than one reason. He was, first of all, a respected literary scholar who earned his Master’s in Cambridge and his Ph.D.
N. Ndebele.
degree in Denver. But, above all, he enjoyed literary fame as author of African poetry, essays, short stories, and novels. Especially his volume *Fools and Other Stories* published in 1983 made him well-known. This volume placed him among the winners. A few years later he was elected president of the Congress of South African Authors. Sufficient reason, one might say, to award him a doctorate in literature. Yet, at the *vu* University Ndebele received an honorary doctorate in law.

This is what happened. At the time of his literary breakthrough Ndebele was an exile in the ‘homeland’ Lesotho. He was unable to accept an offer from the University of Kaapstad to become professor of English linguistics and literature, because the white apartheid-regime that was still in power refused to grant him a work permit. After the abolition of apartheid jobs were a dime a dozen for him. Ndebele could become professor at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, he could even become vice-rector at the University of West-kaap. But Ndebele chose to head the black university of the North, located in North-Transvaal.

It was that choice that motivated the Faculty of Law, represented by professor E. J. H. Schrage, professor of Roman Law, to nominate Ndebele for an honorary doctorate. ‘An honorary doctorate for Ndebele is an international recognition that cooperation in the shaping of the new South Africa deserves support. In this way the honorary doctorate will be seen, not only in Transvaal but in all of South Africa, as support for those who work for the future.’

In his speech on 20 October 1995 Schrage emphasized Ndebele’s work for the university. He finished by referring to Beyers Naudé who preceded Ndebele not only as honorary doctor but also as anti-apartheid activist. An honorary doctorate for a South African obviously was not possible even five years after the fall of the apartheid regime without political and emancipatory rhetoric.

G. De Vries (1995)

Gerrit De Vries (1921) was only nine years old when he performed his first experiment in chemistry. In precisely that year (1930) the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics was established at the vu University, of which faculty chemistry was a part from the beginning. What was
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more obvious than that De Vries, son of a Reformed policeman, would become competent in that field? But things did not turn out that way. After graduating from the mulo (Advanced Elementary Education) he was employed as a volunteer by a commercial laboratory where he analyzed sugar samples. During the thirties he took courses at the School for Sugar Industry which he finished with an apprenticeship in a sugar factory. Thus De Vries was far distant from his first love.

But thanks to vu University professor J. Coops, who in 2006 is better known for his courageous stance during the German occupation than as a chemist, De Vries started working in the chemistry laboratory during the final years of the war. After the war he became an employee of the vu University. As an analyst and assistant in the classroom and the chemistry lab he worked in partnership with various professors and members of the scientific staff whom he advised and assisted with his equipment. His native talent for chemistry was so great that in the course of time he, together with the academicians, published more than sixty scholarly articles in prominent journals.

Also after De Vries retired early in 1983 he stayed the course with his hobby that became his life’s work. In short, De Vries was a phenomenon, comparable to the other honorary doctor at the vu University – the self-taught meteorologist Bijvoet who was awarded the degree exactly twenty years earlier to the day. Honorary promotor professor H. Timmerman honored De Vries, but also wanted it to be known that this honorary doctorate was an expression as well of ‘feelings of gratitude and appreciation to all who have contributed to the wellbeing of the faculty without ever receiving the recognition in the form that is customary in scholarly circles.’

Two weeks after the dies natalis ceremony De Vries was still deeply impressed by it, as may be inferred from a note that he sent to rector magnificus professor Egbert Boeker. He thanked Boeker for all the attention and concluded his note with the heartfelt exclamation: ‘We will never forget this!’ With this plural ‘we’ De Vries also meant his wife. In the curriculum vitae written for the university which all honorary doctor candidates are asked to write for a first impression, De Vries not only mentioned his hobby (playing the organ), but also the fact that after having been a bachelor for 67 years he had, finally, entered into marriage. It seems that before his retirement Gerrit De Vries was married to chemistry.
G. De Vries receives the diploma.
The proposal submitted by the Faculty of Philosophy to grant the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga (1932) an honorary doctorate was very specific. The proposal was submitted early; more than two years before Plantinga received the degree, promotor professor J. Van der Hoeven, professor of the history of modern philosophy, composed a six-page long proposal about Plantinga’s contributions. He followed up the proposal with a ten page *curriculum vitae*.

Judging by this overwhelming offensive Plantinga had to be someone of great significance to the *vu* University – which was true. To begin with, with his book *God and Other Minds*, published in 1967, Plantinga had taken up the gauntlet thrown down by the neo-positivists of the so-called *Wiener Kreis* during the thirties. Representatives of this school, such as Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick, advanced the thesis that religious pronouncements are devoid of meaning in every way because verification or falsification can not be applied. This idea has since become standard in the workshop of scholarship – since the sixties even at the *vu* University. Plantinga had given the philosophy of religion ‘respectable standing once again.’ The existence of God might not be verifiable, but by the same token it could neither be denied, according to Plantinga. Plantinga’s entire œuvre may be read as an intelligent apology for the Christian faith. Van der Hoeven admitted that criticism of certain concepts of Plantinga was possible when viewed from the tradition of the *vu* University, in particular from the perspective of the philosophy of law, developed by H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven. Plantinga’s idea that ‘logical impossibilities’ exist for God was rejected by the followers of the Reformational philosophy as ‘impermissible speculation.’ ‘Nonetheless, to confer an honorary doctorate on someone does not mean that one has to agree with him in every respect,’ as Van der Hoeven put it in the conclusion of his proposal.

In his speech on 20 October 1995 Van der Hoeven did not remain silent about the differences between the American Plantinga and his own method of philosophizing. But Van der Hoeven acknowledged that under the influence of Plantinga the conviction was growing at the *vu* University that there was a renewed need for an authentically Christian philosophy. This was not saying too much, for the honorary
Alvin Plantinga with diploma.
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doctorate became for young philosophers a stimulus to gain a more in-depth knowledge of his work. This resulted in 1998 in a volume about Plantinga’s epistemology and two years later in a workshop on the same theme. However quietly the honorary promotion proceeded, it was an important event. It symbolized that the VU University continued to want to be a special university. For the Faculty of Philosophy which actually had never deviated from the Reformational path, the honorary doctorate was a given. For the theological faculty the honorary doctorate was a significant event, for after the ‘modernism’ of H.M. Kuitert cum suis it returned to a method of doing theology that was willing to cross swords with those who sneer at the Christian faith as being contrary to scholarship.

