

Who Is Like You Among the Gods?

The One and Three in a Pluralistic Context

Research Programme
Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology (BEST)
(intern)

2012—2017

Theological University Apeldoorn
&
Theological University Kampen

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1. Description of the Programme

This programme studies the uniqueness and character of God, as the one and the triune, in contexts of religious pluralism, both in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and in theology and present-day Western society.

On the one hand, the Scriptures and Christian doctrine claim that the intimate knowledge of YHWH and of Jesus as Messiah of Israel and Son of God by the Holy Spirit sets human beings free from the vicious circle of fate and from the scepticism that is the result of polytheism. On the other hand, it can be observed that both ancient and recent forms of religious pluralism contain an aversion to universal claims, because allegedly these would do injustice to the complexity of the world and in the end lead to suppression and violence. The programme engages in reflection on this tension.

In the West, the idea of universal truth as it existed during the Christian era and the period of the Enlightenment is gradually being exchanged for a new religious pluralism. Against this background, the following can be observed: the prophetic and apostolic witness as reflected in the Scriptures not only reacted to, but also exploited the language and images of the venerated polytheistic pantheons as they functioned from the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It is most striking that a similar interaction with contemporary contexts can be seen in the formulation of the Christian views of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In this interaction, the following two elements have proved central, both as identity markers and as definitions of the divine that developed in various contextual ways: (a) the statement of God's unique and aniconic nature – e.g. in the first and second commandments (Ex 20:3-6), in the Shema (Deut 6:4), and in the presentation by the apostles of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the Son of God and as the only name by which men can be saved (Acts 4:12); and (b) the confession of God's Trinity in Christian doctrine.

This tension and interrelation with the pluralistic context raise important questions. How is the confession of the one, triune God to be understood? Furthermore, how can the knowledge of this God and his liberating interaction with human concepts of the divine contribute to the understanding and witness of the gospel in the context of the religious plurality of the 21st-century West?

The programme will deal with these questions in several sub-programmes from the perspective of Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology (BEST), and at conferences focused on the interdisciplinary study of issues which are closely related to the main theme. The main challenge of this programme will be to bridge the gap between two different disciplines, exegesis and dogmatics, in order to stimulate the fruitful cooperation between biblical research and systematic reasoning with respect to the pivotal issue of how to articulate the confession of God in present-day's pluralistic society.

2. Composition and Research Input

Academic Staff

A. Tenured staff

Dr. K. van Bekkum (since 01 09 2012)

Dr. J.M. Burger (since 01 02 2015)

Prof.dr. J. Dekker

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

Dr. A. Huijgen

Prof.dr. B. Kamphuis

Prof.dr. G. Kwakkel

Dr. M.C. Mulder

Prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels

Dr. W.H. Rose

B. Non-tenured staff

Dr. K. van Bekkum (- 01 09 2012)

Dr. J.M. Burger (- 01 02 2015)

C. PhD-students

A. Dubbink

B. van Egmond M.A.

Drs. W. Huttinga

Drs. M. Klinker-De Klerck

Drs. A. Versluis

Drs. H. de Waard

Other Researchers

D. Associate researchers

Dr. H.R. van de Kamp

Dr. M.H. Oosterhuis

Dr. T.E. van Spanje

Dr. A. Versluis

Dr. P.L. Voorberg

E. External PhD-students

Drs. R.K. Alkema

Drs. W.P. van de Berg

Who Is Like You Among the Gods?

Drs. D. Bintsarovskiy

Drs. C.P. de Boer

Drs. J.J.T. Doedens

Drs. H.S. Kim

Drs. C. Lee

Drs. B.A.T. Witzier

3. Standard Regulations and Procedures

1. The Programme Leader, assisted by his two Secretaries, is responsible for making policy and executing initiatives that have been proposed and/or adopted by the group. The Programme Leader will pay particular interest to the academic interaction and exchange between members of the research group, in order to stimulate cooperation between biblical exegetes and systematic theologians.

2. Each year six meetings are organized:

- *August:*

a day meeting ('BEST-workshop') of the research staff, associate members and external PhD-candidates; during this meeting chapters written by PhD-students or articles by the research staff will be discussed;

- *October, December, April, June:*

a mid-day meeting with the research staff and associate members, closing twice with a short business meeting; during these regular meetings products by staff members or interesting articles/books by others will be discussed;

- *January/February:*

a conference of the research staff, associate members and external PhD-candidates with (an) invited speaker(s) from outside TUA/TUK (depending on the possibilities, this conference can be planned later in the year, changing the date with a regular meeting).

3. Proposals for doctoral research are discussed for approbation in a meeting of the research staff.

4. Supervisors give direction to their AIOs and PhD-students in agreement with the specific guidelines of their own university.

5. All members of the research group write an annual report to the Programme Leader which includes a statement of progress of their research, a survey of publications (both academic, professional, and popularizing), and conference papers related to the research projects. This report has to be handed in before 31 December of that year. In January of the following year the Programme Leader has individual contact with the senior members of the research staff (the chair holders are responsible for their AIOs and PhD-students) on the basis of these reports. The results will be discussed during the first regular business meeting of the group.

6. Each year an annual report is composed on the basis of the reports of the members, discussed by the research staff, and then sent to the individual Governing Boards of both universities.

4. Projects

4.1 *Old Testament*

4.1.1 Pentateuch and Theology

1. *YHWH and the land of Canaan – Concepts of the Promised Land*

a. Researcher

Dr. K. van Bekkum

b. Description

To the surprise of many modern Bible readers, geographical descriptions offer a valuable contribution to the message of biblical books. In addition, the depictions can be exploited in combination with non-biblical texts and archaeological remains in order to reconstruct their origin and use by the ancient scribes, for the texts mostly refer to actual borders, locations and regions. Accordingly, a vital question in studying these texts is how the references to the *realia* are related to the monotheistic and often confronting message of biblical historiography and prophecy. This becomes even more intriguing in those cases – for example in the descriptions of the Promised Land – in which the texts depict one and the same area.

For almost a century, the geographical descriptions and depictions of the land of Israel in Numbers 34:1-12; Joshua 13—19; Judges 1:1-36; 1 Kings 4:7-19; Ezekiel 47:13-20 stand out as possible sources used by Israelite scribes in order to create their image of the past. Scholars studied the geography of the lists and districts and attempted to date them, while synchronic studies revealed that they clearly function in a storyline that is most of the time very critical of the way Israel deals with the religious pluralism of its environment.

This raises the question what process of identity formation and orientation can be observed in this (re)shaping of texts and their ideological claim to places and regions and what image of YHWH is presupposed in the use of these descriptions. The project combines a historiographical analysis of the texts using literary and historical-geographical studies with archaeological and non-biblical historical information regarding the social structure of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Southern Levant. In the end this should lead to biblical-theological conclusions.

c. Aim

The following questions are to be answered. What is the meaning of the diverse descriptions of the land? How were they used in Israel's identity formation and orientation? Is it possible to describe the nature of the prophetic criticism and witness in these passages? What historical and theological development can be observed in the use of the concept of the Promised Land?

d. Embedding

The passages exploit descriptions of physical land in ancient near eastern terms in order to communicate monotheistic and sometimes highly critical messages. The project studies both the interrelation with the historical context of the texts and the unique identity of YHWH as portrayed in these passages. In this way, it matches the objectives of the BEST Research Project ‘Who is Like You Among the Gods?’.

e. Intended output

- ‘Coexistence as Guilt. Iron I Memories in Judges 1’, in: G. Galil *et al.* (ed.), *The Ancient Near East in the 12th-10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History* (AOAT, 392), Ugarit Verlag, Münster 2012, 525-548
- ‘Remembering and Claiming Ramesside Canaan. Historical-topographical Problems and the Ideology of Geography in Joshua 13:1-7’ (book chapter in: E. Noort (ed.), *The Book of Joshua and the Land of Israel* (BETL, 250), Louvain 2012, 247-260
- ‘The Use and Ideological Impact of Geography in Numbers 34’ (article; 2013)
- ‘Prophetic Views of the Land and the Date of Israel’s Conquest of Canaan’ (article; 2013)
- Identity Formation in the Historiographic Use of the so-called ‘Solomonic District List’ (article; 2014)
- Paper on Ezekiel 47 (2013)

2. *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*

a. Researcher

Drs. J.J.T. Doedens (External PhD Student; prof.dr. G. Kwakkel Supervisor)

b. Description

As the bridge between the hopeful note at the end of Genesis 5 and the multiplication of the wickedness of man in Genesis 6:5-13, one would expect Genesis 6:1-4 to describe how mankind was heading in the wrong direction. However, the interpretation of the passage is largely complicated by its obscurity. History of exegesis shows that this is not only true for the modern reader. Exegetical questions are numerous. To what kind of events is the text referring? Who are the ‘daughters of men’? To whom is the text referring by *nephilim* and *gibborim*? What is the aim of YHWH’s reaction to what is happening? To what aim does the text mention the time limit of 120 years?

The main exegetical crux in the passage is the question who are meant by the expression ‘sons of God’. In more recent research, the dominant interpretation is that the ‘sons of God’ are to be seen as divine beings or deities. According to this view, the text draws on polytheistic concepts from the context of Israel and by doing so gives evidence of the use of ancient Near Eastern mythology. In fact, the passage is considered to be a full-fledged myth that appears to be incorporated rather uncritically into the Old Testament.

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The study tests this latter view by exploring the history of exegesis of the passage and by weighing the pros and cons of the main interpretive solutions. Special attention is given to the interpretation that the ‘sons of God’ are to be identified as divine beings or deities, the so-called mythological approach. Within this context, the study will explore the Old Testament references to its polytheistic context in contrast to the Old Testament confession of YHWH’s unicity and incomparability. In this connection, the inscriptions uncovered in Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, which give evidence of the concrete polytheistic context of Israel, are taken into account. If mythological concepts have to be accepted as being present in the passage, the impact of this view on the Old Testament confession of YHWH’s unicity and incomparability has to be reflected on.

c. Aim

The aim of the project is threefold.

