

# Discriminating Love

Research Programme Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology (BEST)

2018-2023

## 1. Mission and Vision of BEST

In research group Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology (BEST), biblical scholars and systematic theologians cooperate to stimulate the interaction between those two fields of research, which have too long suffered from compartmentalization. On the one hand, fresh insights from Biblical studies shed new light on systematic questions. In this interaction, Biblical theology function as bridge between Biblical studies and dogmatics. On the other hand, systematic questions give a deepening impulse to Biblical studies by laying bare presuppositions and by stimulating distinctly theological readings of Biblical texts.

We strive for an inspiring understanding of Scripture that has a central interest in God and his works, and a systematic theology that is continuously refreshed by Scriptural input and not strapped by rigid conceptual structures, be it traditional or contemporary. The BEST group is based in the Netherlands and wishes to disclose the rich Dutch Reformed tradition to an international audience.

## 2. Title

Discriminating Love. God's Love As Distinctiveness, Preference, and Judgment

## 3. Overview of the Programme

BEST is an interdisciplinary research group in which researchers cooperate from three different fields: Old Testament studies, New Testament studies, and systematic theology.

The theme of the programme, 'Discriminating love' is the focal point of our research. In our conferences we work together on themes immediately related to our central theme. Biblical scholars and systematic theologians bring together their perspectives on aspects of our research theme. In 2018, our attention is directed to the people of God's preference, Israel. The theme of our 2020 conference will be "the nature/logic of God's love'. Our final conference will focus on 'Discriminations in the Bible' (2022). In this conference we will look back on our research in the past years and formulate conclusions of our research up to that moment.

Furthermore, we strive to formulate research projects that are directly connected to the central theme of our research programme. Moreover, we will all write articles on the theme of 'discriminating love' in which we bring our research projects in direct relation to the research theme. As a result, the different projects will all contribute to a better understanding of our central theme.

Coherence is created also by interdisciplinary projects. One of our long term ambitions is to bring Biblical studies and systematic theology into a fruitful cooperation. Thus, we stimulate co-productions by BEST-researchers from different disciplines in really interdisciplinary projects.

The subtitle of our programme mentions three aspects of God's love: distinctiveness, preference, and judgment. These different aspects show the theme 'discriminating love' opens a field with a variety of different sub-themes. Not all our research projects focus on the centre of the theme, still these projects also will contribute to our understanding of the theme by the publication of articles that address our central theme more directly.

#### 4. Researchers

##### *Senior researchers:*

Dr. K. van Bekkum

Dr. J.M. Burger (Programme secretary)

Prof. dr. J. Dekker

Prof. dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen

Prof. dr. A. Huijgen (Programme leader)

Dr. M. Klinker-De Klerck

Prof. dr. G. Kwakkel

Dr. M.C. Mulder

Prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels

Dr. R.T. te Velde

##### *Associate researchers:*

Dr. A. Versluis

##### *PhD Students:*

G.T. van Appeldoorn

A.J. den Heijer

Drs. H. de Waard

#### 5. Description of the Programme

##### a. Aim/objectives

##### *Background*

Our Western societies, philosophies and theologies are characterized by tensions between the unity of humanity as a whole and specific individualist, ideological, religious, ethnic or regional identities. While the Enlightenment emphasized the infinite value of humanity, human rights, and the principal

equality of all humans, it also showed individualizing tendencies that ultimately, stimulated by the idea of authenticity in Romanticism, emphasize the distinctions between humans. So, while discrimination, under Western conditions, is among the most abhorrent vices, people construct their identities by using real or imagined distinctions, that may or may not be harmful and/or violent. How do legitimate distinctions differ from discrimination? Much current debate is preoccupied with the balance between the need for cultural identities and the dangers of discrimination.

This debate is not confined to the academy, but also relates to recent developments in society, such as the renewed attention for national and regional identities, the longing for strong leadership and the rise of authoritarian regimes, also in parts of the world where a healthy system of checks and balances seemed to have prevailed.

