

8. Engelse samenvatting van de biografie.

I just finished the biography of the astronomer Marcel Minnaert. Its title is *The Skirt of the Universe* after a poem of Lucebert who called man a crumb on the skirt of the universe.

Ten years ago while I was working on my Ph.D. on the Association of Scientific Workers, the Dutch version of this international movement (1946-1980), I made the decision to write this biography. Indeed, on behalf of the University of Utrecht I wrote a booklet: 'Marcel Minnaert (1893-1970): A teacher for life.' It appeared as a 48 page edition in March 1998 on the occasion of the opening of the 'Minnaert building of this University. Apart from my work as a historian, I teach science at the Erasmus Gymnasium in Rotterdam, a grammar school specialised in A-levels. During the next course (2000-2001) I can devote myself to this biography, as the Netherlands organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) has agreed to my writing a biography of this scientist and has granted me a scholarship that will 'free' me from my job and forthcoming obligations.

Marcel Minnaert (1893-1970) is a well known scientist and educator who had many contacts all over the world. During his life he was a member of many commissions of the International Astronomical Union (1930-1970), and winner of the Bruce Medal. I translate here a remark of the French astronomer J.C. Pecker on the occasion of an honorary Ph.D. of the University of Nice (1970), that highlights his significance: "Just in time Minnaert put two tools into our hands that the research of the sun needed: spectra that were good enough to be useful in quantitative analysis, and a theory that was sufficiently put forward to have a quantitative significance and that could serve as an interpretative scheme for the spectra. In those days there were three people in the world that founded what was to be the quantitative analysis of the universe, three people that put the sun in their testtubes: Russell in the USA, Unsöld in Germany and Minnaert in Utrecht. In comparison to the work of these two other men, the work of Minnaert is characterized by its practical direction, by the ease in which it could be applied while supplying enough scientific stronghold. Unsöld was perhaps scientifically speaking the most strict, Russell had the most general approach, but it was probably Minnaert who, more than the two others, opened the way to what has become that essential branch of astrophysics."

My study of Minnaert will also emphasize his opinions and achievements in the field of 'Science and Society'. The fact that he became a scholar in the Netherlands in the first place was due to his flight from Flanders November 1918, Belgium, where he had played a major part in Flemish activism. All his life he remained a committed member of the Flemish Movement (Vlaamse Beweging). In the thirties he became known as a leftwing socialist and anti-fascist. After 1945 he took part in the above mentioned movement that carries names like Bernal, Blackett, J. Huxley, Haldane and Joliot-Curie. He knew most of them personally. When Irène Curie visited Holland in favor of the Stockholm Appeal, she would stay at the Minnaerts'. The biography will necessarily deal with the unison of and the collisions between the scientific, educational and social thoughts of Marcel Minnaert. The biography will be presented in the Minnaert Building in Utrecht on the 23rd of April 2003..