

## Sources and Traditions of Christian Faith in Past and Present

### RESEARCH PROGRAMME 'SOURCES'



**Programme Supervisor: Prof. dr. K. Spronk**

**The Research Programme "Sources and Traditions of Christian Faith in Past and Present" studies the cultural background, the basic understanding and the development of religious sources (texts and documents in the broadest sense) in the history of ancient Israel, Judaism and Christianity, for the benefit of a historical understanding of Western culture and of a well-considered interpretation of these sources in modern communities of Christian Faith.**

**The research fields vary from the ancient Middle Eastern religions and cultures, the Old and New Testament, early Christianity, Judaism and early religious history of Western Europe to Protestantism in its European context. Members of the Sources group participate in international academic discussions and research, and are also active in the Dutch academic context, church and society. Because of the fact that the PThU serves as an academic institute of protestant theology for the Dutch Protestant Church (PKN), special attention is given to research topics relevant to the PKN and its ministers.**

### **Profile: Aims and Methods**

Within the area of Biblical Studies the programme carries out research on biblical texts in its ancient Middle Eastern context and the development and interpretation of biblical texts in past and present. Next to the usual research areas in Old and New Testament, special attention is paid to Semitics (particularly Ugaritic and Rabbinic literature) in order to get better insight in the developments in ancient Israelite Religion and Biblical theology.

Topics of investigation are the historical Jesus and the development of the Christian Gospels, the interpretation of parables of Jesus and the rabbinic sages, conflicting images of Paul in early Christianity, Aramaic Bible translations, patristic interpretation of the Bible, gender in the Bible, the role of prayers in the biblical world and in modern times, intercultural reading of the Bible, views on good and evil, life and death, silence of God.

In the history of Christian faith the diversification of confessional identities and the development of theology with respect to the development of sciences are crucial. Research in the area of Church History focuses on processes of formation of identity as determined by textual and ritual communication in both an institutional and material sense.

In the field of Church History major topics are history and theology of the Reformation (with a special regard to Martin Luther), the development of modern theology and piety since 1650 (Pietism and Enlightenment), Lutheranism and the history of Protestantism in the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th centuries. Special attention is given to the history of Jewish-Christian relations.

Although the research group Sources is highly diverse, because of the combination of

Biblical Studies, Judaism and Church History, the members of the group agree on several features with regard to method. As a group we strive for:

- Study of original languages: all sources will be studied from the original texts, as far as possible. Therefore, special emphasis is laid on the study of languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Coptic, Greek, Ugaritic, Hittite, Akkadian, Latin).
- Critical textual analysis: Academic research, based on a critical analysis of the sources of Christian faith (biblical texts, ancient translations, Jewish sources, early Christian texts, church historical documents).
- Historical and cultural context: Interpretation of texts and data (archaeology, realia, customs, religious buildings and rituals) in their historical and cultural context. Research in the cultural context of the sources of Christian Faith forms a major topic of investigation: ancient Middle Eastern culture and religion, Persian Empire, Roman Empire, Qumran, religion in Western Europe, especially in early times, during the time of Reformation, Pietism and Enlightenment, and during the 19th and 20th Centuries.
- Interdisciplinary research: The sources of Christian faith form the fundamentals of both Practical Theology and Systematic Theology. Therefore, the Sources group strives after collaboration with members of the Beliefs and Practices groups on present-day topics (e.g. the topic of "Freedom" on the occasion of 500 years of Reformation in 2017).
- Research in view of society and church: One of the aims of research is the actualization of the sources of Christian Faith in society and church, defining the relevance of these sources to the modern world. The research group Sources wants to bridge the gap between the ancient sources of Christian faith and the communities of believers in the present, especially in protestant communities in Western Europe, as well as the Western European society that is based on Christian norms and values.

## **Research topics**

**The research of the Sources group is concentrated on three foci:**

### **1. Interpretation of the Bible**

Exegesis of (para)biblical books: Spronk (Judges) and Korpel (Esther; Ruth) prepare commentaries for the HCOT series (Peeters, Leuven). Merz prepares a commentary on the Acts of Paul (KAV series: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen).

Context of Scripture: Korpel, Sanders and Spronk study the position of the Old Testament in the world of the ancient Middle East (Ugarit, Hatti, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia), especially the influence of the cultural and religious context of the ancient world on the religion of Israel. Merz studies the context of early Christianity (e.g., ancient Syriac text of Mara, Son of Serapion, and other relevant Jewish and Greco-Roman sources).

Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity: Korpel, Sanders and Spronk participate in the international Pericope project, and published some articles in the Pericope series (Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield). Korpel and Sanders are board members of the series and edited several volumes in the series. Korpel is the founder of the group and series

and functions as executive editor. The series pays attention to the rhetoric structure of Hebrew poetry, based on a thorough study of text delimitation in Hebrew manuscripts as well as in manuscripts of ancient translations. The Pericope project has led to important new discoveries in manuscripts that proved important to exegesis. Spronk guides also research into the Byzantine Manuscripts. Under his supervision a number of projects subsidized by NWO is devoted to old manuscripts of the Eastern Orthodox liturgical tradition, which will shed new light on old forms of the biblical text and the early history of exegesis. This work is done in close collaboration with specialized institutions in the Netherlands (Faculty of Theology, Tilburg: Rouwhorst) and abroad (university of Athens).