### *Research Question*

The research programme for the years 2018–2023 of the research group BEST addresses an important issue against this background, with as its central question:

***How is the apparently discriminating nature of the love of God in Biblical texts and theological ideas to be interpreted and evaluated in light of the Reformed tradition?***

### *Theological concerns: God's discriminating love*

Not only the cultural tension between universality and particularity, but also genuine theological concerns make this question urgent for theology as such. A first theological concern involves the nature of God's love. Since the Christian tradition regards God as the God of all the earth, his love for his creation is universal. This is complicated, however, by the reality of sin in world, as the human choice against God. Against this background, the Bible and the Christian tradition also emphasize the particularity of God's love, primarily in the election of Israel, and, by extension, of the Church. A logic of love seems to presuppose a moment of choice, and the nature of love seems particular rather than universal. Still, God passionately loves righteousness.

It is apparent that God's love, as pictured in Biblical texts, draws distinctions between persons and peoples. God's love has a preference for righteous and vulnerable people, for those who fear him. Since this love is his own primary motive, not evoked by the objects of God's love—the Bible often emphasizes the unworthiness of the recipients of divine love—there is an apparent discrimination, although 'discrimination' should not be taken in the modern, defamatory sense, but rather in the sense that a *discrimen* is made. Against the present Western cultural background, the pressing question is how God's love, which discriminates between human beings, is to be interpreted and evaluated. On the one hand, the universality of mankind and God's universal reign suggest a negative evaluation, while on the other hand, the particularity of human life and the nature of God's grace suggest a positive one.

A second theological concern is raised by the suggestion of God's discriminating love by various texts in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Scriptures picture God as coming lovingly towards his creation and towards humanity, choosing to make himself vulnerable along the way. This culminates in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. The dynamics of grace and God's will that no one is lost, are expressed in Jesus' story of heavenly joy about one sheep that was found. Meanwhile, Jesus draws borders and frequently speaks of judgment and hell, just like the prophets of the Old Testament, and the New Testament letters highlighted not only God's love, but also his flaming anger, jealousy, and retreat. Human evil evokes God's judgment, whereas at the same time new life

is given through God's forgiving love. Accordingly, the tension of discriminating love is reflected in both Testaments, and particularly in the person of Jesus.

#### *Societal issues: the nature of love, interpreted*

The theological reflection on the nature of God's love has consequences for reflections on the nature of love as such and, therefore, for society at large. The following questions illustrate this: Is love per se universal, or particular? Does love only make friends, or enemies too? Does love lead to self-hatred and weakness in present cultural battles? Or is a love that goes beyond the borders of family, clan and tribe an indispensable element in building a society in which contradictions will always be present? Which concept of love is most suitable for the Christian tradition, the (religious) foundations of Western societies, and the present humanitarian challenges?

#### *Historical dimensions: theological ideas*

Finally, there is also an important historical dimension to this question. The present perception of love in late modern Western society is the result of a long cultural development and diverse influences and can also not be separated from the view of divine love in Judaism and Christianity. At the same time, this society has great difficulties in understanding why and how these traditions define love as something that is not merely universal and directed towards all humans and all of creation, but also makes a distinction between good and evil, separating sin from the sinner, discriminates between people, even in violent ways.

## b. Approach

#### *BE and ST, in light of the Reformed tradition*

The expertise of the research group Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology lies in the interface between biblical studies and theological reflection. The main question of the research programme will be answered with these dual focal points, while interdisciplinary and societal themes will also be taken into account, such as 'loving the stranger in your midst', 'loving the truth', and 'the Spirit who connects and divides.'

The research unit operates within the Reformed tradition. That is relevant, because this tradition has, more than other Christian traditions, emphasized the priority of God's love, the *discrimen* between the one person and the other not being due to personal qualities, but to God's electing grace. This grace does not merely distinguish between persons, but also within the person, in justification. Members of the BEST group are loyal to this tradition, of course not in the sense that they prefer traditional answers to present-day questions. Rather, Biblical texts will be studied with all modern methods available, and the aim is to communicate with the present cultural context.