M. T. Turvey (1995)

Michael Thomas Turvey (1942) was an athlete of world stature when he sustained an injury that ended his career. Turvey turned affliction into a virtue by turning the practice of sports into a science. He studied experimental psychology at Loughborough College in England and earned his doctorate at Ohio University in the United States. In that field he again reached the top and found recognition. The recognition also came from the VU University where the Faculty of Kinetics, created in 1987 as successor of the in 1971 created Interfaculty of Physical Education, submitted a proposal on 14 May 1992, to honor Turvey with an honorary doctorate. According to the chairman of the faculty board, professor J. B. Hopkins, Turvey could be considered the founder of the ‘ecological approach of observation and movement.’ He was an expert in the area of movement coordination. Turvey being a psychologist originally was praised by Hopkins for his multidisciplinary approach.

In order to defend kinetic science (‘a new and multifaceted discipline’) Hopkins maintained, somewhat defensively, that it did not have a uniform formula, nor a generally accepted methodology. The faculty at the VU University was scientifically oriented which would be a fitting framework for an honorary doctorate for Turvey who has contributed ‘substantially to the integral study of human motion,’ which he did from a ‘scientific orientation.’
M. T. Turvey.
The degree was presented to him, well over three years after the petition, by professor Claire F. Michaels who herself had graduated under Turvey. Thus the exceptional and unique situation occurred at the VU University that the Ph. D. student became the honorary promotor. In her speech on 20 October 1995 Michaels mentioned several reasons why Turvey was granted the honorary doctorate. He was said to have been the first person to have put the often neglected problem of movement coordination on the map. Secondly, in addition he understood that movement and observation cannot be considered separately. About these insights Turvey had published much in the course of his career. Finally, Michaels praised him because he taught his students ‘wisely and well.’

Turvey, happily surprised with the award toward the end of 1994, which he said he accepted ‘with considerable pleasure,’ stayed a few days after the ceremony in Amsterdam in order to give a guest lecture in the building at the Van der Boechorststraat, where the Faculty of Kinetics is located. A few days before the ceremony he did ask a few awkward questions: might he not look for a hotel on his own now that he had misplaced the letter with stipulations (accommodations at the Amstelhotel, as well as the number of guests that he could take along at the expense of the VU University)? The wrinkles were ironed out and thus M. T. Turvey stood proudly in the assembly hall on 20 October 1995.

It was a good thing that professor Ivan Wolffers, professor of public health, took enough time. Already in 1998, more than two years before the planned graduation date, he proposed to the College of Deans to grant Irene Fernandez (1946) from Malaysia an honorary doctorate. Three months later the College met to discuss the matter. It realized that an honorary doctorate for Irene Fernandez would be a matter difficult to stomach for the authoritarian Malaysian government. Fernandez, born in 1946, had become, over time, a formidable critic of her country, because she linked public health to human rights. Fernandez began in the seventies as a co-worker in the Young Christian Workers’ Movement. She performed trade union work, fought for the interests
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of consumers, and took up the cause of women’s rights.

Women, a vulnerable group everywhere, but especially in the third world, became the focus of her work. Fernandez created a number of organizations that defended the rights of women. In the eighties, when AIDS began to spread rapidly, she was involved in establishing CARAM, which stands for Coordination of Action Research on Aids and Mobility. Through this work she came to know Ivan Wolffers. Wolffers, in his own way, was no less involved than Fernandez. After his training in Utrecht Wolffers had settled down as a family physician. He found out that patients know alarmingly little about medicines – and that the pharmaceutical industry, being money hungry, would prefer them to remain ignorant. For that reason Wolffers wrote the standard work Medicines in 1997, in which he described the effects (and side effects) of medicines in an easy to understand way. Fernandez must have been a woman after Wolffers’ own heart. The two cooperated closely – Wolffers in freedom in democratic Netherlands, Fernandez in dictatorial Malaysia. There her work was not appreciated. Various complaints were being directed against her.

No wonder that the College of Deans pointed out to the medical faculty the ‘politically sensitive character of this honorary doctorate and the consequences it may have for the person(s) involved.’ Upon the advice of Wolffers the Dutch ambassador in Kuala Lumpur was contacted in an effort to sound out his opinion about the sensitivities surrounding this honorary doctorate. An answer was slow in coming due to a changing of the guard. The new ambassador confirmed that Malaysia is ‘extraordinarily sensitive to anything that may be construed as foreign interference.’ It appeared to be important to him to emphasize that the initiative came from the Faculty of Medicine, so that Malaysian authorities would not get the impression that the Dutch government was responsible for the honorary doctorate – an impression which might easily arise in a suspicious and aggressive regime.

That settled it. Dean professor E.A. Van Der Veen started writing a proposal in June of 1999. In it he did not shy away from mentioning the accusations leveled at Fernandez. In the meantime the ambassador in Malaysia became nervous after all. The ambassador expressed his concern to Nico Schrijver who was associated with the Faculty of Law at the vU University. Schrijver, in turn, began to question the significance and the reputation of Fernandez which he stated to profes-
The honorary doctors of 2000 with their promotores. From left to right: Keith Ward and H. M. Vroom; Irene Fernandez and I. Wolffers; Cyprian Foia and M. A. Kaashoek; Lindon John Eaves and D. Boomsma.
sor Arend Soeteman, professor of law and the history of law at the vU University. The embassy had mentioned to Schrijver that Fernandez was known indeed for her work on behalf of (migrant) women and her criticism of the abuses in the prison system, but not for her involvement in medical issues. Schrijver reacted in telegram style: ‘The unfamiliarity with the candidate in this respect I find peculiar, ask the ambassador for more information...What is her position? How strong is her influence? Are there many others who do similar work?’ Schrijver wished Soeteman, party to this honorary doctorate, much success in the forthcoming discussions.

This encouragement Soeteman, and with him the entire juridical faculty, could certainly use. She was at her wits end, and via dean professor P. Vlas she obtained advice from professor Peter Kooijmans, Christian-democratic politician, former minister of Foreign Affairs and meanwhile judge at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Kooijmans judged, quite forcefully, on 6 October 1999, that the vU University should not act so timidly. He had read the recommendation and it seemed to him that Fernandez is ‘not recommended for an honorary doctorate for her scholarly, but for her social activities.’ Kooijmans added, ‘If in today’s Malaysia one is active socially he will have to be a real introvert not to clash with the authorities. This factor, therefore, should not play a role in the deliberations about granting it.’ Kooijmans also chided her Majesty’s ambassador in loco, ‘That, as the ambassador fears, the Malaysian government can hardly imagine that the Dutch government does not play an active role in the granting of an honorary doctorate, seems to me to be pure nonsense. Malaysia has an embassy here in the Hague which knows darn well (or ought to know) that matters are different here. Kok is no Ceaucescu.’