1. It provides an overview and evaluation of possible exegetical outcomes on Gen 6:1-4;
2. It tries to show a new road towards the explanation of the passage in the context of Genesis and the Pentateuch;
3. It offers a contribution to the study of Old Testament revelation in its original polytheistic context and its relationship to Ancient Near Eastern myth.

d. Embedding

The project studies the relationship between the religion of Israel and its polytheistic context, and focuses on the identity of God in that it discusses the question how the Old Testament can speak about ‘sons of God’ while also maintaining that YHWH is the one and only God.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD thesis; 2013)

3. *Our God is a consuming fire*

a. Researcher

Bart Dubbink MA (PhD Student; prof.dr. G. Kwakkel Supervisor)

b. Description

The concept of YHWH as a ‘jealous’ God (אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה) is today generally linked with and studied in connection with Israelite (exclusive) monotheism. YHWH is ‘jealous’: He claims to be the One and Only True God, and therefore His people are not allowed to serve other gods. This type of claim of YHWH is often associated with the (possible) violent implications of Israelite (exclusive) monotheism. Occasionally (e.g. Assmann, Kirsch), the ‘jealous’ God is blamed for the violent acts of his followers in past (e.g. Phinehas, Eliah, Jehu) and present. Considering the central position of the concept of the ‘jealous’ God in the Old Testament (Ex. 20,5 [the second commandment!]; Ex. 34,14) and the (often in passing) use of this concept in current debate, it is surprising that no one has studied the meaning of this concept comprehensively,

especially in view of the current debate on monotheism. Besides, the Hebrew words קנא, קנאה and נקם (often translated as jealousy, envy, zeal) also have been studied insufficiently, and current developments in (cognitive) linguistics and the semantics of emotion words may add a great deal of clarity to their meaning.

To put it simply, the main question of this project is: what is the meaning of קנא, קנאה and נקם when assigned to God, to what concept do texts refer where these words are used, and how can the results be interpreted in the context of the debate on monotheism. In the end this project (1) leads to a deepening of our understanding of the image of God in the Old Testament and (2) is a contribution to the debate on monotheism and intolerance.

c. Aim

This project helps to answer the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of קנא, קנאה and נקם in the Old Testament, esp. when connected with God?
2. To which concept(s) do the נקם-texts contribute?
3. What do the נקם-texts reveal about the identity of YHWH and the image of God in the Old Testament?
4. How could the study of the concept(s) the נקם-texts refer to contribute to the monotheism debate?

d. Embedding

This project investigates one of the main aspects in the Old Testament of YHWH being a ‘monotheistic’ God and the implications that this concept entails for his people. The tension with our pluralistic context is discussed in particular through studying the use of the concept of the נקם-texts in the monotheism debate.

e. Intended output

- Papers (2013-2016)
- ‘The Meaning of נקם in the Context of the Prosperity of the Wicked’ (article; 2013)
- ‘Human נקם in the Old Testament’ (article; 2014)
- ‘YHWH, language, emotion’ (article; 2015)
- ‘Het ambigue gebruik van het Oude Testament in het monotheïsmedebat’ (article; 2016)
- Monograph (PhD thesis; 2017)

4. *YHWH and Balaam*

a. Researcher

Dr. M.H. Oosterhuis

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b. Description

The person and the prophetic activity of Balaam, son of Beor from Pethor, as described in Numbers 22—24 have drawn the attention of many Old Testament scholars. The excavation of the Deir ‘Alla Balaam Inscription in 1967 has substantially contributed to this attention.

This project investigates the prophetic performance of Bileam according to Numbers 22—24, making use of the study of the Balaam Inscription of *Deir ‘Alla*. It offers a sketch of what can be said of the person of Balaam, his roots and spiritual background, his international fame and authority, but it mainly studies several aspects of Numbers 22—24: (a) the way in which YHWH relates to Balaam, with special focus on the varying use of the divine names YHWH and God; (b) Balaam’s relation to YHWH, with special focus on Balaam’s talking about God and his use of divine names; (c) the way Balaam deals with God’s revelation, with special focus on the submission to YHWH’s authority; (d) the acknowledgement of the authority of Balaam’s message.

c. Aim

Goal of my investigation is to contribute answers to at least the following questions:

- Who is YHWH according to Numbers 22—24 and how does He relate to the gods?
- Does YHWH reveal himself among non-Yahwistic prophets and peoples?
- What purpose does YHWH’s engagement with Balaam serve?
- What light does this story shed on the history of religion in the Southern Levant?

d. Embedding

This investigation deals with questions about the image and the uniqueness of the God who reveals Himself through the Bible and in Jesus Christ.

e. Intended output

- One or two scholarly articles (e.g. in SJOT or ZAW)
- Commentary on Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers in the Dutch series *De Brug*

5. *The Command to Exterminate the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7)*

a. Researcher

Drs. A. Versluis (PhD Student; prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels Supervisor)

b. Description

In Deuteronomy 7, Israel receives YHWH’s command to exterminate the nations that live in the land of Canaan. Anything reminiscent of the religion of the Canaanites has to be eradicated. According to Deuteronomy 7, the motive for this command is the alleged religious danger that the Canaanites pose to Israel.

In Deuteronomy 7, the command to exterminate the nations of Canaan is closely connected to the nature of YHWH and to the exclusive relationship between YHWH and Israel. The tension between Israel and the religious world of Canaan is thus solved in a very

radical way, namely by exterminating a competing religion and its adherents. In our pluralistic context, such a text raises profound questions concerning the Old Testament view of God and its possible potential of legitimizing violence.

c. Aim

The aim of this study is to analyze and evaluate the command to exterminate the Canaanites. The following subjects are dealt with: (a) a thorough analysis of Deut. 7; (b) an inquiry into the attitude towards the nations of Canaan and its motives in the Old Testament as a whole; (c) an investigation of the historical background of these nations and of the command; (d) a biblical-theological interpretation and evaluation of the command to exterminate these nations.

d. Embedding

This study directly deals with the identity of God (what are the implications for the view of God if YHWH, according to the Old Testament, commanded this extermination) and with the way in which Israel should deal with the surrounding religious world. In the evaluation of this command, the tension with our pluralistic context is discussed. With respect to that particular issue, the discussion with systematic theologians may be fruitful.

e. Intended output

- *Geen verbond, geen genade. Analyse en evaluatie van het gebod om de Kanaänieten uit te roeien*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer 2012 (PhD thesis)
- Three English articles (peer-reviewed journals; 2013)
- A popularizing publication
- English edition of the PhD thesis

4.1.2 Text and Theology of the Latter Prophets

The sub-programme ‘Text and Theology of the Latter Prophets’ consists of several research projects that focus on the textual and theological analysis of the so-called latter prophets of the Old Testament. In the books of these prophets the spiritual and religious struggle concerning the identity and character of YHWH, the God of Israel, comes to the fore in a unparalleled way. On the one hand these prophets, being children of their time, used and applied religious ideas and language in the broad framework of the existing political-religious patterns of thinking. On the other hand their message obviously clashed with the prevailing mainstream religious convictions, as they gave testimony to the wholly Other, YHWH, the unique God who pursues his own way with his people and the nations, amidst all socio-political turmoil.

The following projects are part of the sub-programme:

1. Biblical Theological Contours of the Book of Isaiah (Dekker);
2. Hosea, Prophet of God’s Exclusive Love (Kwakkel);

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3. Exegesis and Theology of the Book of Jeremiah (Peels, De Waard, Vazquez and Kim);
4. YHWH and His Agents on Earth in the Book of Zechariah (Rose);
5. ‘The Lion Has Roared’. Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament (Peels *et al.*).

1. Biblical Theological Contours of the Book of Isaiah

a. Researcher

Prof. dr. J. Dekker

b. Description

With regard to Isaiah ‘The Three-Book Interpretation’ that once replaced ‘The One-Prophet Interpretation’ in scholarly discussions has now been abandoned in favour of the ‘The One-Book Interpretation’. This is an important shift. Building on the results of historical and literary research, today a biblical-theological focus in our understanding of Isaiah is needed. It is the challenge of present-day biblical scholarship to come to a theological understanding of the Book of Isaiah in which the fruits of historical research are seriously and critically incorporated. What does the book of Isaiah, the message of which developed in confrontation with the ideological claims and religious systems of mighty political empires, communicate about the Almighty? Interestingly, Isaiah received the honorary title ‘the Fifth Gospel’ in the Early Church. For that reason we cannot restrict ourselves to the *theological* contours of the book of Isaiah. We have to ask for its *biblical theological* contours: How did the Isaianic proclamation of the Holy One of Israel contribute to the New Testament view of God as revealing himself in Jesus Christ? The Book of Isaiah will thus be investigated from a biblical-theological perspective and with a view to the Christian doctrine of God.

c. Aim

The intended result of the project is a series of articles in Dutch and English on several theological themes that are important from a biblical theological perspective and relevant for understanding the Christian doctrine of God within present-day’s pluralistic society. These articles are meant to clear the way to a monograph on the biblical theological contours of the Book of Isaiah.

d. Embedding

This project is part of the Research Program Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology 2012—2017 ‘Who are You Among the Gods? The One and the Three in a Pluralistic Context’. It can be expected that a study of the theology of the Book of Isaiah will provide pointers for interacting with the challenging questions of modern western society, because the political contexts in which the book came into existence were characterized by a religious plurality in terms of their inherent truth-claims. Throughout the centuries the Book of Isaiah has always provided inspiration for reflection on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian

doctrine of God. This remarkable fact testifies to the inherent theological quality of this book. A thorough biblical-theological understanding of Isaiah, therefore, can contribute to our understanding of the essence of the Gospel in the context of present-day's religious plurality.

e. Intended output

- 'Isaiah, Prophet in the Service of the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 1-39)', in: H.G.L. Peels & S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012), 40-64
- 'Eenheid en auteurschap van Jesaja' (article; 2012)
- 'The Servant and the Servants in Isaiah' (*Sárospataki Füzetek*; 2012)
- *Het evangelie volgens Jesaja. De knecht en de knechten*, Luisteroefeningen, Zoetermeer (2013)
- 'Leviatan in Jesaja' (chapter in book; 2014)
- 'God and the gods in Isaiah' (article; 2013)
- 'The people of God in Isaiah' (article; 2014)
- 'Israel and the nations in Isaiah' (article; 2015)
- 'Man before God in Isaiah' (article; 2016)
- 'Religion and politics in Isaiah' (article; 2017)
- 'Religion and ethics in Isaiah' (article; 2017)

2. Hosea, Prophet of God's Exclusive Love

a. Researcher

Prof.dr. G. Kwakkel

b. Description

It is typical of the Book of Hosea to describe the relationship between YHWH and Israel in terms of the bond of love uniting a husband and his wife. An important corollary of this idea is that YHWH demands exclusive love and that participation in the cult of other gods is considered tantamount to adultery. In Hosea, YHWH's aversion against the polytheistic practices of Israel is so strong that he even reveals himself as a predator, threatening to tear his people into pieces. In this project, Hosea will be studied in three ways:

1. Concise exegesis of the Hebrew text, with the help of standard commentaries such as those of Wolff, Rudolph, Macintosh and Ben Zvi;
2. A more penetrating analysis of the motifs of exclusive love and rejection of the cult of other gods;
3. Detailed exegesis of a limited number of short passages, in order to resolve cruces that traditionally have puzzled interpreters.

