The mission of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies is to carry out top-level research using a variety of methods and approaches. The central topic of the philosophical programmes is the concept of ‘rationality’. Rationality is often seen as a distinctive characteristic of human beings. What does it mean to be a rational being, and how can ‘rationality’ be defined? From what standpoint can we judge the rationality of the beliefs, actions and practices of ourselves and of others? What are the foundations of rationality and how has this concept developed over time? The research programmes in the fields of theology and religious studies focus on the development and interaction of religions in their various social, cultural and political contexts. Their central topic is the concept of ‘transformation’, studied as a process of change in religious and spiritual identities, both at the level of the individual believer and at the collective level of communities and institutions.

A systematic study of rationality is carried out in the following four research programmes:

- **Cognition, Interpretation and Context** – This programme relates to conceptions of belief, cognition and language. It addresses the various ways in which we interpret and understand human behaviour.
- **The Project of a Hermeneutic Philosophy** – In this programme the relationship between rationality, meaning and interpretation is examined.
- **From Natural Philosophy to Science** – This programme focuses on the emergence of science as the paradigm of rational thinking in Western Europe.
- **Ethos, Polis and Religion** – This programme focuses on the concept of ‘practical rationality’ and its impact on ethics, politics, and religion.

The study of the transformations of religions and religiosity in their various social, cultural and political contexts is carried out in the following five research programmes:

- **Trajectories of Religiosity** – This programme combines comparative religious studies with the anthropology of religion and focuses on ritual, religiosity, and the history of religions.
- **Biblical Studies, Ancient Judaism, Early Christianity, and Gnosticism** – This programme focuses on biblical and extra-biblical texts that reflect religious transformations in social, political or religious contexts.
- **Transformations of the Concepts, Practices and Representation of Discipline in Christianity** – This programme studies concepts and practices of ‘discipline’ in the history of Christianity.
- **Transformation of Religion within the Frameworks of Modernity** – This programme investigates the effects of social and cultural transformation on the normative quality of religious interpretative systems.
- **Religious Identity Transformation in Context** – This programme develops theories about the transformation of religious identity within a pluralizing and individualizing context.
Research facilities
The faculty library, which is integrated into the central humanities library, houses excellent collections of books and journals on philosophy (especially the history of philosophy), theology and religious studies. In addition, it houses one of the world’s largest microfilm collections of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts on logic, semantics, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and theology. The library possesses several special collections, such as the Egyptological collection of books named after the Nijmegen professor J.M.A. Janssen, and the collection of the Titus Brandsma Institute, a fine collection of books and journals on spirituality and mysticism.

The humanities library also houses the collection of the Catholic Documentation Centre, which includes a wealth of audio-visual materials, as well as a collection of about 1000 interviews on CD-ROM with Dutch missionaries about their work overseas – a unique source for anthropological and missiological research.

Collaboration
Individual researchers participate in national research schools such as the Netherlands Research School for Practical Philosophy, the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER) and the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS).

The Institute has formal agreements of cooperation with the DePaul University (Chicago), the University of Edinburgh, the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), the University of Helsinki, the University of Istanbul, the University of Krakow, the University of Leuven, the University of Münster, the University of Paris IV (La Sorbonne), the University of Rome (La Sapienza), the University of Sao Paolo and the University of Stellenbosch.

Researchers in the fields of theology and religious studies collaborate closely with several Nijmegen-based institutes such as the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, the Titus Brandsma Institute, the Institute of Catholic Education and the Nijmegen Institute of Mission Studies.
Research results

Cognition, Interpretation and Context
Within the framework of this philosophy programme, Prof. Marc Slors developed a new approach to psychopathologies, according to which psychopathologies are – at a fundamental level – dysfunctions in our basic, body-based orientation to the physical and social world, rather than dysfunctions at higher levels of cognition. He organized, together with Dr Bart Geurts, an international workshop on mind reading, which brought together linguists, philosophers, and psychologists to discuss Theory of Mind and related topics. The members of the NWO project Quantity Matters were strongly represented at the Amsterdam Colloquium, which is the main international conference on semantics. Veni fellow Dr Corien Bary continued to work on direct and indirect reports and on the related distinction between mention and use.