Thanks to Kooijmans’ firm attitude everything turned out well. Rector magnificus professor T. Sminia acknowledged this also a few days later, ‘Your significant contribution toward reaching a decision is appreciated very much by the Rectory.’ A year later, on 20 October 2000, Irene Fernandez stood in the assembly hall where she heard a ringing speech by honorary promotor Ivan Wolffers who praised her creativity, ‘sharp analytical mind, and her unrestrained dedication.’ In the meantime she had overcome the shock she experienced when she heard that she, who never attended a university, had been chosen to receive
an honorary doctorate. Honorary promotor Wolffers was proud of his special *promovendus*. To *Ad Valvas* he commented, ‘Few researchers at universities are prepared to actually go into the slums. I think it is nice that this time the honorary doctorate is not going to someone who has written a thousand articles.’ The dictatorship in Malaysia did not laugh, but allowed it to happen while gnashing their teeth.


Keith Ward (1938) may be called the exception to the quip that studying theology is the surest way to atheism. Ward studied philosophy in Oxford, among others with Alfred J. Ayer, who in his *Language, Truth and Logic*, which became a classic, explained the basic pattern of logical positivism. In it his distinction between scholarly meaningful and meaningless statements was most striking. Ayer considered religion to be an emotion that had hardly anything to do with scholarship. Ward, born in 1938, listened to all of this, but was not convinced. On the contrary, besides philosophy he also started studying theology, and although he was not brought up in a religious home, he became gradually more convinced of Christianity.

After this study Ward could no longer become a simple proponent. He had been exposed to too much scientific thinking to ignore the dominant secular culture of the second half of the twentieth century. Which he did not do. In the footsteps of Ludwig Wittgenstein he wanted to escape the restrictions the *Wiener Kreis* had placed on the philosophy of religion. Ward was recommended by professor of the philosophy of religion, H. M. Vroom, who on 3 May 1999 used superlatives to convince the College of Deans that Ward was the right candidate for the honorary doctorate. According to Vroom the British philosopher of religion not only gave evidence of having a thorough knowledge of modern philosophy and other religions, but on the basis of this he participated in the debate between religion and science in which he did not avoid ‘the difficult questions.’

Vroom showed himself to have been impressed most by a four-volume philosophic work in which Ward developed a comparative theology. In the nineties he described in four books religion in relation to Revelation, Creation and Human Nature. ‘His studies testify to a
unique breadth of knowledge and insight and a very analytical and synthetic ability.’ To convince the deans Vroom also summoned a witness, namely his colleague Vincent Brümmer, philosophy of religion professor in Utrecht. Brümmer, who knew Ward well, was pleased to comply with the request. He described Ward as ‘being unbelievably productive as a scholar,’ as ‘a creative thinker,’ and as someone who ‘had not limited himself to one particular problem area within theology.’

The ceremony itself went without a hitch. Like so many honorary doctors Ward showed himself to be very thankful for the doctorate. ‘We shall always remember the occasion.’ And he appeared to be impressed by the doctoral philosophy of religion students, whom he met during his visit. ‘We enjoyed meeting them, and were impressed by the quality of their scholarship.’


It is hard to imagine the situation today, almost two decades after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. In 1975, over thirty years ago, the Romania of Nicolai Ceaușescu was considered in Western Europe and the United States to be a pleasant place to live for its citizens. Due to this delusion the Romanian dictator could be knighted in England and his tyrannical wife was even able to get an honorary doctorate in chemistry from Cambridge – in spite of the fact that this housewife had not even received a secondary education. But before the fall of communism in December 1989, Romania was one of the worst dictatorships in the Eastern bloc. Brilliant mathematician Ciprian Foias (1933) lived through this. As professor of mathematics at the University of Bucharest he began to experience repression more and more. Foias was not a member of the communist party which was taken ill of him.

During the first years of his professorship he enjoyed the protection of his influential teacher Miron Nicolescu. But when he died in 1975 Foias was forced to compromise in order not to call down the wrath of the regime upon himself. Foias looked for an opportunity to leave the country. He co-authored a paper with Ceaușescu’s daughter – no fake like her ‘chemical’ mother. This helped. Foias received a visa for
a conference in Helsinki, and fled from there to Paris. His fame was so great that he was immediately offered a professorship in Paris. He derived this fame from his ‘exceptional contributions to fundamental and applied mathematics with far-reaching implications – which he had also developed – for mathematical physics, for economic disciplines, and for engineering.’ Thus wrote the dean of the Faculty of Exact Sciences professor M.A. Kaashoek, in his proposal to grant Foias an honorary doctorate in 2000, as formulated on 9 April 1999. Foias’ work in mathematics, Kaashoek added, was not only ‘exceptionally fascinating,’ but it also fit in well with the profile of the vU University, ‘which puts scholarship in the broader framework of service.’

Kaashoek attached a 32-page supplement in which Foias’ 389 (!) publications were enumerated as well as the many conferences he had attended and addressed. And, as if this were not enough, Kaashoek’s request was accompanied by two letters of recommendation. One came from professor W. R. Van Zwet, scientific director of the Thomas Stieltje Institute for Mathematics of the University of Leiden. He applauded the honorary doctorate ‘unanimously and heartily.’ A quartet of prominent mathematicians from Israel and the United States did the same. In a comprehensive letter of recommendation much was made of Foias’ contributions to mathematics, and here also his ‘solutions to ‘real life’ problems’ were again mentioned.

Towards the College of Deans Foias showed himself to be ‘strongly moved’ by the honorary doctorate. Prior to the award a two-day conference was held with his work occupying center stage. How deeply the award affected Foias became clear from a letter he sent to rector magnificus T. Sminia two weeks after the ceremony. He indicated frankly that the honorary doctorate was ‘the highlight of my professional career.’ Meanwhile he had no desire to return to his mother country Romania. He told Ad Valvas, which interviewed him for the occasion, that he did not want to go back because the country continued to suffer the consequences of communism. But one improvement he did see: Romanians were at least able to complain publicly about their situation. Foias did not do that, nor did he have to. The honorary doctorate granted him by the vU University was the crown upon his career as a mathematician.
During the preliminaries of the honorary doctorate to behavioral geneticist Lindon John Eaves (1944) on 20 October 2000, Willem B. Drees, associated at the time with the Reflection Center of the vu University, cited a striking anecdote about an appearance of the next honorary doctor. The German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg celebrated his sixtieth birthday in 1988. For that occasion a conference was organized about faith and science, a theme that had occupied Pannenberg all of his life. When he came to the themes of ‘life’ and ‘man’ Pannenberg commented, among other things, that he had let himself be inspired by philosophers such as Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Plessner.