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c. Aim

The research project intends to explain to modern Bible readers what was at stake when Hosea addressed his original audience and how he reacted to the belief systems of his contemporaries. It also attempts to clarify the relationship between the description of God as a loving husband and the severe measures he takes against his own people. Furthermore, it will contribute to the solution of some long-standing puzzles in the interpretation of Hosea.

d. Embedding

The project studies the identity of the God of Israel as revealed in Hosea, in confrontation with its historical polytheistic context, and with an eye to the concerns of modern readers who are embarrassed by the religious intolerance which seems to be characteristic of Hosea's God. Papers with respect to exegetical problems or theological issues will be presented to international fora such as the European Association of Biblical Studies.

e. Intended output

- 'Prophets and prophetic literature', in: H.G.L. Peels & S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012), 1-16
- 'Hosea, prophet of God's love', in: H.G.L. Peels & S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012), 27-39
- 'The Wilderness in Hosea', in: Antje Labahn, Pierre Van Hecke (eds), *Conceptual Metaphors in Poetic Texts. Proceedings of the Metaphor Research Group of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Lincoln 2009* (Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts), Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013, 129-153
- Two articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *Vetus Testamentum*
- A short commentary on Hosea in the Dutch series *De Brug*

3. Exegesis and Theology of the Book of Jeremiah

General description

Text and theology of the Book of Jeremiah continuously intrigue its readers. This book shows many signs of a complicated history which is object of much discussion. On the one hand there is an important difference between the Hebrew and Greek text of the book, on the other hand the Jeremiah text has much affinity with the phraseology and ideas of the so-called Deuteronomistic History. The concrete historical background is the downfall of the kingdom of Judah during the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In these critical times of history, old certainties fall away, and the traditional image of God is under pressure. The ruin of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple seem to demonstrate the superiority of the widely venerated deities. What sense does it have to adhere to this One God who requires exclusive worship, whereas the plurality of international gods dominate the world? Then, amidst all

religious temptation and political confusion, the prophetic preaching point to a bewildering new way of living, via the exile.

This project aims at investigating the text and theology of Jeremiah via various angles:

1. an integral exegesis of the final part of the book, the collection of oracles against the nations Jer. 46—51, and the closing chapter Jer. 52 (H.G.L. Peels);
2. a detailed analysis of the closing chapter Jer. 52 and its relationship with the so-called Deuteronomistic History (H. de Waard);
3. a comparative investigation into the theme of shame/disgrace in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (H.-S. Kim);
- (4. Jeremiah 18; a problematic aspect of the God-talk in Jeremiah? [accepted proposal by H.-J. Vazquez]).

3.1 Exegesis of the Oracles Against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah

a. Researcher

Prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels

b. Description

An integral exegesis of the closing section of the book of Jeremiah, the so-called oracles against the nations in chapters 46—52. Historical as well as literary questions are at stake, with a special emphasis on the theological value of these prophecies. What is the image of YHWH communicated by these texts? How do they fit into their polytheistic context?

c. Aim

The purpose of this research is the publication of exegetical and biblical-theological articles on the preaching of the book of Jeremiah in academic journals, and a contribution to the international Jeremiah research with the publication of an exegetical volume in the series *Historical Commentary of the Old Testament* (Peeters, Leuven, also in Dutch in *Commentaar op het Oude Testament* (Kok, Kampen).

d. Embedding

The project contributes to the investigation of the image of God in the Old Testament, both by analyzing the God-talk and the ideas of divine intervention in the oracles against the nations, and by highlighting the uniqueness of God in confrontation with the political and religious constellation of Jeremiah's time.

e. Intended output

- 'Biddende bijwoners in Babel. Een exegese van Jeremia 29:4-7', in: G.C. den Hertog en H.G.L. Peels (red.), *Vreemdelingen en bijwoners. Opstellen rond een urgent theologisch thema* (Apeldoornse Studie 59), Apeldoorn 2012, 85-104.

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- ‘Jeremiah, prophet of ruin and ultimate hope’, in: H.G.L. Peels and S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared. Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012), 96-118
- “‘Before Pharaoh seized Gaza’. A Reappraisal of the Date, Function, and Purpose of the Superscription of Jeremiah 47’, *Vetus Testamentum* 63/1 (2013), 1-15
- Exegetical article (book chapter in Fs P.Wells; 2013)
- Article in *Schrift* (2013)
- Article on Leviathan (book chapter; 2013)
- Two peer-reviewed articles on Jeremiah (*VT* or *ZAW*; 2014 and 2017)
- Two articles in a thematic volume (image of God in the OT; *Theologia Reformata*; 2014)
- *Jeremia. Deel 4* (Commentaar op het Oude Testament, Kok Kampen; 2015/16)
- *Jeremiah. Volume IV* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, Peeters Leuven; 2015/16)

3.2 ‘Because of the Anger of the Lord’ – Jeremiah 52 between Prophecy and History

a. Researcher

Drs. H. de Waard (PhD Student; prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels Supervisor)

b. Description

Especially since the wake of the 20th century (B. Duhm), the Book of Jeremiah has been regarded more and more as a complex and composite part of literature. Today, it is quite mainstream to identify various voices in the book, each of which with its own perspective on the character of YHWH and his relationship with Israel (Judah) and the world (see e.g. the work of H.-J. Stipp). At the same time, several prominent scholars have pointed to the coherence between these voices – being brought together in this particular literary-ideological work they are meant to be heard as one interpretative voice that tries to make sense of the complexities of life, then and now (see e.g. the work of W. Brueggemann; L. Stulman).

The project focuses on the voice of Jeremiah 52 within the book, which is a remarkable one for two reasons. First, this is the last voice of the book and it speaks extensively about one of the book’s central themes, namely the capture of Jerusalem and the end of the Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC. Second, this voice is explicitly marked as a *Fremdkörper* within the book – not belonging to the ‘words of Jeremiah’ proper (see 51:64) – and shows a very close resemblance with the conclusion of the Book of Kings (2 Kings 24:18ff.). Thus, Jeremiah 52 stands in the center of a web of interpretative voices, which all try to give theological sense to Judaism’s most radical geo-political crisis. Hence, Jeremiah 52 deserves a thorough analysis, which is lacking until now.

In concrete terms, the project consists of the next four elements:

1. A synchronic analysis of Jeremiah 52 in its literary context (i.e. the Book of Jeremiah), both in the Masoretic text (MT) and in the Septuagint (LXX);

2. A synchronic analysis of 2 Kings 24:18—25:30. in its literary context (i.e. the Book of Kings and the Deuteronomistic History);
3. A diachronic analysis of the relationship between Jeremiah 52 (MT and LXX) and 2 Kings 24:18-25:30;
4. A diachronic analysis of Jeremiah 52 in its literary context (i.e. the Book of Jeremiah).

c. Aim

The primary aim of the project is to contribute to our understanding of the *scopus* of the Book of Jeremiah in its present form (MT), and of the relationship between the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Kings (and the Deuteronomistic History). To state it in more concrete terms: the project will search for an answer to the question how the voice of Jeremiah 52 coheres (or not) with the other voices in the Book of Jeremiah and how this chapter relates these voices to those of the Book of Kings. This will also provide fresh input for the study of the composition of the Book of Jeremiah and of the social-religious developments in (post-)exilic Judaism and its stance towards the pluralistic Ancient Near Eastern world.

d. Embedding

The project studies the way in which both Jeremiah 52 and the Book of Jeremiah as a whole, in their respective pluralistic linguistic-theological and social-religious (pluralistic) contexts, relate the course of history (*in casu* the 586 BC crisis) to the character of the one God, YHWH.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD-thesis in English; 2017)

3.3 Shame and Disgrace in the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

a. Researcher

Drs. H.S. Kim (PhD Student; prof. dr. H.G.L. Peels Supervisor)

b. Description

The idea of shame and honor as a code of conduct has been treated at best, a historical and cultural curiosity, or at worst a primitive and violent value system. In comparison to a guilt-culture based on the law, a shame-culture has been said to be based on a face-saving mentality that regulates only external behaviors. However, the validity of such a distinction as between a guilt culture and a shame culture, or between internal ethics and external ethics, begins to be questioned in a post-modern pluralistic society. Moreover, in the Bible shame words are used as many as sin and guilt words, and these two language groups overlap in emotional, juridical, and social areas.

The general observations in the previous paragraph are to be examined in the biblical text. For this purpose, two books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel is chosen because of their common historical background of the political, social and religious decline of the kingdom of Judah

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and the Jerusalem temple. Since the sound and resound of the shame motif is prevalent in the political upheavals and demolition of the Zion temple, the meaning and significance of the shame/disgrace theme gains more importance than elsewhere.