## c. Innovative elements

An important innovative element of the BEST-group is that we bring together Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology. Often researchers in those disciplines work in splendid isolation, focusing on linguistic, historical, exegetical, philosophical or constructive methods and on their own specific field of interests. Christian theologians, however, should read Scripture with a theological interest (in

search of God), and reflect on theological themes listening to the Scriptures. Theological specialization and the huge amount of literature make it difficult for individual researchers to combine Biblical and systematic perspectives. Consequently, we strive to work together in one group to realize this really combination of perspectives that should be characteristic of all Christian theology.

#### d. Knowledge utilization

As researchgroup, we present ourselves every week in our own 'Theologenblog', in which we as theologians share some of our views on theology and on the actuality. This weblog is published on the websites of two Dutch Christian newspapers, the Nederlands Dagblad ([www.nd.nl/theologenblog](http://www.nd.nl/theologenblog)) and the Reformatorisch Dagblad ([www.rd.nl/thema/opinie/2016/theologenblog](http://www.rd.nl/thema/opinie/2016/theologenblog)).

Moreover, we collaborate with other researchers from TUA and TUK in post-academic education organized in PEP ([www.pepredikanten.nl/](http://www.pepredikanten.nl/)) and AKZ+ where researchers from TUA, TUK and VIAA (Zwolle) share their theological knowledge with the general public ([www.weetwatjegeloof.nl/](http://www.weetwatjegeloof.nl/)).

For the period 2018-2023 we plan furthermore to publish together popular publications related to our biannual conferences, one on Israel and one on the love of God. Furthermore, we will strive to organize one or more popular activities where BEST-researchers will present their researches in lectures or workshops to the general public.

## 6. International network

As BEST-researchers, we have our national and international networks. We plan to cooperate to reinforce and enlarge our networks. To realize this intention, we have several practical plans.

- a. We want to reinforce our international profile by organizing sessions under the flag of international societies like the European Association of Biblical Studies, the American Academy of Religion, the Society of Biblical Literature or the Evangelical Theological Society. The network of the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar at the ETS/SBL-conference serves as an inspiring example.
- b. Furthermore, we will build our network with peers who share this interest our theme and in in the interaction between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology. We plan to invite them to become partners or our research group.

## Research Projects

In our research, we want to develop first of all the interaction between Biblical Scholars and systematic theologians within our research group. To realize this, we organize our thematic conferences. Furthermore, we stimulate multidisciplinary projects.

But of course, we also have research project in the field of Old and New Testament studies as well as in systematic theology. Below, a short overview of research projects can be found.

### 1. Thematic conferences

1. Covenant
2. Israel as Hermeneutical Challenge
3. The Nature and Logic of God's Love
4. Discriminations in the Bible

### 2. Old Testament

#### 1. God's Love and Judgment in the OT Prophets

This is the largest Old Testament-projects and consist in several sub-projects.

- 1.1 Biblical Theological Contours of the Book of Isaiah (prof. dr. J. Dekker)
- 1.2 The Oracles Against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah (prof. dr. H.G.K. Peels)
- 1.3 Jeremiah 52: Text, Context, Redaction (drs. H. de Waard (PhD-student); supervisor prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels)
- 1.4 Shame and Disgrace in the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (drs. H.S. Kim (PhD-student; supervisor prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels)
- 1.5 The Vulnerability of God in the book of Jeremiah (drs. B. Kang (PhD-student); supervisor prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels)

Other Old Testament-projects

2. Divine Preference in Genesis 1-11 (prof. dr. K. van Bekkum, prof. dr. A. Huijgen)
2. Concepts of the Promised Land (prof. dr. K. van Bekkum)
3. Quohélet's Evaluation of Israel's History (J.-H. Seo (PhD-student); prof dr. K. van Bekkum (supervisor); prof. dr. G. Kwakkel (promotor))
4. Human Relations in Old Testament Ethics (dr. A. Versluis)

### 3. New Testament

1. Identity formation in the New Testament and Dead Sea Scrolls through the use of the contrast light and darkness (G. van Appeldoorn MA (PhD student); internal supervisor prof. dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen, external supervisor prof. dr. J.W. van Henten (UvA))