Eaves was not pleased to hear this. Why did Pannenberg ignore biology, he wanted to know during the discussion that followed. According to Drees Eaves grabbed a stack of papers from his briefcase filled with tables and graphs. And he made the devastating comment, ‘Here, data, nothing but data. Data about thirty thousand people – not, as happens so often with philosophers about experiences of one single person, namely those of the philosopher himself.’ While Drees was taken with this comment, the remarkable combination of activities that Eaves combined in one person must have spoken to him even more. Eaves was not only a behavioral geneticist but also a theologian and in that capacity working as an Anglican priest. Eaves received his honorary doctorate from psychology professor Dorret Boomsma because of his research, which was not only focused on genetics but also on behavior. Eaves conducted research on twins, research which he extended to relatives. In it he did not limit himself to genetic kinship expressed in external similarities, but he also included their behavior in his research. Eaves, who was born in England, lectured in the United States since 1981, where he was in charge of a research institute for human genetics, while he also was professor of psychiatry.

The Reflection Center considered the coming of priest-biologist Eaves a good pretext for convening a three-day conference from 23-25 October 2000, the theme of which would be the question: is nature ever bad, wrong, or ugly? Where theologians consider God as the source of good and evil, biologists see reality as something that creates
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itself. And yet, the question which was given to the participants was that people do often make an ethical distinction between what is and what ought to be. This problem Eaves also tackled, when asked if we live in a tragic universe. He did not deny that it was not so, but he did it with the same passion with which he had attacked Pannenberg at the time.

Karel Knip (2002)

Whereas in the past honorary doctorates were sometimes in the germination stage a year or more, the proposal to confer an honorary doctorate on science journalist Karel Knip (1946) dated back to only a half a year before the award ceremony on 20 October 2002. Professor H. Timmerman, dean of the Faculty of Exact Sciences, drew attention to the importance of journalism for science on 14 March 2002. Timmerman outlined the emergence of scientific journalism in the Netherlands which he dated to the fifties. During the sixties and seventies of the previous century a shift took place; less attention was paid to science itself and more to the consequences of science for man, society, and the environment.

Especially after the publication of the report of the Club of Rome in 1972, journalism began to follow the (exact) sciences more critically. It was at that time that Karel Knip took his first steps on the path of journalism. Initially he somewhat resembled Gyro Gearloose from the Donald Duck comic strip: obsessed by science he tried to invent all kinds of things, but in vain – and initially he even became a student drop-out. Knip began to study chemical technology in Delft in 1963, a study which he cut short in 1967 to study microbiology at the University of Amsterdam. In the meantime Knip did all sorts of things that somehow had something to do with science and that in any case aroused his curiosity. For months he dove in vain off Kijkduin in search of a German U-boat, and he tried to build a telescope – again without result. And he followed the landing on the moon not like many of his compatriots via the reassuring commentary of Chriet Titulaer and Henk Terlingen on television, but from Coeroeni in Surinam via a transceiver.

In the meantime the engaged Knip took his first steps in journal-
Karel Knip receives the diploma.
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ism. He wrote for *Propria Cures* and was active in that part of the student movement that opposed the Vietnam War in the sixties. As a student he already wrote about science for *NRC Handelsblad*, which employed him in 1988. It was here that he first developed into a true science journalist for which he was gifted all along. On Saturdays he published many articles in the supplement ‘Science and Education’ which he compiled in *Progress* (*De vooruitgang* (1986)) and *Everyday Science* (*Alledaagse Wetenschap* (1999)).

Promotor Timmerman was clear why ‘drs. Knip,’ as he wrote consequentially, deserved an honorary doctorate. ‘Drs. Knip shows by his contributions to *NRC Handelsblad* that he is not only a skilled journalist with a ready pen, but that he is also able to present the results of scientific research in a comprehensible, yet also responsible manner.’ For that reason Knip was thought to be an ‘excellent representative’ of ‘a discipline that is of inestimable importance for society’s understanding of science and for science itself.’

The College of Deans showed itself convinced quickly of the importance of this honorary doctorate. In this honorary doctorate it saw the possibility of increasing the interest of society for the university. This would not have been possible fifty years earlier. In those days a journalist was still used to saying, ‘your excellency,’ and ‘professor’ which sufficiently indicates the distance between higher politics and higher scholarship on the one hand and subservient journalism on the other. But now in the new millennium when the talk was often about ‘the enterprising university’ which needed to ‘sell itself,’ journalism, which in the meantime also had grown up, gained in importance and appreciation. The honorary doctorate conferred on Karel Knip may therefore be seen as a sign of the times.

Huub Oosterhuis (2002)

That former Roman Catholic priest, hymn writer, and poet Huub Oosterhuis (1933) would receive an honorary doctorate was beyond all doubt. The only question was, when and where? There was almost no doubt as to the where. The (formerly called) Roman Catholic University of Nijmegen was the most logical place. Indeed, in 1983 it was suggested there to crown Oosterhuis. H. Van Der Linde, professor of Ec-
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Honories made the comment at the time that only Oosterhuis’ eucharistic prayers would be sufficient to qualify him for an honorary doctorate. But the disobedient Oosterhuis was unacceptable to the bishops, certainly in 1983 when a strong restorative wind blew through the Dutch church province.

In 2001, a year before the actual award took place, professor M. E. Brinkman, dean of the Faculty of Theology went to the College of Deans with a twofold incentive to honor Oosterhuis. Brinkman prefaced his petition with a political statement. The theological faculty had awarded an honorary doctorate on other occasions outside its own circles. The best-known example was the honorary doctorate granted Rev. Beyers Naudé in 1972 – which was offered him because of his ‘theological refutation’ of the apartheid ideology. Now, thirty years later, another ‘kairos’ moment might have arrived – Huub Oosterhuis, shown ‘in an heretical light’ by the Roman Catholic Church, deserved to receive an honorary doctorate. This would demonstrate ‘ecumenical courage,’ according to Brinkman, who did not shrink from describing Oosterhuis’ work as a contemporary continuation of the Dutch Authorizied Version of the Bible of 1637.