Even if the social and juridical dimensions of shame/disgrace are conspicuous in this part of the Old Testament, the inner and psychological aspects of shame/disgrace are also mentioned particularly in the promises of the new covenant (Jer. 31:18-19, 33-34; Ez. 36:24-28). Here, it is written that the hard and stone-like hearts of the exiles will be softened and be made obedient by the power of the Holy Spirit. After being renewed, 'they will be ashamed of their former behavior' (Ez. 16:63. Cf. Jer. 31:19).

c. Aim

This study will focus on the following research question: What is the meaning and significance of the theme of shame/disgrace in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel? This main question can be answered by dealing with the following questions:

1. How the theme of shame/grace is dealt before, during, and after the downfall of Judah?
2. Is the theme of shame/disgrace related with the structures of the two prophetic books that reflected roughly the historical changes around the fall of the nation in their narratives?
3. How is the theme of shame/disgrace related to the theme of the new covenant in both books?

d. Embedding

Compared to other biblical studies on the topic of shame, detailed studies of the meaning and significance of the theme of shame in the latter prophetic books, especially in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are lacking. By filling the important gap, we can get a better picture of the theme of shame and its significance of the overall message of the prophets. Together with a rich understanding of the theme of shame, other important themes such as God's covenant and vengeance receive more vivid color.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD-thesis in English; 2017)

4. YHWH and His Agents on Earth in the Book of Zechariah

a. Researcher

Dr. W.H. Rose

b. Description

In the book of the prophet Zechariah various agents of YHWH are mentioned who play an important role in human history, including (1) the king to be appointed by YHWH and (2) the so-called 'Angel of YHWH'. With respect to the former the project will explore how the king

is portrayed particularly in Zechariah 9–14 (building on earlier work on the king in Zechariah 1–6) and what can be said about the relationship between the king and the ‘pierced one’ in Zechariah 12 and the ‘stricken shepherd’ in Zechariah 13. With respect to the ‘Angel of YHWH’ it will be investigated what can be said about his identity and the nature of his relationship to YHWH.

c. Aim

Scholars have conflicting views on the portrayal and the identity of ‘messianic’ figures and of the ‘angel of YHWH’ in the Old Testament. The project aims to explore whether a fresh exegesis can contribute to bridging the gap between opposing views.

d. Embedding

In a number of cases YHWH, the God of Israel, is portrayed as acting through representatives. Some of these agents are thought to be closely related to YHWH while others are seen to stand at a greater distance. Both the king and the ‘angel of YHWH’ which are the focus of this project have often been thought to belong to the first group.

The contribution which both of these agents can make to exploring the identity of YHWH depends to a certain extent on this assumed proximity to YHWH. The project explores the precise nature of this proximity.

e. Intended output

Three book chapters or journal articles:

- ‘Zechariah and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Postexilic Israel’, in: Iain Provan, Mark J. Boda (eds), *Let us Go up to Zion. Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Vetus Testamentum Supplement, 153), Leiden, Brill 2012, 219-231
- ‘Zechariah, Prophet of the King of Jerusalem’, in: H.G.L. Peels and S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared. Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012), 183-196
- ‘Sightings of the Messiah in Zechariah 9–14’ (2012)
- ‘How special is the “Angel of YHWH”?’ (2013)

5. ‘The Lion Has Roared’

a. Researchers

Prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels (editor-in-chief)

Prof.dr. G. Kwakkel

Dr. W. Rose

Prof. dr. J. Dekker

et al.

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b. Description and Aim

This is an international book project under the title *The Lion has roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*. Chief editors are prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels (TUA) and prof.dr. S.D. Snyman (University of the Free State, South-Africa). Scholars from a wide range of evangelical/reformed theological institutions and faculties in eight different countries (from Asia, America, Africa and Europe) are contributing to the project. This global approach makes this project unique. The project aims at providing a book that will reflect recent research on the prophetic literature of the Old Testament (including the book of Daniel that is seen in the New Testament and by many readers of the Bible as a prophetic book). After shortly highlighting the historical setting and structure of the book, the main emphasis is on the core message and theological themes of each prophetic book. Against the background of polytheistic religion and cultural pluralism, the prophets of the Old Testament wrestled with their people and their God to proclaim the message about the One and Only God of Israel who in his wrath and mercy pursues his way with his rebellious people, even through the depths of ultimate ruin and exile. The prophetic witness as reflected in the Old Testament not only reacted to, but also exploited the language and images of the polytheistic environment. As such, the prophetic literature exhibits a vivid and fierce interaction with the god-talk of their days.

Members of the BEST-research group write the chapters on Hosea (Kwakkel), Isaiah (Dekker), Jeremiah (Peels), Zachariah (Rose), and a general introduction to prophetic literature (Kwakkel).

c. Embedding

This project focuses on the witness of the Old Testament prophets with respect to the YHWH, a controversial proclamation in a pluralistic context. As such, an analysis of the prophetic voices contributes to a better understanding of the unique character of YHWH in the Old Testament.

d. Output

H.G.L. Peels & S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The Lion Has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, USA; 2012)

4.2 New Testament

1. The Jesus Tradition in the Catholic Epistles

a. Researcher

R.K. Alkema, MA (External PhD-student; prof.dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen Supervisor)

b. Description

The words and deeds of Jesus are known to us primarily through the canonical Gospels. These four books present, each in its own way, tradition material concerning Jesus, in a literary manner. Jesus Tradition, however, can be found in more places than the four Gospels of scripture. One can think of non-canonical Gospels, the Apostolic Fathers, but also the New Testament epistles, where Jesus' voice resonates in much of the paraenetic material. Sometimes in a direct quotation, but more often the references are mere echo's and allusions. Whereas 'Jesus and Paul' has been a popular field of research for a long time, it is only fairly recently that the same kind of attention has been paid to the relationship of Jesus and the Epistle of James. In the present research I would like to present and evaluate the results of this last field of research, and extend it to the whole of the collection of the Catholic Epistles, of which James is the first letter. For each of the seven epistles an overview and evaluation of possible references (be it quotations or allusions) to the Jesus Tradition will be presented.

c. Aim

The research project aims at delivering a clear overview of the role Jesus Tradition played in the Catholic Epistles, thereby shedding light on the value it possessed for the Early Church.

d. Embedding

The research will be dealing with literary and exegetical matters, related primarily to the field of New Testament research. However, one noted theological feature of the research, which could be of some interest to systematic theology, is the (often neglected) importance of the teaching of Jesus in itself, how it has affected early Christian communities, and the weight it carries for New Testament theology.

e. Intended output

The relevant data and conclusions will be presented in a dissertation, which is expected to be finished by the end of 2016. Between 2014 and 2016 one or two articles will be offered for publication in academic journals.

2. The Drama of Baptism: An Exegetical-Theological Study of 1 Peter 3:21

a. Researcher

Drs. W.P. van den Berg (External PhD Student; prof.dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen Supervisor)

b. Description

1 Peter 3:21 asserts that baptism saves. This study focuses on the function and meaning of baptism within the context of the letter as a whole. The leading question is how baptism saves.

The starting point is an investigation of the theology of 1 Peter, with the focus on salvation as an important theme of the letter. A narrative perspective has been chosen because of the frequent references to the story of Israel's Exodus in the letter. The study looks at the following questions: (1) how 1 Peter takes the concept of salvation from the Exodus story and applies it (with practical examples) to the lives of the hearers within a polytheistic society, after their deliverance by Christ's blood from their futile life and ignorance to God's love (as 1 Peter says); (2) how trials and suffering function in this process of salvation; and (3) how the character of the triune God is revealed and proclaimed to other people through this process of being transformed to God's priesthood.

Moving on from the letter's theology, the immediate context of 3:21 is then examined. This section of the study looks at how suffering, judgment and proclamation relate to baptism. Peter's emphasis on Jesus' example of suffering for unjust people to save them, may provide unique insight into the character of God as expressed in baptism.

Finally, the study examines the meaning and function of baptism from the text itself with a view to (1) the lives of the hearers themselves, (2) the proclamation of salvation by the triune God and (3) the salvation of other people.

c. Aim

This investigation aims to contribute to the debate about baptism, and especially to baptism's potential role in revealing and proclaiming the image of the triune God in a pluralistic society. A further goal is to demonstrate the solid coherence between the Old and New Testaments and the relevance of narratology to the study of 1 Peter.

d. Embedding

1 Peter makes it clear that believing in and being baptized into the one, triune God impacts the practical lives of the hearers, but that it also touches the lives of the people around them, i.e. society as a whole. A study of 1 Peter and baptism could help Christians, in a rapidly pluralizing society, to face their own questions and inner resistance to their process of salvation, but also to cope with ignorance and resistance from people around them.

e. Intended output

- *The Drama of Baptism: An Exegetical-Theological Study of 1 Peter 3:21* (PhD Thesis; 2014)

3. King or High Priest at the Right Hand?

a. Researcher

Drs. C.P. de Boer (External PhD Student; prof.dr. T.M. Hofman and prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels Supervisors)

b. Description

Psalm 110 is being studied intensively within Old and New Testament scholarship. Although in the past years a great number of studies have examined the interpretation and reception of Psalm 110 in texts from the time up to and including the 1st century AD and thereafter, until now a comprehensive study is lacking in which all texts up to and including the 1st century AD are being analysed independently and in their relation to one another. One of the purposes of this study is to fill this gap as well as to confront all the presented results with those from this research.

c. Aim

The second part of this study, the reception and interpretation of Psalm 110 in the New Testament, is based on the inventory of all places in literature where Psalm 110 is interpreted from the time up to and including the 1st century AD and the investigation of the reception and interpretation of this psalm in these passages. Psalm 110 (especially verses 1 and 4) is the most quoted Old Testament text in the New Testament. The reception and interpretation of this psalm play a crucial role with regard to three issues in the New Testament:

1. the formulation of the relationship between the Father and Son;
2. confessing that Jesus of Nazareth is either *Kurios* or (high) priest at God's right hand;
3. eschatology.