## **2. Reception of the Bible**

Targumic Studies: Within the last decades the PThU has developed into an international center of Targum Studies. One of the recent results in this area is the project "A Jewish Targum in the Christian World", supervised by Houtman and Kirn, investigating if, and if so how, the manuscripts and early prints of Targum Samuel in medieval and early-modern Europe have been influenced by their Christian surroundings. Houtman is also working on a commentary on the Targum of Isaiah.

Biblical interpretation in patristic times: Roukema studies the biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers and prepares a publication on the patristic interpretation of the Greek translation of the Book of Micah and for the series "Novum Testamentum Patristicum" he will write a volume on the patristic interpretation of 1 Corinthians. Merz investigates the Pauline trajectory on the edges of the canon. The intertextual dialogue between documents that became part of the New Testament (e.g. Gospels, Pastoral Epistles) and documents that became apocryphal literature (e.g. Apocryphal Acts) is studied as part of the transformation of sources of early Christian faith into canonical documents.

Contextual and Intercultural Reading of the Bible: Investigation of the methods and results of contextual reading of the Bible. Spronk participates in the Institute for Contextual and Intercultural Reading of the Bible (in cooperation with the VU Free University). Merz participates in gender-oriented research on early Christian texts.

## **3. Formation of Christian Identities in Past and Present**

History of Early Christianity: The Jesus movement and the development of Christianity as a separate religion: Merz studies the transformation of the Jewish Kingdom of God movement led by Jesus of Nazareth into early Christianity as it is documented in the early Christian sources. She conducts Historical Jesus research (e.g. the revision of the textbook *The Historical Jesus*, together with G. Theissen, Heidelberg) and research into the development of the Jesus tradition (e.g. in the NWO funded project "Parables and the Partings of the Ways", a cooperation of PThU, University of Tilburg and Utrecht University). Roukema will publish a few articles on Origen of Alexandria's interpretation of Scripture. Van Klinken studies the early christianization of the Low Countries.

History of Reformation and Lutheranism: Kirn is engaged in the history of the Reformation, with special attention to Jewish-Christian relations, e.g. the reformers' attitude towards Jews and Judaism, different concepts of tolerance, and the history of Biblical exegesis in the context of Christian Hebraism in the tradition of J. Reuchlin. Matthias studies the history of protestant theology of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Germany and the Netherlands with special regard to the biography and theology of Martin Luther. He prepares a Latin-Dutch edition of Luther's works in three volumes.

History of Pietism and Enlightenment: Kirn works on Pietism and Enlightenment in European perspective, related to the various aspects of confessional identity and its transformation in Early Modern times. Jewish-Christian relations also play an important role in this context. Kirn prepares a book on the Confessional Age, Pietism and Enlightenment. Matthias is a member of the German *Historische Kommission für die Erforschung des Pietismus* and works over key figures of early German pietism (Arndt, Spener, Francke, Petersen, Arnold).

History of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century: Mietus focuses for his research on the history of theology in the 19th century, in particular on the works of J.H. Gunning Jr. and on the historical roots of the Alliance of Free Evangelical Churches. Van Klinken studies the 20th century history of the relations between the Dutch protestant churches and the state of Israel, especially in the project of Nes Ammim. This underlines the importance of the history of Jewish-Christian relations for the research group.

## **Valorisation**

Members of the Sources group make their research available to the public by national congresses and conference days (sometimes in cooperation with the PKN), by reworked translations into Dutch of their publications, by sermons and lectures in churches, as well as by publications in different media (social media, newspapers, Dutch journals, television and radio). Furthermore, the group strives for more attention to the public, for example by cooperation with museums (Biblical Museum Amsterdam, Catharijne Convent Utrecht) and the Protestant Dutch Bible Society (NBG), and by setting up a website "Ask a Biblical Scholar" for laypeople where website visitors can put forward questions with regard to the Bible and its context.

## **Members of the research group**

### **Senior scholars (between brackets the function and field they contribute to):**

Houtman, Dineke (professor, Rabbinics, Amsterdam)  
Kirn, Hans-Martin (professor, chair holder CH Groningen)  
Klinken, Gert van (assistant professor, CH, Amsterdam)  
Korpel, Marjo (associate professor, OT, Semitics, Groningen)  
Matthias, Markus (professor, chair holder Lutherana, CH, Amsterdam)  
Merz, Annette (professor, chair holder NT Groningen)  
Mietus, Leo (lecturer, CH, Seminary Alliance FEC, Amsterdam)  
Roukema, Riemer (research professor Early Christianity, Groningen)  
Sanders, Paul (assistant professor, OT Amsterdam)  
Spronk, Klaas (professor, programme supervisor, chair holder OT Amsterdam)

### **Junior scholars (between brackets the function and focus point they contribute to):**

Boezelman, Wijnand (phd student, NT)  
Bosch, Jan-Willem van den (assistant researcher, Rabbinics)  
Lena, Joan (phd student, NT)  
Tanja, Johanna (phd student, Rabbinics)  
Voogd, Rianne (phd student, NT)