Like no one else Oosterhuis had, according to Brinkman, ‘given form to the intent of Vatican II (1962-1965) to translate the ancient liturgy into the vernacular.’ In this he had been ‘a pioneer.’ Brinkman emphasized in his petition that Oosterhuis’ songs had been warmly received, also in Protestant churches. An honorary doctorate for Oosterhuis would also serve the theological faculty well. After all, it did plan, Brinkman wrote, to ‘show itself in the coming years as an open, ecumenical faculty that wanted to be active in the dim area of faith and culture. An honorary doctorate would fit wonderfully well within this new profile.’

Plain language from which professor N. Schuman, honorary promoter of Oosterhuis, might have learned something. His accompanying speech was not remarkable in comprehensibility, to say the least. He used sentences such as, ‘Whereas at first Oosterhuis was moved by a creative impulse for the renewal of the liturgy per se, his work developed more and more into a significant contribution to the enculturation of the liturgy. To put it differently, besides the trans-cultural aspect of the liturgy which is governed by constants, its contextual aspect began to receive all the attention in Oosterhuis, because he confronted
cultus and culture with each other.’ Such sentences would certainly not prompt the deans to applaud.

In spite of this, the College was easily convinced of the necessity of an honorary doctorate for Oosterhuis. He was, after all, as the vU Reflection Institute wrote in an accompanying introduction, ‘an important help in the search for religious re-orientation which was started in the sixties of the previous century.’ In the course of time his student ekklesia in Amsterdaml which, already since the sixties, caused a furor, drew thousands of worshippers who no longer could identify with the classical church rituals.

The vU Reflection Institute was so excited about the honorary doctorate that it conducted a small survey regarding the reception of Oosterhuis’ songs among budding vU University theologians, among participants of liturgical celebrations at the vU University, and among members of the Amsterdam student ekklesia. This survey confirmed, once again, that Oosterhuis’ devotional texts were appreciated more than the ones critical of society. The interviewees did not have much use for the latter. Oosterhuis, initially a member of the Labor Party grew more and more radical. Together with, among others, vaudeville artist Freek De Jonge, television producer Harry De Winter, and Jan Marijnissen, leader of the Socialist Party, he was one of the signers of the manifesto Stop Selling Out Civilization, which was addressed to the ‘purple’ Kok-cabinet, which also was supposed to have neglected social services. In the meantime Oosterhuis also had become a member of the Socialist Party. Religion and Socialism are a good mix he stated flatly in the party newspaper Tribune. ‘There is a close spiritual kinship between the prophet Amos and Marx.’ God is a leftist – this is how the theology of honorary doctor Oosterhuis may be summarized. After a demonstration on 2 October 2004 against the ‘a-social’ policy of the Balkenende-cabinet, Oosterhuis stated defly, ‘My God walked with us in Amsterdam on 2 October.’ To be clear, Oosterhuis’ theological ideas were not the reason for the Faculty of Theology to grant him an honorary doctorate.
Huub Oosterhuis with diploma and cape. Opposite him: honorary promotor N. Schuman.
The honorary doctorate that was awarded to Adriaan Bos (1934) at the proposal of the Faculty of Law on 20 October 2005, was appropriate for the tradition of the vU University. The doctorate combined a solid career, and an equally solid erudition, combined with an ethical concern for the world. In the case of jurist Adriaan Bos the occasion included the fact that in him an heir of the university was honored. Bos was born in Dordrecht, and studied law at the vU University until 1960. He soon entered the service of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and in 1963 changed to Foreign Affairs. There he began as assistant juridical advisor on a career march through the institution, which brought him to his highest level in 1989 – juridical advisor to the minister of Foreign Affairs.

At first glance this is not what one would call an impressive career. But Bos developed a great number of projects as an agent of the Dutch government. For years he was involved with the Committee for International Rhine Traffic, and he was a member of the Conference on Maritime Rights of the United Nations. Closer to home, he was a member of the National Committee for International Privacy rights. These concerns demonstrate that Bos had a word for the world, and as a Reformed church member, he also had a Word for the world. He thus joined the Committee for International Affairs of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands.

None of these activities is insignificant, but he never would have received an honorary doctorate for those, if he had not, in the autumn of his career, exerted himself to help establish an International Criminal Court. In 1995, shortly after the mass murders in Rwanda, and with the Balkan wars still fresh in everyone’s memory, Bos became chairman of a commission of the United Nations, which had to see to it that (war) criminals would not escape their lawful punishment. After years of fits and starts, the Criminal Court finally began in Den Haag in 2003. Bos had to exert all his diplomatic talents to have as many countries as possible sign the protocol. When that effort finally succeeded in the middle of 1998, Bos was honored with a standing ovation. As honorary promotor professor P. Vlas wrote proudly, ‘A proper recognition for all the work that he accomplished!’ Ad Valvas, which reported on the honorary doctorates in the week of 20 October 2005, relativized
Adriaan Bos receives the cape.
Bos’ success somewhat by noting that one hundred nations had ratified the International Criminal Court, but then exclaimed: ‘And when the United States?’ That certainly was the missing link, which causes the Criminal Court to function at half strength.

This lacuna did not diminish Bos’ contributions to international justice in Vlas’ eyes. Vlas did not hesitate to place the promovendus in a historical line with Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), with whom the small country on the North Sea began the tradition ‘to practice international politics on the basis of norms and value.’ (It really says that). Thus Vlas showed (unintentionally) that the designation ‘Netherlands Model Country’ (‘Nederland Gidsland’) was still valid in 2005. This designation is still proudly carried on by a vu University, which (no less proudly) continues to carry the words ‘social involvement’ in its banner.

GERRIT KROL (2005)

Before author and mathematician Gerrit Krol entered the building of the vu University on the De Boelelaan in Buitenveldert, he would not have given much thought to this place. However, author Ad Zuiderent and historian Willem Frijhoff of the literary faculty mention in their explanation about the honorary doctorate that Krol, in his novel, *The Driver is Bored* (*De chauffeur verveelt zich* (1973)), ‘lying on the sandy plain south of Amsterdam, which is now called Buitenveldert,’ reflects on the phenomenon of science. Krol says himself that not being very methodical, he has not come very far in science. As an author, however, driven by continuous creativity, he has come far.