How is it to be explained that this song, which originally describes the dependence of the Israelite king on YHWH and that arose within the setting of the monotheistic religion of the Old Testament, was used for the validation of these three issues?

d. Embedding

By confessing 'Jesus of Nazareth is *Kurios*' the New Testament church positions itself within a Jewish environment with regard to its fellow Jews, followers of the monotheistic belief in YHWH. They share the common acceptance of the authority of Scripture, apply the same exegetical methods, but the results of their interpretations differ fundamentally. Also, this New Testament confession sounds in a polytheistic culture in which it has to be explained and defended. In both situations the reception and interpretation of the Psalm 110 are crucial.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD thesis in Dutch; 2014)

4. *Apostolic Witness in an Early Christian Context*

a. Researcher

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

b. Description

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? His identity raised fundamental questions among his contemporaries, both Jews and gentiles. Nevertheless, the apostolic confession of Jesus as God (beginning with the confession of Thomas, according to John 20:28) established itself within early Christian circles. The apostles derived their authority from Jesus Christ; his divine identity seems to legitimate their preaching.

What trends or patterns, then, can be traced in the development of the early Jewish-Christian church during the apostolic period (up to AD 150) and what kind of role did the testimony of the apostles play in that development? Can one say that there was something like spiritual leadership coming from Jerusalem? The answer to questions like these is sought in the transmitted textual documents of the apostolic period. Theologically, a feature of the research will be the redemptive-historical approach.

This project contains, *inter alia*, research into the message of the four Gospels, taking into consideration that they reflect the apostles' preaching of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world. With regard to Matthew, Mark and Luke this will be done by drawing attention to the so-called tradition-hypothesis, whereas with regard to John the focus is on the fourth evangelist's own contribution. A special area of research will be biblical-theological in nature, dealing with the theme 'Jesus as God' according to the New Testament in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.

c. Aim

By means of publications in Dutch and English, this research project aims at contributing to the understanding of both the content and the impact of the apostolic witness of Jesus Christ in the early Christian tradition, particularly from a redemptive-historical point of view.

d. Embedding

The most obvious link with the BEST-programme 'Who is Like You Among the Gods?' is the apostolic witness in the early Christian tradition. Indeed, both for biblical exegetes and for systematic theologians, the divine identity of Jesus Christ is a highly contested topic in recent scholarly debate. Concerning this topic there will be cooperation with the Research Centre for Early Christianity, ETF Leuven, particularly with the research of dr. Boris Paschke on early Christian worship. Regarding the Gospel of John as documenting the apostolic witness, there will be collegial interaction with prof.dr. Armin D. Baum (FTH Giessen, ETF Leuven), who is working on a commentary in the German series *Historisch-Theologische Auslegung*. Moreover, the present researcher participates in the research project 'Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics' of the Department of New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Exchange of knowledge will be organised by presenting papers at national and international research conferences. Spread of knowledge will be achieved by giving guest lectures at various international universities, based on the above described research.

e. Intended output

- ‘Johannes en de anderen. Wie zijn ‘wij’ in de proloog en de epiloog van het vierde evangelie?’, *Theologia Reformata* 55 (2012), 369-388
- ‘A Godfighter Becomes a Fighter for God’, in: Pieter G.R. de Villiers & Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Coping with Violence in the New Testament* (STAR-series, volume 16; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 83-100.
- ‘Jerusalem, the Mother Church’, in: *Sárospataki Füzetek* 16.4 (2012): xx-xx
- ‘Macht, onmacht en volmacht in 1 Tim. 2:8-15’, *HTS Theological Studies* 68.1 (2012)
- ‘Vierstemmig evangelie. De traditiehypothese als oplossing in de synoptische kwestie’, *Theologia Reformata* 55 (2012), 30-51
- ‘Men and Women in Church Service’ (book chapter; 2013)
- ‘The Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the Letter to the Hebrews’ (book chapter; 2013)
- Short study on the narrative framework of The Fourth Gospel (article; 2014)
- Een exegetische bijdrage over het thema vrede in het Nieuwe Testament (article; 2014)
- ‘Case Study on Peace in the New Testament’ (book chapter; 2015)
- ‘Jezus als God volgens het Nieuwe Testament’ (article; 2015)
- Dutch monograph on Jesus; 2017)
- At least 3 Dutch book chapters, originating from 3 study conferences with reformed pastors or church members at Kampen (2013—2015)

5. *Gospel and Social Conventions According to 1 Timothy & Titus*

a. Researcher

Drs. Myriam Klinker-De Klerck (PhD Student; prof.dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen Supervisor)

b. Description

The central question of the project can be formulated as follows: *Do the ethical rules in 1 Timothy and Titus, especially in the field of human relationships, witness to a ‘bourgeois Christianity’?*

The so-called Pastoral Epistles (PE) are commonly characterized as ‘bourgeois’ writings because they recommend a morally impeccable and virtuous lifestyle. It is interesting to investigate to what extent and why the author ‘affirmed’ or ‘rejected’ the existing social conventions in the different concrete situations which the ‘twin’ letters 1 Timothy & Titus describe. For instance, what does Paul state concerning the relationship between men and women, the relationship between different generations, or attitudes towards authorities?

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The main track of the research project can be described as follows. First, the motivations for regulating human conduct in 1 Timothy & Titus are examined. Do they articulate the wish to create a sustainable Christian lifestyle after the hope of the *parousia* diminished? Second, the PE are compared with 1 Corinthians, i.e. concerning the rules of conduct for men and women in relation to each other. Do 1 Timothy & Titus witness to a more advanced accommodation to prevailing ethics?

Concerning the method of research, three stages can be distinguished. In the first stage of the project 1 Timothy & Titus as such are examined by the use of commentaries and other literature. Furthermore, the existing social conventions are examined from a Hellenistic as well as from a Jewish point of view. Specific attention is given to the societies of first-century Ephesus and Crete. The second stage of the project focuses on the concrete regulation of 1 Timothy & Titus. The selected relevant passages are exegetically investigated. Attention is given to the function of the passages in the letter as a whole as well as to their connection with the concrete socio-historical situation. In the third stage of the project, the findings are compared to related passages in 1 Corinthians. The comparison is confined to the field of man-woman relationship.

c. Aim

The alleged witness of the Pastoral Epistles to a ‘bourgeois Christianity’ is one of the arguments that underscore the ‘consensus’ concerning the inauthentic character of these letters. The project aims at testing the hypothesis of ‘bourgeois ethics’ in 1 Timothy & Titus.

d. Embedding

The message that Timothy and Titus are urged to bring is about a unique God who wants to save all people. This message, exclusive and inclusive at the same time, involves ethical regulations too. Moral standards in Western society nowadays are changing because of ideological pluralism. In view of this western context it is interesting to investigate how Christian ethics in 1 Timothy & Titus interacted with the existing multicolored socio-cultural and religious context of the first century. Especially the question why this mode of interaction was chosen is important to answer.

e. Intended output

- *Herderlijke regel of inburgeringscursus? Een bijdrage aan het onderzoek naar de ‘burgerlijke’ ethiek in 1 Timoteüs & Titus* (PhD thesis; 2013)
- Summarizing article of the research results

6. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians

a. Researcher

Prof.dr. T.E. van Spanje

b. Description

In his letters the apostle Paul presents himself as an authentic witness of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is obvious that he was being confronted with a variety of opponents and religious convictions that appeared to be incompatible with his message. Within this in many respects pluralistic context the apostle was challenged to formulate his message in a manner whereby the true identity of Jesus Christ remained the central focus.

In his second canonical letter to the Corinthians Paul criticizes his opponents and also expresses some views not only on the identity of Jesus Christ but also on that of God and the Holy Spirit. Having offered an integral exegesis of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (published in 2009), further profound and detailed research on some specific historical and exegetical issues is required in order to gain more insight into the way Paul instructs his readers so as to safeguard the revelation of which the apostle was a witness.

c. Aim

The research project aims at providing a further understanding of the way Paul formulates and expounds his message within his contemporary context.

d. Embedding

The results of the Biblical research project are expected to be relevant not only to modern Pauline studies but also to those studies in Systematic Theology that deal with the character and uniqueness of God. Consequently, the thematic working title of the project is: 'Paul's view on the identity of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit'.

e. Intended output

The prospective output will be equally spread over the period 2012—2017 and will consist of two book chapters and three articles to be published in academic journals, preferably in English. The main focus of the publications will be on specific exegetical issues from Paul's letters, preferably from his second letter to the Corinthians, and on hermeneutical presuppositions in modern Pauline studies.

7. Spiritus Interpres. Hermeneutical implications of the New Testament affirmations about the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

a. Researcher

Drs. B.A.T. Witzier (External PhD Student; prof.dr. T.M. Hofman and prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels Supervisors)

b. Description

In the Hellenistic first century AD context of religious and philosophical pluralism, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ occurred in a remarkably exclusive way. Proof of this can be found not only in the content of the central concepts, but also in what is said about the means by which this content will be appropriated. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

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exemplifies this. In cosmopolitan Corinth, a harbor city receiving religious and philosophical influences from all over the Hellenistic world, Paul confronts what he calls “human wisdom” with the “foolishness” of God’s wisdom in the proclamation of the cross of Jesus Christ. The understanding of this wisdom cannot be grasped without the intervention of the Spirit of God.

This radical and fundamental emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the one that discloses the truth of God to man, occurs particularly in the literature attributed to the apostles Paul and John. Understanding the Word of God, getting the right view on Jesus Christ, is not something which one chooses for by oneself, but something one has to receive from above.