The Project of a Hermeneutic Philosophy
In the context of his Veni project on present-day philosophical conceptions of plurality, Dr Gert-Jan van der Heiden examined to what extent the critique of Alain Badiou and others on the hermeneutic paradigm is viable. He also published a volume on the importance of ‘subjectivity’ in phenomenology (together with László Tengelyi, Inga Römer and Karel Novotný). Dr Veronica Vasterling concentrated on the hermeneutic and phenomenological import of Hannah Arendt’s philosophy of plurality. Prof. Philippe Van Haute investigated the topicality of the psychoanalytic approach to philosophical anthropology. Prof. Ben Vedder and Dr Gert-Jan van der Heiden successfully applied for a five years research project entitled Overcoming the Faith-Reason Opposition, on the importance of Saint Paul’s letters in contemporary philosophy.

From Natural Philosophy to Science
Dr Sander de Boer defended his PhD thesis on the transformations of the Aristotelian science of the soul between 1260 and 1360. Dr Hiro Hirai concluded his book entitled Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy. This book documents for the first time the importance of medical humanism to the emergence of early modern science. Dr Carla Rita Palmerino demonstrated that up to the Newtonians of the early eighteenth century, natural philosophers routinely assumed the existence of an isomorphism between all extended magnitudes (space, time and matter). Dr Leen Spruit, an Associated Researcher at the Center of the History of Philosophy and Science, discovered the earliest manuscript of Spinoza’s Ethica in the Vatican. This discovery, which was front-page news in various national and international newspapers, sheds new light on the evolution of Spinoza’s most famous book and on the early ecclesiastic attempts to prevent its dissemination. Prof. Paul Bakker worked on the concluding volume of his NWO Vidi project during a research sabbatical at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS).

Ethos, Polis and Religion
Researchers involved in this philosophy programme worked on the role of Aristotelian ‘naturalistic’ ethics in the domains of socio-biology and the social sciences. Dr Marcel Becker and Prof. Paul van Tongeren showed that Aristotle’s ethics offers unexpected
Dutch Catholics, and unexplored possibilities to account for human freedom and responsibility. Dr Marin Terpstra and Prof. Evert van der Zweerde focused on the philosophical analysis of current theories of democracy and their underlying assumptions. They also studied the controversial role of religion and the meaning of the theory of secularization. Prof. Paul van Tongeren completed a further set of lemmata for the Nietzsche-Wörterbuch and a book on nihilism and morality during a research sabbatical at NIAS.

Trajectories of Religiosity
Researchers involved in the NWO Refiguring Death Rites project – led by Prof. Venbrux and Dr Quartier – showed how new ritualizations of death in the Netherlands entail new notions of religiosity. Prof. Van der Velde’s comparative research revealed remarkable contrasts between Asia and the West with respect to the interpretation of the Buddha image and the saintly figure of the Dalai Lama. Against the background of the momentous changes in the Middle East, researchers of Islamic studies focused on the significance of concepts such as ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ in the context of the ‘Arab Spring’. Dr Roel Meijer examined the Arab revolts in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Syria and Bahrain. Dr Joas Wagemakers studied the ideological and national background of the concept of ‘citizenship’ for Saudi Shiites, its practical application and its implications for the future. He also obtained a NWO Veni grant for a project on Jordanian Islamic political and social activists (Loyal Subjects or Reluctant Inhabitants?). Dr Martijn de Koning focused on Salafism as a social movement. The role of artistic expressions as mobilizing forces within revolutionary changes has been taken up by Nina ter Laan MA, who received a Radboud University Frye Stipend, and Prof. Karin van Nieuwkerk.

Biblical Studies, Ancient Judaism, Early Christianity, and Gnosticism
Prof. Ellen van Wolde continued the debate on the meaning of the Hebrew verb ‘bara’ (‘to separate’), instead of ‘to create’) and its consequences for a new understanding of biblical texts on creation. Prof. Van Wolde’s views were discussed at the Annual Meeting of the American-based Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco. In New Testament studies, Prof. Jan van der Watt focused on various aspects of Johannine ethics. He developed a new interpretation of the concept of ‘leadership’ in Johannine literature.

Transformations of the Concepts, Practices and Representation of Discipline in Christianity
Prof. Daniela Müller (with Dr Gian Ackermans) published on the position of church history as an academic discipline in its own right and on various models of female leadership in the Middle Ages. Dr Gian Ackermans studied the eighteenth-century conflict in the Catholic Church of the Northern Netherlands, which resulted in the Old Catholic Schism of 1723. He showed that the personal interaction between the bishop and the priests had a huge impact on the genesis of the schism which to this day divides Dutch Catholics.