Krol is an author who emphatically gave a place to science in his work, and for that reason could count on much academic appreciation. Zuiderent, one of the authors of the honorary doctorate, had received his doctor’s degree for his study of Krol’s writings. Other scientists and critics, among whom Kees Fens, Wam De Moor, Tom Van Deel, and J. F. Vogelaar consulted his work regularly. Krol was born in Groningen, and learned his literature by the spoonful. Because his father was a teacher of Dutch, in the Krol family literature was always part of the conversation. Krol was drawn to literature, but he did not want to follow in his father’s footsteps. He studied mathematics, hoping that he would ‘encounter universal truth.’ However, literature must have
drawn him strongly, because during his military service he wrote no less than four novels, but he published none of them. His debut novel appeared in 1962 – *The Skirts of Joy Scheepmaker* (*De rokken van Joy Scheepmaker*). It tells the story of the love between a young man just out of the military and a young girl, who, considering her age (16) had just outgrown the Lolita stage.

*The Millimetered Head* (*Het gemillimeterde hoofd*) appeared five years later. It is a collage of short paragraphs, diagrams, mathematical formulas, and illustrations. Critics racked their brains over the book, which even drove Kees Fens to describe his own review thus: ‘I see this piece as no more than an attempt at discussion.’ This did not keep Fens from regarding the book as one of Krol’s best works thus far. His fame increased with *The Illness of Middleton* (*De ziekte van Middleton*) (1969), in which Krol tells of his relationships with women, by means of the voluptuous and round-breasted American pin-up girl, Margaret Middleton.

This book was not mentioned in the recommendation for the honorary doctorate. No surprise there. Krol’s writing was rewarded especially because ‘the literary quality is coupled with theoretical reflection and insight from the sciences, especially the exact sciences and philosophy.’ Critics especially pointed to the work that touches the sectioning of science and literature, such as Krol’s most recent novel, *Rondo Veneziano* (2004), which poses the question how long the natural sciences can remain dominant in today’s culture. Following the British author C. P. Snow, who already noted the gap between the humanities and the natural sciences in 1959, Krol was also captured by this question.

More explosive was ‘the burning question’ that Krol broached in a lecture for the Society of Literary Activities Amsterdam – that is, the question of the death penalty. In a country that after the German occupation had (arbitrarily and with great self-satisfaction) brought small as well as big war criminals before the firing squad, after 1960 there was a prohibition even to (re) consider the death penalty. Krol demolished this taboo. It was only because of the nuance of his argument that he himself was not declared (spiritually) dead, and that fifteen years later he could receive an honorary doctorate from the v u University.
Gerrit Krol with diploma and cape.
The social sciences have a bad reputation – and in some respects not unjustly. Practitioners of anthropology, sociology, and psychology often have the habit of expressing in incomprehensible, high-sounding jargon what could be expressed in common human language. Professor H. Dahles-Schnetzinger, professor of the anthropology of organizations, especially the ethnography of organizations, at the vU University, did not escape such language, when she, as honorary promotor of social psychologist Joanne Martin (1948) tried to explain the significance of her work. Her account was bulging with jargon – although it started out very well. Dahles-Schnetzinger explained that Martin, professor in organizational studies at Stanford, deserved the honorary doctorate because of her research about women and minorities in organizations. But, as soon as Dahles-Schnetzinger attempted to explain what the results were of such research, things went wrong.

In atrocious jargon she explained that ‘generations of students and researchers have, also through the work of Joanne Martin, learned to see organizations as fluid, unstable structures with permeable boundaries, differentiated and fragmented, and bursting with ambiguities and ambivalences, differences and injustices.’ Dahles-Schnetzinger tried to explain that Martin had developed three perspectives about organizations. The ‘integration perspective’ looks for similarities among the members of organizations; the ‘differentiation perspective’ describes the unavoidable differences and opposites in organizations; and the ‘fragmentation perspective’ teaches that organizations are not characterized by rigid lines and boundaries, but contain diverse clusters and networks.

Only those who look at organizations from all three perspectives can, according to Martin, achieve sound and critical insight into organizations. An especially critical insight: Martin was resentful of the ‘dominant integration perspective,’ in which modern managers attempt to force their colleagues to dance to their tune. In recent years Martin has more and more found a way out in the ‘fragmentation perspective’; an organization should offer more space to diverse interest groups in organizations, as well as to divergent scientific opinions in the academic world. Universities should enjoy the warm interest of Martin. The temple of science should not just gather more knowl-
Joanne Martin, opposite her honorary promotor Heidi Dahles-Schnetzinger.
Honorary doctorates are usually awarded because of exceptional scholarly or social contributions. However, they are not outside the times. Occasionally, someone’s work is suddenly considered important when a historical event occurs. This happened with the work of the Australian pedagogue of religion, John Martin Hull (1935). After studying pedagogy in his homeland in the fifties, Hull left for England to study theology, but he was involved with inter-religious education his whole life. The importance of this was seen earlier, as can be seen from the honorary doctorate in theology that he received from the Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt in 1995. But when professor Siebren Miedema, professor of religious pedagogy, proposed to elevate Hull to honorary doctorate at the VU University, he had in mind the attacks of 11 September 2001, and the results of that for the place and function of religion in the public domain. Miedema could not foretell how the discussion about article 23 of the Dutch Constitution (about the freedom of education) would turn out. However, he wrote: ‘What is clear is that Hull with his trailblazing approach in theory and practice has pointed to a path for the ideological training in education, that could also turn out to be of great worth at some time for the Dutch situation’

Hull had traveled far before he put himself forward as a proponent of inter-religious education. He was born in a conservative milieu, and
J.M. Hull.
only came in touch with other religions and forms of belief through his studies. This did not leave him untouched. He experienced a serious faith crisis before he found his religious direction – that of liberal Christianity, certainly based on the Bible, but also open to dialogue with other religions. Under the influence of his English teachers Hull tried to reflect anew on Christianity, against the background of a pluralistic, quickly secularizing society. But in distinction from his teachers, Hull did not want to confine himself to the Christian faith, but to study it in connection and contact with other religions and ideologies. As a member of the Christian Education Movement and as editor-in-chief of the journal of that society, Hull made his opinions known. He also did so in the *British Journal of Religious Education*, which he edited from 1970-1996.

The honorary doctorate for Hull fit seamlessly with the direction of the theological faculty, which, with the appointment of professor M. E. Brinkman as dean, functioned as a hotel with many rooms – many Christian streams and groups found accommodation there, just as the other major religion in the Netherlands: Islam. No wonder that Miedema could write with satisfaction that Hull’s plea for inter-religious training and dialogue connected seamlessly with the *vu University, ‘where a rainbow of representatives from various ideologies can meet each other in an open and active manner.’* Already in the sixties and seventies Hull could be called a seer who was ahead of his time regarding inter-religious dialogue which, after 2001, got going with such difficulty – except that the term ‘seer’ is somewhat unfortunate for a man who had been blind for decades.