A thorough exegesis of the significant New Testament texts with a number of biblical theological conclusions will be followed by an inventory and discussion of the hermeneutical implications, in particular with regard to present-day (postmodern) academic interpretative theories, indicating which hermeneutical space can be defended for the activity of the Spirit in the interaction with Scripture.

c. Aim

What does this specific activity of the Spirit mean for the understanding of God and, consequently, for the interaction with God’s Word reaching us in the Scripture of the Old and New Testament, in our 21st-century context of religious pluralism and relativism? Or, in other words, what are the hermeneutical implications of the New Testament affirmations about the dependence on the illuminating work of the Spirit? That is the central question this research-project aims to answer.

d. Embedding

If, biblically speaking, there is no access to true knowledge of God without the illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit, an insightful description of the hermeneutical implications will be of great value not only for the understanding, but also for the witness of the gospel in the context of the religious plurality of the 21st century in the Western world.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD thesis in Dutch; 2015), provisional title: *Spiritus Interpres. Hermeneutische implicaties van het nieuwtestamentische spreken over het verlichtende werk van de Heilige Geest.*

4.3 Systematic Theology

1. Perspective in Christ

a. Researcher

Dr. J.M. Burger

b. Description

To focus on the identity of God within a plural, multi-religious context is to focus within a perspective. This project concentrates on the perspective itself, following Paul's statement that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3). It will explore the significance of 'being in Christ' for Christian understanding. In Christ, we find a new perspective on God, but this implies immediately a new perspective on the Bible, the self and the other, as well as on the world.

The starting point is a soteriology centred in 'being in Christ', which will be understood in a Trinitarian grammar. Building on the work of Ingolf U. Dalferth, Oliver O'Donovan, my own PhD-thesis *Being in Christ* as well as other relevant literature, a systematic theological framework for dealing with hermeneutical questions will be developed.

Further, in the light of this framework the significance of 'being in Christ' will be investigated for our understanding of God, our world, self and the other, as well as the Holy Scriptures. The central question for dealing with the understanding of the Holy Scriptures is the question concerning the plot of the story of the Bible as a whole in the light of 'being in Christ'.

Finally, the question is raised how this knowledge in Christ relates to other knowledge we find in our plural and multi-religious world. As the final part of this project the relation between this Christian perspective(s) and other perspectives will be discussed.

c. Aim

This project aims at reinforcing the Christian perspective on the Trinitarian God in a pluralistic context. To reach this aim, a contextually sensitive alternative will be developed to modern approaches of hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture that are more oriented towards a foundationalist model.

d. Embedding

This project deals with systematic theological issues, but also with biblical-theological questions. Central to it is the perspective of the biblical picture of the triune God as disclosed in Christ. The project relates to the TUK curriculum (theme week on Biblical Theology Bachelor 1-2 in 2012), to the TUK (project on hermeneutics), but also to international research. Papers have been or will be given at conferences (CPC 2011, SST, FEET), at St. Paul's University (Limuru, Kenia) and at St. Andrews and Aberdeen University (Scotland, UK). Further, articles will be discussed with specialists in the field (I.U. Dalferth [Zürich, Switzerland], G. van den Brink [VU University Amsterdam], etc.).

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e. Intended output

- ‘Volmaakt in Christus: een uitnodiging’, *Soteria* 29/2 (2012), 16-26
- “‘Het hart en wezen der christelijke religie zelve’”: over de praktische relevantie van de triniteitsleer’, *Theologia Reformata* 4 (2012), 333-349
- ‘O’Donovan’s hermeneutics’ (article in e.g. *Studies in Christian Ethics*; 2012)
- ‘Dalferth’s hermeneutical theology’ (article in e.g. *IJST* ; 2012)
- ‘Taylors analyse van het gesloten mens- en wereldbeeld’ (article in collection of essays WI Christenunie; 2012)
- ‘Hermeneutische triniteitsleer: De bijdrage van Ingolf U. Dalferth aan de trinitarische renaissance’ (article *NTT*)
- ‘The plot of the Bible and the doctrine of the covenant’ (article in *CThJ / Horizons in Biblical Theology*; 2013)
- ‘Being in Christ as a hermeneutical starting point’ (article in *IJST / CThJ*; 2013)
- ‘Foundationalism in Neo-Calvinism?’ (article in *CThJ*; 2013)
- ‘Narratief pastoraat, biografie en delen in het verhaal van Christus’ (article with dr. P.W. van de Kamp; *PTjournal*)
- Monograph (2014)

2. God hidden and God revealed: A Reformed and an Eastern Orthodox Perspective

a. Researcher

D. Bintsarovskiy (PhD Student; prof.dr. B. Kamphuis Supervisor)

b. Description

The relation between God in himself and God in his revelation is a much debated question in the history of Christian theology. In the view of God’s infinity and transcendence, orthodox Christian theologians have always realized and tried to preserve the otherness and incomprehensibility of God. At the same time they didn’t want to underestimate God’s revelation and its correspondence to God himself. But how can God be simultaneously hidden and revealed, inaccessible and accessible, unknowable and known, incommunicable and communicable? Christian traditions have approached this problem in a number of ways. This project is focused on the historical Reformed and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Given the diversity and richness of both traditions, it is impossible to analyze them in their fullness in the context of this project. In order to make it more clear and concrete, I will focus only on two theologians – Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Eastern Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff (1926-1992).

The project is supposed to have four major parts. In the first introductory part I will explain the relevance of the elaborated questions and their importance for a dialogue between Reformed and Eastern orthodox traditions. The next two parts will be dedicated to the exposition of the views of Bavinck and Meyendorff correspondingly. These two chapters will

be more or less independent from each other reflecting the method, perspective, context and language of each theologian. In the fourth part I will try to identify some key questions for both traditions and *compare* the views of the theologians on these questions. In the last part I will also *evaluate* both views.

c. Aim

The aim of the project is to analyse, compare and evaluate the views of Herman Bavinck and John Meyendorff and thereby to understand the differences between the traditions they represent and to determine the strong and weak sides of each of the traditions.

d. Embedding

This project can be part of the BEST program, because: (a) it is focused on a dialogue between different Christian traditions which fits the program's emphasis on the confession of God in a *pluralistic* context; (b) although the idea of revelation is present in many religions, the project shows the *uniqueness* of the Christian doctrine of God and his revelation; (c) the project shows both *unity and diversity* in the Christian doctrine of God as it presents the Reformed and Eastern Orthodox perspectives.

e. Intended output

- PhD-thesis (2018)

3. *Martyrdom and Perseverance in Augustine*

a. Researcher

Drs. B. van Egmond (PhD Student; prof.dr. B. Kamphuis Supervisor)

b. Description and aim

The aim of this research project is to approach Augustine's thinking on the perseverance of the saints from the perspective of his martyrology. His thinking on perseverance is often situated in the context of his doctrine of grace and predestination. The concrete practice of perseverance as a virtue, however, is not dealt with. In the context of martyrdom both of these topics come together. Consequently, Augustine's martyrology seems to be a fruitful place to get a better understanding of Augustine's views on perseverance as a divine gift and as a human virtue (consisting of patience, continence, self-sacrifice, dying well).

During his whole life Augustine preached on the celebration days of the martyrs. In his sermons he attempted to establish a continuity between the perseverance of the martyrs and that of his congregation. In addition, the theme of perseverance in the context of martyrdom played an important role in his polemics with Donatists, Pagans and (to a lesser extent) Pelagians. The central question of my research will be how Augustine's view of grace influences his understanding of the martyr's perseverance over against his opponents.

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The outcome of this research will also provide an answer to one of the central questions of the research programme in which this project is situated: what does the nature of specifically Christian perseverance say about the identity of the Christian God who grants it and is himself glorified through it? In order to answer these questions Augustine's sermons on the martyrs, his treatment of specific 'martyrological' texts from the bible, relevant parts of his anti-Donatist writings and his anti-Pagan polemics in the *City of God* will be investigated.

The special focus of this research is the interplay between virtue and grace in Augustine's theology of perseverance. From a systematic perspective this research offers material for a contemporary formulation of the doctrine of perseverance (in a context in which martyrdom has again become relevant, because of the rise of religious fundamentalism on the one hand and secularization on the other). From an historical perspective this research contributes to a better understanding of Augustine's doctrine of grace in the context of his martyrology.

c. Embedding

In two ways this project contributes to the general aims of the BEST-program. Firstly, it appears that in Augustine's martyrology the identity of God himself is disputed. What does Christian martyrdom reveal about the identity of the Christian God? How is this God distinguished from other 'gods' for whom people persevere under suffering until the end? Secondly, in Augustine's treatment of martyrdom the tensions between Catholic Christianity and other religious convictions (Donatist and Pagan) become apparent.

d. Intended output

- Peer-reviewed article: Dupont, A and B. van Egmond, *Augustine's Use of the Concept of Praeparatio. A Case Study in the Recent Debate on Continuity in Augustine's Doctrine of Grace*, *Sacris Erudiri* 51 (2012) [submitted]
- Peer-reviewed article: 'Perseverance until the end in Augustine's anti-Donatist polemic' in: M. Vinzent e.a. (ed.), *Studia Patristica 53. Papers presented at the 16th Oxford Conference in Patristics*, Leuven-New York-Dudley: Peeters, 2013 [accepted]
- "'Cum tremore se exulare.'" The Spirituality of Augustine's Writings to the so-called semi-Pelagians' in: Paul van Geest e.a. (ed.) *The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, Leuven: Peeters, 2013 [accepted]
- "'Ab ipso patientia mea'". Augustine's Critique of Donatist Martyrdom as Voluntary Death and his Doctrine of Grace' in: M.A. Gaumer, A. Dupont and M. Lamberigts (ed.), *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity*, Leuven: Peeters, 2013 [submitted]
- Peer-reviewed article (2014)
- *Martyrdom and Perseverance in Augustine* (PhD-thesis 2015)

4. Participation and Communicability: John Milbank and Herman Bavinck on the Relation Between God and the World

a. Researcher

Drs. W. Huttinga (PhD Student; prof.dr. B. Kamphuis Supervisor)

b. Description

How do God and the world relate? This fundamental ontological question has always haunted theology and will remain hotly debated. In the current research programme, particular systematic theological reflection is needed on the relation between unity and plurality within the doctrine of God and Creation. This project intends to add to this reflection, focussing on the concept of ‘participation’, as it was put on the theological agenda by the *radical orthodoxy*-group in the 1990s. Is participation a concept that is useful and welcome in the Reformed tradition, or does it contain threats that are utterly unwelcome?