2. Babylon destroyed: an exegetical investigation into the communication strategy in Revelation 18 (drs. W. de Bruin (PhD student); supervisor prof. dr. H. G. L. Peels and dr. M.C. Mulder)
3. Abraham and the Riches of Christ: The Pauline Concept of Inheritance (R.P. Dodson (PhD student); prof. dr. Rob van Houwelingen, supervisor; dr. Michael Mulder, co-promoter)
4. God's Justice in the Catholic Epistles: The Stories of Cain & Abel and Sodom & Gomorrah according to James, John, Peter and Jude (C. Gunawan, MA (External PhD Student); first supervisor: prof. Dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen; other supervisors: dr. Pieter J. Lalleman and prof. dr. Stanley E. Porter)
5. The Public Performance of Paul in the book of Acts as Demonstration of God's Discriminating Love (Arco den Heijer MA (PhD student); prof. P.H.R. van Houwelingen, first supervisor; prof. B.J. Koet, second supervisor; dr. J. Barentsen, advisor)
6. Messengers of discriminating love. The twelve apostles as disciples of Jesus and missionaries of the gospel (prof. dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen)
7. Suffering from a perspective of honor and shame (dr. M.G.P. Klinker-De Klerck)
8. The resurrection of the beheaded and the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20.1-6: a study on the vindication of the martyrs (dr. Leandro A. de Lima (External PhD Student); first promoter: prof. dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen; second promoter: dr. J.W. van Henten)
9. Paul's Use of Scripture as a Formative Framework for his Understanding of God's discriminating Love for Israel and its Hermeneutical Impact (dr. M.C. Mulder)
10. The Vengeance of God in the New Testament (A. van den Os MA (PhD-student); internal supervisor: prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels, external supervisor: TBD)
11. Spiritus Interpres. Hermeneutical implications of the New Testament affirmations about the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (drs. B.A.T. Witzier (external PhD-student); prof. dr. T.M. Hofman, supervisor; prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels, co-supervisor)

#### 4. Systematic Theology

##### 1. The Trinity and the Logic of Love

- 1.1 A Trinitarian Hermeneutic of the Old Testament (prof. dr. A. Huijgen)
- 1.2 The Logic of Trinitarian Love (prof. dr. A. Huijgen)
- 1.3 Discriminating love in the Canons of Dordt (prof. dr. A. Huijgen; dr. R.T. te Velde)
- 1.4 Herman Bavinck's Theological Relationship with John Calvin in relation to the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Image of God (C. Choi (PhD-student); prof. dr. A. Huijgen, supervisor; G. Harinck second supervisor)
- 1.5 Spirit in Time – An investigation of the proprium of the Holy Spirit in His action in history (Pieter Nijse (external PhD-student); prof. dr. A. Huijgen, supervisor; P.M. Wisse second supervisor)
- 1.6 Christological concentration in the theology of Abraham van de Beek (Anne Th. van Olst (external PhD-student); prof. dr. A. Huijgen, supervisor; P.M. Wisse second supervisor)
- 1.7 Theosis in the Theology of Robert Jenson (Audy Santoso (external PhD-student); prof. dr. A. Huijgen, supervisor; C. van der Kooi second supervisor)

##### Other projects:

2. God Hidden and Revealed: A Reformed and an Eastern Orthodox Perspective (D. Bintsarovskiy, PhD student); prof. dr. B. Kamphuis, first supervisor; prof. dr. H. Boersma, second supervisor; dr. H. Burger, co-supervisor)

3. Discernment in Christ. Theological hermeneutics, Scripture and Participation in Christ (dr. J.M. Burger)
4. A critical examination of the idea of the 'fruitio Dei' as essence of the heavenly blessing (dr. A. van der Dussen)
5. The *filioque*-controversy (Drs. C. Lee (PhD Student); prof. dr. B. Kamphuis, supervisor)
6. Emotions in Religious Experiences in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards and Sarah Coakley: A Comparison (M.Y. Matalu (external PhD student; dr. J.M. (Hans) Burger, first supervisor; prof. dr. A.L. Th. (Ad.) de Bruijne, second supervisor; prof. dr. J.W. (Joke) van Saane, third supervisor).
7. Predestination (dr. R.T. te Velde)