**Joke Waller-Hunter (2005)**

The honorary doctorate that was awarded to Joke Waller-Hunter (1946-2005) was a unique event. First of all, because of the moment. That moment was not 20 October 2005 at the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the *vu* University, but 28 September. Moreover, the place for the event was not the ceremonial hall, but a sickbed in a hospice near Bonn, where Waller-Hunter spent her final days. Waller-Hunter had been ill for years and would not live to see the *dies natalis*. She died a week before the *dies*, on 14 October 2005. She received the honorary
doctorate with a final exertion of strength. We know from a remembrance of her good friend, Wouter Veening, that, considering the circumstances, it was a joyous atmosphere.

It was Veening who, twenty years earlier, had brought the career of his friend on the fast track. In 1984 he was offered a position with the office of International Affairs of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (vrom). Tired of the bureaucratization of the ministry, Veening declined and proposed Waller-Hunter, who, according to him, was more suitable for the position. Waller-Hunter developed a remarkable passion for environmental questions (certainly remarkable for someone with a completely different study background – French). Waller-Hunter had begun her career with the province of North Holland, where, between 1973 and 1982 she would make a name for herself as an enthusiastic spokeswoman who crossed the province in a red Fiat 500 to encourage the provincial efforts. Later she would exchange North Holland for the world, where she traveled with her husband, Herman Waller. Not only that – Waller-Hunter sometimes worked there as well. For example, in Indonesia she helped the Ministry of Environment to develop legislation.

However, the activities of Waller-Hunter up to that time were not the direct cause for raising her academic standing. (Similar to the jurist Adriaan Bos, who was also recommended that year, but whose activities before his involvement with the International Criminal Court were not decisive for the honorary doctorate). For Waller-Hunter it was her work on behalf of various international conferences dealing with the environment and development. She did this first for the ministry of vrom. And several years later as chief of the Climate Office of the United Nations in Bonn. There she wrote preliminary drafts for the difficult discussions about world-wide climate agreements. According to her honorary promotor professor P. Vellinga, professor of environmental sciences at the vu University, Waller-Hunter laid the foundation for the current Climate Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol in which the world, except the United States, has agreed to force back emission of greenhouse gases. According to Vellinga, Waller-Hunter connected with the mission of the vu University because of her dedication to the environment. ‘This university was founded 125 years ago from the idea that scholarship cannot stand apart from society, but also that society cannot and may not neglect scholarly ideas.’
J. Waller-Hunter with Peter Brasik, general secretary of the College of Deans.
When approaching the 125th anniversary of the vu University, the Academic Center for Dentistry of Amsterdam (a joint venture of the Dentistry Faculties of the University of Amsterdam and of the vu University) sprang into action early, in order to arrange for an honorary doctorate from the vu University for the famous Irish colleague, Diarmuid Shanley. In the summer of 2003, dean professor W. Beertsen of the Board of Administration of the vu University wrote a letter in which he argued why to award Shanley, a professor of dentistry at Trinity College Dublin, an honorary doctorate. The most important reason Beertsen adduced was that Shanley had worked for the improvement of European cooperation in the area of dentistry. Beertsen praised Shanley’s unceasing effort and involvement, and greatly admired the diplomatic gifts with which the Irishman had promoted the education in dentistry, also in the less progressive European countries. Because ‘internationalizing’ and European union were to be ‘policy spearheads’ of the vu University, Shanley appeared to be a prime candidate for an honorary doctorate.

The board was also persuaded of this and honored the proposal, but, in view of the many applications for 2005, moved it to the following year. This gave the Faculty of Dentistry some additional time to justify its application – if necessary. Shanley enjoyed a measure of fame because of his involvement in the dentistry policy in Europe. Already early in his career, Shanley (who was educated in Dublin and in the United States) was involved with establishing guidelines to which European dentistry should adhere. In 1996 he took the initiative for a project to bring together various faculties from Europe. To this end he created an organization which organized scientific conferences four times a year in which information was exchanged and discussions were held about the standardization of dentistry. In the following years, dentists from other countries were also invited, always with the intent to improve the uniformity of methods and treatment.

Shanley’s efforts did not remain unnoticed. In 2002 he was asked to guide the twelve new European members into the union in the area of dentistry. Shanley directed his attention especially to East-European training, which he attempted to draw out of its isolation by sending nearly fifty visiting teams to investigate and to report about the condi-
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tion of dental research. In November 2004, Beertsen, in his further justification for the honorary doctorate, wrote, ‘When dentistry in Europe in the future will be of equal quality and content and have a comparable method, so that one can speak of European dentistry, history will honor Derry Shanley as its founder.’ Beertsen emphasized that the honorary doctorate for Stanley would also be good for the VU University: it demonstrated once more how much interest the university had in cooperating with Eastern Europe, ‘so that our knowledge, expertise, and experience will become available to all the inhabitants of Europe. The VU University and professor Diarmuid Shanley share the same vision and goal!’

Shanley was still in the dark when these words reached the Board of Administration. After he had been informed in February 2005, he reacted with surprise. He wrote that he was ‘greatly honoured,’ especially because the honorary doctorate came ‘from such an internationally renowned centre of dental education and research.’ Several months later, in June 2006, a shadow was cast on the joy, because of the death of Shanley’s spouse, Orna. Shanley decided to be accompanied to the ceremony by his daughter Emma. They were lodged in the Museum Square Hotel in the De Lairessestraat in Amsterdam.

During the ceremony on the dies natalis, honorary promotor Beertsen made a connection between Shanley’s work and the Christian roots of the VU University. While Shanley had worked for European union his whole life, the University wanted to educate students with a broad perspective on the world, with which they, against the background of a united Europe, would have to find their way.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Shanley was overwhelmed by a feeling of deep gratitude, which many honorary doctors before him had already experienced. He gave expression to this emotion in an undated, handwritten letter to the just-appointed rector magnificus Lex Bouter. He showed his appreciation for the hospitality shown to him: ‘The entire occasion was an example of formality in a very friendly and reassuring environment.’
Honorary doctor Diarmuid Shanley (standing).
The honorary doctorate that was awarded to the British physician Ian Chalmers in 2006 was certainly not the first academic honor that he had received. In previous years very different universities, such as those of Aberdeen, Liverpool, New York, and London had already honored his contributions in medicine. And as if that were not enough, Ian Chalmers was knighted in 2000 and could since be addressed as Sir Ian Chalmers. What moved the VU University to join the chorus of admirers and send their academic praise?

