

A totally unexpected new book of Vollenhoven

Book presentation. Vollenhoven symposium. Amsterdam. Free University. 15 August 2011.

Dr. K.A. Bril

In 1963 Vollenhoven gave a number of guest lectures in Potchefstroom. There were 24 lectures in all.

All these lectures have now been made available in book form. It is a completely new book, for there was no manuscript. It is, as if it appeared out of nothing.

In Potchefstroom all the lectures were taped on a recording machine in the classical format of that time, with double play tape spools, 17 centimetres in diameter, 720 metres in length. In total the 24 lectures took up more than 1500 metres of tape.

In 1970 I received these tapes, from dr. Bennie van der Walt (here present) who remarked: “Maybe you can do something with these.”

In 1970 and 1971 the lectures were typed with the help of a dictaphone by Ms. Johanna M. Leerling (here present) and others and the services of the Philosophy Department. It resulted in a typescript of 197 folio sized pages.

But – some passages on the tapes were difficult to follow, for example when Vollenhoven wrote something on the board, with his back to the microphone. And when he explained what he had drawn on the board, the diagram was not available.

Hence the typescript was not yet ready for publication. And personal computers were not yet in.

These large tapes are now out-dated and it was difficult to find a machine on which to play them. But Mr. Lûtsen de Vries agreed to transfer the sound onto CDs. Mr. de Vries known as being a church organist, was a sound technician. All the material of the tapes could be fitted onto two CDs in 2007.

In the meantime we could work with personal computers. In 2009 the 200 pages were scanned and made workable in Word. After some initial stagnation this time-consuming work was done by Mrs. Marg de Vos (here present).

Then, as of 2010, the computer is so advanced that one could listen to the text while reading the scanned version. That made it possible to definitely edit the text.

The result surprised me.

The Result

The result was indeed a big surprise. For Vollenhoven had the reputation that his texts are compact and difficult to understand. But when asked to give guest lectures, he was expected to speak in a way that others could follow. Someone, who read the typescript, wrote: "I have never read such clear articles by Vollenhoven".

The moment too was ideal. In these last year's just before his retirement Vollenhoven was able to (tentatively) round off his research.

There is a second surprise.

When I saw the topics of the presentations for this symposium and for the conference this week, the special relevance of Vollenhoven's book struck me.

- The topic of the conference, the creation order, is extensively discussed in chapters 2, 4 and 8. But it is also in the background of the whole series of the lectures.
- There are also extensive discussions, of specific topics on the agenda of the conference, such as anthropology, psychology, theology and evolution.

Vollenhoven, one of the two founders of Reformational philosophy, has always had a clear perspective as to what this philosophy stands for. His perspective is still not extensively shared, though it continues to be relevant for philosophy today and for our life-practice.

There is also something else.

Reading Vollenhoven, one is constantly struck by how he thinks and speaks from out of his and our biblical-Christian life-conviction.

There is much to learn from Vollenhoven. He has philosophical insight to pass on.

Also Vollenhoven touches the heart.

These are the reasons why he makes me enthusiastic, and that may be the case with you too.

Potchefstroom

Nearly 50 years ago the lectures contained in this book were delivered at Potchefstroom, South-Africa – about 9000 kilometre from here, we are today.

I regard it as appropriate that a copy of this printed version should re-travel the same route.

Therefore I invite prof. Michael Heyns, Director of the School of Philosophy at Potchefstroom to receive the first copy.

However, may a friendly request accompany this presentation to you prof. Heyns: Will your School and /or your Centre for Foundational Studies at the North West University please seriously consider the translation and publication of this book into English, the lingua franca of today?

In this way South Africa could make a significant contribution to our international community of Reformational scholarship.

Vollenhoven, D.H.Th. (2011) *Gastcolleges wijsbegeerte. Erfenis voor het heden*. Red. K.A. Bril en R.A. Nijhoff. Amstelveen, De Zaak Haes, 2011. 292 p. ISBN 978 90 77157 008. €32.50

In the meantime, an English translation is in the making under auspices of 'Potchefstroom'.