

Theological Disciplines in Conversation

Three research programmes of Apeldoorn and Kampen

By integrating their research programmes, the theological universities of Apeldoorn and Kampen are able to present a combined tradition of more than two centuries of classical theology. In the field of Reformation studies and Neo-Calvinism they belong to the international leaders in the field, while they hold strong, internationally recognized positions in Biblical Studies, Public Theology, Ethics, and Missiology. As both institutions are relatively small, they have found their strength in intense cooperation, innovative combinations, and an increasing focus on their strong points. Recently, this has resulted in three research groups with an intentional 'integrative' character. Part of the philosophy behind this is that innovative research is likely to grow out of unexpected combinations of disciplines.

Thus, the first research program is a daring initiative to combine two fields of research that are all too often kept strictly separated: *Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology* (BEST). The institutions in Kampen and Apeldoorn believe in an approach to Scripture that is eager to listen and expects new and formative meaning. Developments within Biblical Studies that emphasize the *Endgestalt* of Bible books and the importance of synchronic reading on the one hand, and the renewed interest in Biblical theology within the field of Systematics on the other, have opened an interesting space for close cooperation between these disciplines. BEST aims at readings of the Bible that are thoroughly informed by modern insights in exegesis, philosophy, and *Umwelt* studies with an open mind towards non-modern readings of the Bible and to reformed and catholic doctrine. This new approach will likely result in an improved quality of both studies in Biblical and Systematic theology.

Very interesting and challenging interactions also emerge from the second research program, *Reformed Traditions in Secular Europe* (RTSE). In this group practical theologians, historians of neo-calvinism, ethicists, missiologists, and public theologians work together with a shared focus on the traditions and practices of the Protestant Reformation in modern (secular) Europe. Present day Western-Europe is inconceivable without its Reformation legacy. The other way around, modern Reformed theology and church practices have been deeply influenced by modernity and post-modernity. The challenges and questions of these circumstances are the core of this research program. Part of this group's research pertains to developing conceptual models for the cooperation between theology and non-theological sciences in the field of congregational studies, ethics, and missiology. Moreover, through close cooperation with the Reformed Center for Church Practice (*Praktijkcentrum*) there is a constant interaction with questions that emerge in society, resulting in new research, and in the diffusion of academic research.

Finally, the research program *Early Modern Reformed Theology* (EMRT) builds on the strong tradition of both institutions in the field of historical (Post-)Reformation studies. Highly internationally recognized research and the critical edition of theological works (both digital and printed) is combined with a careful discernment of the way the Early Modern Reformed theology shapes the life and worldview of the Christian community.

In sum, these three research projects testify to the mission of both institutions to keep the different discourses of theology in conversation with a view to current developments in the church and the rest of society. In all its academic scrutiny, the research of Apeldoorn and Kampen presents the treasures of Christian theology as an invaluable contribution to current debates about the values and sources of our culture in a world that is increasingly religious and modern at the same time. Historical texts are a formative and inspiring discourse for present day beliefs and practices. Therefore, in all of these projects functions a hermeneutics of expectation and hope.