



Research Programme Sources

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

In our research group we study 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

Interpretation of the Bible

Exegesis of (para)biblical books: Spronk (Judges) and Korpel (Ruth) prepare commentaries for the HCOT series (Peeters, Leuven). Korpel, Sanders and Spronk participate in the international projects of the Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Database (<http://www.sahd.div.ed.ac.uk/>) and Pericope (<http://www.pericope.net/>). Merz prepares a commentary on the Acts of Paul (KAV series: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen). Ten Hoopen focusses on Genesis 1-11, while Tops and Boogert study the Gospel of John.

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). Hartog researches the interaction of ancient Jews (e.g., the Qumran movement, Hellenistic-Jewish authors, certain New Testament writers) with their Graeco-Roman Umwelt. Tops studies the influence of the Greco-Roman rhetorical and philosophical tradition in the gospels. Teugels studies the relation between early Jewish and early Christian interpretations of Scripture, e.g. in midrash and parables.

Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity: study of midrash (Teugels), Targum (Houtman), early Jewish exegesis (Hartog), textual criticism (Krans, Boogert), scribal culture/practices (Korpel, Hartog)

Reception of the Bible

Centre for Early Jewish Hermeneutics: bringing together scholars from VU University, the University of Groningen, and the Protestant Theological University, the Centre for Early Jewish Hermeneutics (CEJH) investigates exegetical and hermeneutical practices in early Judaism (c. 200 BCE—800 CE). Sources staff members involved are Teugels, Houtman, and Hartog. Houtman studies the history of the development of Targum Isaiah.

Biblical interpretation in patristic times: Roukema studies the biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers (Micah, 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.

Transmission and Interpretation of the Bible in Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment: Krans studies the influence of the transition from bible manuscripts to printed editions on the interpretation of the Bible. The exposition of miracle stories by theologians of the enlightenment is another long term project of him.

Contextual Reading of the Bible: Investigation of the methods and results of contextual reading of the Bible. Spronk participates in the Centre for Contextual Bible Interpretation. Merz studies the reception of the Bible in Bibliodrama (“embodied reader-response criticism”).

Formation of Christian Identities in Past and Present

History of Reformation and Lutheranism: Kirn is engaged in the history of the Reformation. Matthias studies the history of protestant theology of the 16th and 17th centuries in Germany and the Netherlands with special regard to the biography and theology of Martin Luther.

History of Pietism and Enlightenment: Kirn works on Pietism and Enlightenment in European perspective. 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 19th/20th 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

On the Dutch website “Bijbelblog” members of the researchgroup and other colleagues answer all kinds of questions on the field of Biblical studies. In the Scriptorium Project researchers and craftsmen present the production of religious books and invite visitors in workshops to actively experience the work of the ancient scriptorium.

Members of the research group

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

- Egmond, Peter van (postdoctoral researcher, CH, Amsterdam)
- Hartog, Barry (postdoctoral researcher, Groningen)
- Houtman, Dineke (professor, Judaica, Amsterdam)
- Kirn, Hans-Martin (professor, chair holder CH Groningen)
- Klinken, Gert van (assistant professor, CH, Amsterdam)
- Korpel, Marjo (associate professor, OT, Semitics, Groningen)
- Krans, Jan (assistant professor, NT, Amsterdam)
- Matthias, Markus (professor, chair holder Lutherana, CH, Amsterdam)
- Meer, Michaël van der (lecturer, OT, 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)
- Sierksma-Agteres, Suzan (lecturer, Greek, Amsterdam)

- Spronk, Klaas (professor, OT Amsterdam)
- Teugels, Lieve (assistant professor, Jewish Studies, Amsterdam)
- Westra, Liuwe (lecturer, NT, Groningen)
- Witkamp, Theo (lecturer, CBS, Amsterdam)

Junior scholars:

- Boogert, Ernst (Phd student, NT)
- Hoopen, Robin ten (Phd student, OT)
- Tops, Thomas (Phd student, NT)