This project investigates how the main representative of *radical orthodoxy*, John Milbank, considers the relation between God and the world and compares his view with the Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. Milbank’s and Bavinck’s theological oeuvres will be analyzed, focusing on their conception of the relation between God and the world. Subsequently, a general view on participation will be given, which is offered by a historical overview of the theological tradition of participation, showing its conceptual implications. Against this backdrop, Milbank’s and Bavinck’s theological positions will be discussed, offering an outlook on the possibility and/or impossibility of participation in Reformed theology.

c. Aim

By analysing, comparing and evaluating John Milbank’s and Herman Bavinck’s conceptions of the relation between God and the world, this research intends to increase understanding of participation in Reformed theology and tries to assess its possible use in a Reformed framework.

d. Embedding

Although the current research programme emphasizes the ‘one God’ over against a pluralistic context, in the Christian tradition God is not simply the One over against the plurality of the world. It has always been emphasized that this world somehow participates in God’s ‘oneness’ and, on the other hand, that God as triune is not simply a unity over against difference, but is ‘difference in harmony’. A systematic theological analysis of these questions, focusing on the possibility of the concept of participation in the Reformed tradition, will add to the depth of the reflection on these topics, which is needed in the current research programme.

e. Intended output

- PhD-thesis (2014)
- Two articles in peer-reviewed international journals (2015—2017)
- One article in a non-refereed journal (2015—2017)

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- One academic conference (2015—2017)

5. The Trinity and the Old Testament

a. Researcher

Dr. A. Huijgen

b. Description

Modern historical-critical exegesis has long liberated itself from systematic theological biases that projected later dogmatic developments backwards on the New or even the Old Testament. This is particularly the case with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, which is obviously highly influenced by Greek philosophy and ontology. So, the current Trinitarian renaissance in systematic theology seems to widen the gap between biblical exegesis and systematic theology.

However, systematic theologians (Robert Jenson, Christoph Schwöber et al.) as well as an Old Testament scholar as Manfred Oeming affirm that there are traces of prototrinitarian thought even in the Old Testament. This research is still tentative but promising, particularly for the reformed tradition, which has traditionally stressed the relevance of the Old Testament and the importance of the interrelation of biblical exegesis and systematic theology.

Besides, the question is how prototrinitarian diversity in the Old Testament could possibly relate to its religiously pluralist, and often polytheistic, context. Answers to this question could serve the present debate in our religiously pluralist society.

c. Aim

The present research seeks to answer the question whether prototrinitarian traces can be found in the Old Testament, and if so, how these contribute to the understanding of trinitarian theology and a trinitarian hermeneutic of the Old Testament (of whatever kind). If not, the question remains how the Old Testament is to be systematically evaluated in a theology that understands itself as inherently trinitarian. Much depends on a definition of ‘prototrinitarian’, which will be developed by way of assessing existing proposals (starting with Jenson, Schwöbel, and Oeming). This research is primarily systematic in scope, which means that for detailed exegesis it is mainly dependent on secondary literature or on cooperation with exegetes. This research explicitly confronts itself with present pluralist understandings of the world and God, exploring in what ways a trinitarian understanding of the Old Testament may further the debate.

d. Embedding

This research fits in the BEST-structure because it is open for cooperation with exegetes. An international embedding will be sought through cooperation with the theologians mentioned. In circles of the International Journal of Systematic Theology, there seems to be a strong sensitivity for this kind of research and this specific topic.

e. Intended output

- ‘Prototrinitarian formulas in the Old Testament? An overview of positions in the debate’ (article in peer-reviewed journal; 2014)
- ‘Trinity and Old Testament. Prototrinitarian formulas and their theological implications’ (article in peer-reviewed journal; 2015—2016)
- ‘What Trinitarian Theology can learn from the Old Testament’ (article in peer-reviewed journal; 2017)

6. The Great Mystery of Our Faith: a Christology

a. Researcher

Prof.dr. B. Kamphuis

b. Description

The Christian church confesses Jesus Christ as God’s revelation: we know God through Him. We believe that God has identified Himself through and with Jesus: his person, his work, his life and death and resurrection are decisive for our knowledge of God’s identity. Christ Himself is God. Only thus can He reveal God. This confession has a unique and universal claim. Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God. Only through Him do we know God the Father. That is why we are dependent on God’s revelation in Christ for our knowledge of God.

However, this revelation is not immediately accessible. According to the testimony of the New Testament, it is a mystery. After all, revelation is not passing on a cognitive truth or some historical facts. Revelation is personal: in the person of Jesus Christ we come to know God. Personal knowledge does not cancel mysteries, but reveals them as mysteries [*slaat them op mysteries? In dat geval is de zin onduidelijk*]. So the Christian confession is the confession of a mystery. Because of this the unique and universal claim of this confession cannot be demonstrated. This claim will always be disputed and encounter resistance.

In this project the character of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as a mystery will be researched. Firstly, this will be done by biblical-theological research of the testimony about Christ in the New Testament. How is the mystery of our faith expressed there? This part of the project will also deal with results of recent research in the New Testament. Secondly, the history of the great Christological dogmas will be investigated: the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. How do these dogmas respect and maintain the mystery? Thirdly, historical-theological research will be done, especially in protestant theology of the 20th century. How is the mystery expressed in a modern and a postmodern context? Finally, conclusions for reformed theology will be drawn.

c. Aim

The goal of the project is to find a new expression of the confession of faith in Jesus Christ, against the background of recent New Testament theology and dogma-historical and historical-theological research.

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d. Embedding

The programme BEST focuses on: (a) the identity of God; (b) the tension with the surrounding religious world and (c) the interrelation with the plural context. Especially a. is important for this project. But because of the unique and universal claim of God's revelation in Christ the project also deals with b. In the final conclusion c. will be central.

e. Intended output

- *Het geheim (The Mystery)* (monograph; 2013)
- Articles about specific points that cannot be dealt with in the monograph or parts of the monograph in English (subjects have not been chosen yet)

7. The Filioque

a. Researcher

Prof.dr. B. Kamphuis

b. Description

In recent theology (since the middle of the 20th century), there has been an increasing interest in the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Theologians of the first half of the 20th century have often been reproached for the fact that in their theology the interest for the person and work of Jesus is so dominant that pneumatology is almost forgotten. Not only Karl Barth has been blamed for this, but for example also the Dutch Reformed theologian Klaas Schilder. However, the reproach of *Geistvergessenheit* itself can change into *Geistbesessenheit* (Moltmann), if the relation between Christ and the Spirit is neglected.

This project focuses on this relation. In Western theology the relationship between Christ and the Spirit is expressed in the confession of the *filioque*: the Spirit proceeds not only from God the Father but 'also from the Son'. Therefore the *filioque* is central to this project: what are the consequences of the acceptance of the *filioque* or its rejection for the structure of pneumatology? Research needs to be done, on the one hand, into Eastern Orthodox theology and its sources, and, on the other hand, into Western theology which was influenced by Augustine (the father of the *filioque*-doctrine). In the ecumenical movement the *filioque* was discussed intensely. This discussion also has to be evaluated.

c. Aim

The goal of the project is a new evaluation of the *filioque* in reformed theology.

d. Embedding

One of the focuses of this programme is the identity of God, as expressed in the confession of the trinity. Research on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit touches an important aspect of the doctrine of the trinity. It was so important that it played a decisive role in church history (the Schism of 1054). Research of the *filioque* is also important for the interrelation

with the plural context: it concerns the relation with Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as with charismatic theology, because the relationship between Christ and the Spirit is one of the subjects of discussion between charismatic and reformed theology.

Besides this, the theme of the study group 'Christian articles of faith' (Xart), consisting of systematic theologians from the Netherlands and Flanders, is 'the secret presence of God'. Research on pneumatology and the *filioque* fits into this theme very well.

e. Intended output

- *Christ and the Spirit between East and West* (monograph; 2015)
- Some articles before 2015

8. The *Filioque*-controversy

a. Researcher

Drs. C. Lee (PhD Student; prof.dr. B. Kamphuis Supervisor)

b. Description

The *filioque* again? This question presents two concerns. First of all, the theme "*filioque*" is not new because of the long history of controversies about it (at least since the 9th century AD by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople). Secondly, this question "the *filioque* again?" presents another concern, that is, whether a satisfying solution to the *filioque*-controversy can be given. The long history of the *filioque*-controversy shows how difficult it is to reach a satisfying conclusion.

The project to study the possibility of reaching a satisfying consensus of the *filioque*-controversy has, however, two reasons for significance. First of all, a satisfying consensus of the *filioque*-problem can provide an opportunity for the doctrine of the triune God to be deeply understood from an ecumenical perspective. The alleged differences in the doctrine between the Western and the Eastern Churches become conspicuous by the different view on the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. These differences can be ecumenically re-evaluated by a consensus of the *filioque*-problem. Secondly, this project can show that the differences in systematic-theological presentations of the Christian dogma can be complementary. A particular understanding of the *filioque*-problem brings about different presentations of the Christian dogma. Sometimes these differences seem to be contradictory with one another. A satisfying consensus of the *filioque*-problem could offer a perspective from which these differences are considered not to be contradictory but to be complementary.