Transformation of Religion within the Frameworks of Modernity
Dr Inigo Bocken organized a conference in Hildesheim (Germany) on Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau. He also reconstructed the life and work of Charles de Bovelles (1470-1560). Aloys Wijnngaards, MA concluded his research on the connection of public theology and economics. He investigated a dominant idea in neo-classical economics that separates positive assessments of market behavior and normative assessment of ethics and the meaning of life. Dr Ria van den Brandt and Kazsia Szurmiak, MA explored new themes in holocaust studies, focusing on religious and existential discourses of Jewish victims and survivors of the Shoah.

Religious Identity Transformation in Context
Dr San van Eersel defended his PhD thesis on interreligious communication between teachers and students in primary schools. Dr Paul Vermeer studied the effects of religious upbringing on the basis of a unique longitudinal, panel dataset of more than 400 families. Prof. Chris Hermans and Dr Theo van der Zee studied afterlife beliefs of primary school children to enhance theory formation on the development of religious beliefs. In the NWO funded research programme Ethno-religious conflicts in Indonesia and the Philippines, led by Dr Carl Sterkens, large-scale quantitative survey data were gathered on this subject (3000 respondents randomly sampled). Prof. Frans Wijnen started a project on post-colonial immigrants in the Netherlands.

Societal impact
The Institute incorporates the Soeterbeeck Programme, which promotes reflection and public debate on matters of science, society, religion and worldviews, and the Kaski (Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut) – a Catholic research center specializing in issues of religion and society. The Kaski publishes advisory reports at the request of various societal organizations. Individual members of the Institute regularly participate in forum discussions and contribute to public debate by publishing articles in newspapers, giving talks on the radio and in other media.

In 2011, Dr Marcel Becker taught a series of seminars to civil servants about integrity and public administration. The seminars were organized in collaboration with the Office for Promoting Integrity in the Public Sector (BIOS). He also offered a seminar at the Court of Justice in Arnhem about ethics and the quality of jurisdiction. Researchers in Islamic studies cooperated in the Islam Research Project (IRP) on Saudi Arabia initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The results of their work should be directly useful in Dutch foreign policies. Dr Roel Meijer’s book on The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe has been adapted to appeal to a more general Dutch audience in order to increase its societal impact. Dr Paul Vermeer’s findings of his research on religious upbringing have been published in several national journals such as Trouw and the Reformatorisch Dagblad. He presented
Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies

Key publications


Dissertations: 7
Scientific publications: 176
Professional publications: 61

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Identity. The third programme will examine the dynamics of moral, political and religious communities. Researchers study themes such as secularisation and sacrality, state and social cohesion, and religion in the public sphere. Researchers in the fields of philosophy, theology and religious studies will closely collaborate within the framework of these three new research programmes. They will continue and intensify their cooperation with colleagues from the Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies and the Centre of Language Studies in the framework of two multidisciplinary research themes: Europe’s Identities Past and Present and Language in Mind and Society.

As of January 2012, the PhD training programmes of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, the Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies and the Centre of Language Studies have been integrated in the newly founded Graduate School for the Humanities.

Future research

Within the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, three new research programmes are currently being developed that will formally replace the existing programmes in philosophy, theology and religious studies as of January 2013.

The first programme will focus on the relationship between philosophy, theology and science as rivals in explaining and interpreting the world. Researchers study the various ‘knowledge claims’ of philosophy, theology and the (natural and social) sciences from a historical and contemporary point of view. The second programme will concentrate on the various relationships between culture, religion and cognition. It will not only focus on the role of cognitive mechanisms in the formation and development of culture and religion, but also on the role of culture in a broad sense (including religious phenomena) in the formation of the human mind and identity. The third programme will examine the dynamics of moral, political and religious communities. Researchers study themes such as secularisation and sacrality, state and social cohesion, and religion in the public sphere. Researchers in the fields of philosophy, theology and religious studies will closely collaborate within the framework of these three new research programmes. They will continue and intensify their cooperation with colleagues from the Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies and the Centre of Language Studies in the framework of two multidisciplinary research themes: Europe’s Identities Past and Present and Language in Mind and Society.

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