On 15 March 2006, the Medical Center of the VU University formulated a proposal to nominate Chalmers for an honorary doctorate at the VU University. They emphasized especially how Chalmers combined his medical profession with societal engagement. He was characterized as the driving force behind ‘evidence-based medicine,’ in which the traditional, scientific approach of medicine was deliberately connected with the experiences of the patient. Chalmers was praised for his pioneering work. He created a data base in the area of perinatology which was directed at the development of the child in the womb, after the birth, and in the first stage of life. In 1992 Chalmers set up the Cochrane Collaboration, in which 2,600 systematic surveys about medical questions were placed, focused as much as possible on the individual patient. Ten years later Chalmers redirected his research to the so-called James Lind Alliance, which focused especially on medical questions that had not yet been answered in patient-directed research.

The request for his honorary doctorate was supported by the College of Deans, with rector magnificus professor T. Sminia as spokesman. He asserted that Chalmers’ oeuvre was completely similar to the motto that the Medical Center of the VU University had always had: ‘Knowledge makes us better.’ Professor L. M. Bouter, professor of epidemiology and director of the Extramural Medical Research (EMGO) at the VU University was appointed as promotor. Bouter would succeed Sminia a month before the honorary promotion as rector magnificus, and he would therefore introduce Chalmers and invest him with the honor from within his profession, but would also congratulate the laureate as chairman of the College of Deans. In his oration Bouters detailed Chalmers’ initiatives and interest in medicine, but not after he
Ian Chalmers with rector magnificus L. M. Bouter.
had told the audience where the engagement of the British physician came from. After having studied medicine in the sixties, Chalmers practiced for several years as a pediatrician in English hospitals. In 1969 he left for Gaza to work among Palestinian refugees. Frustrated by a lack of accessible and reliable information about the effect of medical interventions, Chalmers concluded that things had to change. Back in Great Britain he exerted himself to gather as many results as possible from different social-scientific and medical studies, so that catastrophic experiences, such as those in Gaza, would not happen in the future.

However, in 2006 Chalmers was still not optimistic about medical science, in spite of all his efforts. In an interview on 29 October with *nrc Handelsblad*, he pointed out the enormous discrepancy between the questions posed by medical-scientific researchers and the questions posed by clinicians and patients. ‘That is strange, isn’t it? Why is a researcher not humble enough to research what the patients and the doctors ask about?’ In other interviews published at that time Chalmers called for radical changes in the relationship between researchers and patients. He put his hope in the ‘anger’ of the public that would expose the close connection among politics, the pharmaceutical industry, and science. This anger had to be interpreted by journalists. Well, Chalmers had no lack of journalistic attention. During his visit at the Vu University, the press seemed to be impressed by the intensity of the British doctor.

And not only the press. A month after the *dies natalis* honorary promoter Lex Bouter also showed himself to be impressed by Chalmers’ personality. Bouter wrote that he had enjoyed the days Chalmers and his partner had spent in Amsterdam. And in the meantime he had so identified himself with his role as rector magnificus, that he impressed on Chalmers: ‘Please, always remember that the honorary doctorate implies a lasting link with the Vu University.’

**Nicholas Wolterstorff (2007)**

Unlike many other honorary doctors, the Vu University was not unknown to American philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, when the news reached him that he would receive an honorary doctorate. He
had lectured at the vu University between 1986-1990 – the university that has its roots in the same Reformed tradition that has characterized Wolterstorff’s life and work. The philosopher was born in 1932 from Dutch parents, who had immigrated to the land of unlimited opportunities. The family settled in the village of Bigelow in the southern part of the state of Minnesota. Wolterstorff grew up in a Calvinistic family, in which reading the Bible and attending church were central. In his biographical summary, *The Grace that Shaped My Life*, he described the appeal that the sober Calvinistic church exerted on him, how he learned to celebrate the Lord’s Supper four times a year, and how he learned to experience deeply the three motifs of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (sin, grace, and gratitude). In 1953 Wolterstorff began to study philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and later at Harvard University.

After receiving his Ph.D. from Harvard, he was professor at Calvin College from 1959-1989 for thirty years, after which he lectured at Yale until 2004. Wolterstorff published 16 books and more than 140 scholarly articles. His thought covered ontology (the study of being), epistemology (theory of knowledge), education, and the arts. No matter how diverse those areas are, one can discern a recurring theme in his thought. Throughout his life Wolterstorff has been engaged in thinking deeply about Christianity, and also in defending it against the attacks that are made, especially by the atheistically motivated Anglo-Saxon philosophy, on Christianity in general and on Christian scholarship specifically. According to honorary promotor H. E. S. Woldring, professor of political philosophy at the vu University, Wolterstorff’s work can be regarded as ‘pioneering, original, and challenging. The pioneering, original, and challenging character of Wolterstorff’s thought lies in the manner in which he thinks creatively and deeply about the Christian faith and relates it to philosophical questions, and, conversely, opens philosophical perspectives on Christianity.’

In order to have Christianity regarded seriously, also in the strongly secularized scholarship, Wolterstorff discounts so-called foundational thought that declared that human knowledge must be based on indubitable foundations. Philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and Rudolf Carnap maintained that only elementary mathematics and logical statements could be counted among such knowledge. Wolterstorff criticized such thought, because it would be normative and would do
Nicholas Wolterstorff.
away with significant sections of scholarly theories as ‘without foundations.’ Wolterstorff was not the only one who criticized foundational thought (his better-known countryman Richard Rorty did the same), but Wolterstorff did not draw completely relativistic conclusions from his critique of foundational thought. Foundational thought is not false in itself, but one must seek a better theory. Wolterstorff thus sought a connection with the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796) who declared that man can trust his God-given, healthy thought and powers of observation. Faith in God, according to Wolterstorff, would be rational without proof or reasons. Faith is ‘immediate,’ that is, without the interposition of proofs or arguments. According to honorary promotor Woldring, this approach of faith in God was criticized by atheists as well as Roman Catholics, but Wolterstorff ‘had also persuaded many.’ Among these many was Woldring himself, and, following in his footsteps, many other philosophers at the v u University. Wolterstorff at times defended his Christian faith alone, but often also in cooperation with his professional colleague, Alvin Plantinga, who preceded him in 1995 as an honorary doctor at the v u University. Both stood on the basis of a renewed Reformational epistemology, which harked back to a long tradition at the v u University. In their own manner and in their own time Plantinga and Wolterstorff have attempted to carve out a place for Reformational philosophy, and have tried to find affiliation with the great and renowned pioneers at the v u University, H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, who, in the thirties of the previous century first provided an interpretation of Reformed philosophy.
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