This project contains three theological approaches. First of all, the patristic approach is at its foundation. The ideas of the church fathers about the triune God and the *filioque*-problem provide the basis for the doctrinal development in the *filioque*-controversy. Among the church fathers, Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa are essential to the controversy. Secondly, the modern systematic-theological approach is taken into consideration. The recent development in the ecumenical understanding of the doctrine of the triune God offers an opportunity to reevaluate the western and eastern Trinitarian traditions and to look for a

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complementary consensus about the *filioque*. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Dumitru Stăniloae have significantly contributed to the modern development of the doctrine of the triune God. Finally, the biblical-theological approach is also essential for this project. Selected Bible texts important for the *filioque*-problem can be studied to reevaluate the patristic and modern systematic-theological understanding of the triune God and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit and to define a criterial boundary in the *filioque*-controversy.

c. Aim

The goal of the project is to study the possibility of reaching a satisfying consensus on the *filioque*-controversy with the patristic, systematic-theological, and biblical-theological approaches.

d. Embedding

The project concentrates on the triune God and the relationship within Him, especially that between the Son and the Spirit. Accordingly, it is related to identifying the Christian God, one of the important focuses of the BEST-programme (2012-2017). This project is also concerned with the contextual plurality, another important focus of the BEST-programme, because the *filioque*-controversy is deeply related to the theological and cultural controversy between the Western and the Eastern Churches.

e. Intended output

- Monograph (PhD thesis in English; 2017)

4.4 Multidisciplinary Projects and Conferences

1. Playing with Leviathan: Conference

a. Researchers

Dr. H.R. van de Kamp, prof.dr. G. Kwakkel

With the cooperation of dr. K. van Bekkum, prof.dr. J. Dekker, prof.dr. H.G.L. Peels, drs. H.J. Room, drs. H.J. Roosenbrand, dr. W.H. Rose (OT); prof.dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen, (NT); prof.dr. B. Kamphuis (ST); prof.dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne (Ethics); drs. C.J. Haak (Missiology); and co-workers from outside TUA-TUK (invited)

b. Description

This research investigates passages in Scripture about the dragon (Leviathan) and the question how to deal with them in systematic theology, ethics and missiology. This project comprises:

1. Study of passages in the Old Testament about the dragon and Leviathan;
2. Comparison of these passages with passages from Ugarit and Mesopotamia about Leviathan (Lothan);
3. Research into the origin of using the image of the dragon in Revelation 12 and related passages in the New Testament;
4. Research into how systematic theology can deal with the Leviathan passages;
5. Research into how ethics can make use of the Leviathan notion;
6. Ideas on how missiology can address the dragon stories in the mythology of the nations;
7. Description of the traces of Leviathan in iconography and in the world of arts and film.

c. Aim

1. An analysis of why the biblical texts describing the acts of God as those of the only God nevertheless use the language and images from the context of religious pluralism;
2. An analysis of the extent to which the use of images from mythology promoted the understanding of the biblical texts by readers who lived in the context of religious pluralism;
3. An answer to the question whether annexation of common mythological symbols in the present-day context can be profitable.

d. Embedding

This research concerns:

1. The identity of God: He is unique and yet can be described by language and images from the context of religious pluralism;
2. The tension with respect to the surrounding religious world (monotheism versus polytheism);
3. The interrelation with a pluralist context: the fact that Bible writers annexed mythological patterns in their context of religious pluralism could inspire preachers to

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adopt a strategy which makes use of this antithetical annexation in a modern pluralist context.

This project contributes to the cooperation between various theological disciplines.

Expansion is being pursued by cooperation with experts in the field of iconography, history of church art, the world of games and film. Further expansion is foreseen by working together with experts from Amsterdam, Utrecht and Heverlee.

e. Intended output

- Conference with presentation of research results in April 2013 (in cooperation with PEP)
- Publication by TU-bezinningsreeks & Series Apeldoornse Studies; translated version in *Themes in Biblical Narrative* (Brill, Leiden)

2. *The Temple in Jewish and Christian Tradition*

a. Researcher

Dr. M.C. Mulder

Dr. Mulder participates in this research project as director of the Centre for Israel Studies. As such, others who are cooperating within this Centre can be involved as well.

b. Description

The disappearance of the Temple as the central place of worship and unique locus of encountering the presence of the living God has caused a theological shift of paradigm within Jewish and Christian traditions. In both traditions God did not cease to be present, in both traditions the Temple is even still a living entity.

Which parts of Scripture are important in this shift of paradigm, which hermeneutical decisions have been taken and how are these decisions connected to the continuing laudation ‘Who is like you among the gods?’, even when the place of this God has been destructed?

Reading the Scriptures of Israel together with Jewish scholars offers new insight into our confession of the One and Three in a pluralistic context. It is an option that other themes within these mutual encounters can also emerge in connection to the research programme ‘Who is Like You Among the Gods?’

c. Aim

This project aims at broadening the Christian perspective on the confession of the unique God in a pluralistic context, by reframing our mindset through the encounter with the living Jewish tradition. Point of departure is the research question about the temple: how was this unique place of encountering the living God transformed into a living entity even after its destruction, an entity that is still of central importance in both Jewish and Christian traditions?

d. Embedding

This project is not only part of the TUA/TUK research programme of Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology, but is embedded in an ongoing collaboration between the Centre for Israel Studies and the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem as well. Several joint symposia have been organized, a new exchange will take place in September and a further expert meeting has been planned for June 2013.

e. Intended output

- ‘Verwoest en springlevend. Tempeldienst in een post-tempelperiode?’ (working title; article in AS).
- A publication on the presence of the absent Temple in Jewish and Christian traditions: exegetical, theological and hermeneutical perspectives; with contributions from Jewish scholars (rabbi prof.dr. Dahlia Marx, rabbi prof.dr. David Golinkin, rabbi prof.dr. Moshe Silberschein, rabbi dr. Einat Ramon, dr. Marcie Lenk) and Christian scholars (prof.dr. Gerard den Hertog, rev. drs. ir. Niek Tramper, dr. Michael Mulder and others?). This publication elaborates on contributions to two seminars, in June 2010 and February 2012 of Pastors and scholars from the Netherlands, including staff and students from the TUA, and Rabbis, staff and students of the Rabbinical Seminary of the Conservative Schechter Institute in Jerusalem (scheduled in 2013)
- 2013, June 26-27 – a joint expert meeting on a related theme

3. *The God of the Old Testament: Violence, Anger, Jealousy*

a. Researchers

Dr. K. van Bekkum, dr. J.M. Burger, prof. dr. J. Dekker, drs. A. Dubbink, prof.dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen, dr. A. Huijgen, dr. M.C. Mulder, dr. H.G.L. Peels, dr. T.E. van Spanje, dr. R.T. te Velde (Kampen)

b. Description

Obviously, the God of the Old Testament shows himself to be violent (or, at least, to use or facilitate violence), angry and jealous. How can Christian theology accommodate such images of God? This conference brings the researchers of the BEST research group together in a debate that lies at the very heart of the themes of the group.

c. Aim

1. An interaction of biblical theological approaches with systematic theological approaches;
2. An analysis of violence in the Old and New Testaments and in our present culture;

d. Embedding

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This conference lies at the heart of the matter of the present research programme, since it combines BE and ST, and does so in addressing the cultural differences between ancient cultures and between ancient cultures and the present.

e. Intended output

- Conference ‘The God of the Old Testament’, Apeldoorn 2014
- Publication of the papers a special issue of *Theologia Reformata* (57 (2014) 4)

4. Impact of Destruction – Josephus Seminar

a. Researchers

Dr. W. den Hollander (Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Hamilton) and other co-workers from outside TUA-TUK, that is, prof.dr. J.W. van Henten (University of Amsterdam), dr. T. Jonquière (Independent scholar, Utrecht) and prof.dr. M. Popović (University of Groningen)

b. Description

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem had a decisive impact on Judaism during the late 1st century A.D. The diversity in the reactions to this event clearly reflects the pluralism of Judaism during this period, a context within which certain early Christian groups can also be considered. The study of the development of Judaism, however, is highly complicated by the fact that the value/relationship of biblical and non-biblical sources and material culture for biblical interpretation and historical reconstruction is contested. This seminar brings together leading scholars in Josephus studies and addresses this methodological issue, with the immediate impact of the destruction of the temple in the works of Josephus and the New Testament as a case study. This project comprises:

1. Josephus’ Temple and the Historical Jesus;
2. Traitor or Prophet? Josephus’ Behaviour during the Siege of Jerusalem;
3. Jesus, Josephus, and the Fall of Jerusalem: On Doing History with Scripture;
4. Reflections on the Relation between the Sources from a Cultural-historical Perspective.

c. Aim

1. An analysis of the nature of the sources and their contribution to the historical reconstruction
2. A description of the plurality of Judaism as reflected in the competing narratives offering a reaction to the destruction of the temple
3. An analysis of the question to what extent different theological convictions lead to diverse descriptions of the historical vicissitudes and its religious impact.

d. Embedding

This research concerns:

1. The plurality of 1st century Judaism
2. The impact of the destruction of the temple on this plurality and on the perceptions of the identity of God
3. The interrelation of the diverse Jewish movements with their pluralist context

e. Intended output

- Seminar with presentation of research results in September 2014
- Publication of the papers in a peer-reviewed journal

5. Justified by God: Tom Wright on Paul and Justification

a. Researchers

Prof.dr. N.T Wright (University of St. Andrews); dr. C.J. Thomson (University of Cambridge); dr. J. White (Freie Theologische Hochschule Giessen); dr. J.M. Burger

b. Description

Christians, especially in the Reformed tradition, believe that God justifies them by faith. God is a gracious God, who vindicated Jesus and raised him from the dead. But how is this vindication of Jesus Christ related to the justification by faith? The so called ‘New Perspective on Paul’ has raised important questions here concerning the relationship between justification by faith and our participation in Christ. Within the plurality of Christian traditions, this is a central problem in ecumenical dialogue.

In his recent book on Paul, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright addresses the question of God, his faithfulness and the gift of justification by faith in relation to participation in Christ. His work has impact both on New Testament studies and on Systematic Theology. Hence, studying this question is an excellent opportunity to work together as systematic theologians and biblical scholars.

The conference evaluates the position of N.T. Wright concerning justification by faith from different perspectives: New Testament, Old Testament and Systematic Theology.

c. Aim

1. Study of the doctrine of justification and the relationship between justification and participation
2. Evaluation of new steps made in the so called ‘New Perspective on Paul’
3. Interaction between Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology

d. Embedding

To understand God’s righteousness and our justification, first of all we need to investigate the message of Paul (together with the other apostles) within his pluralist context, between Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman influences. Wright’s work gives a fresh perspective of Paul in his context. Understanding Paul in his context helps us to understand who the justifying God is in our pluralist context.

Who Is Like You Among the Gods?

e. Intended output

- Conference ‘Tom Wright on Paul and justification’, 31st of October 2014
- Publication of the papers in a book published by Wipf and Stock

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