

NICO RIEMERSMA

An ‘Amsterdam’ Way of Exegesis

Abstract

In the sixties of the last century, in the Netherlands a movement of biblical scholars arose who became proponents of a completely different approach to the Bible than the conventional, historical-critical method. They soon became known as the “Amsterdam School.” Frans Breukelman and Karel Deurloo are the two most important exponents of the Amsterdam School. The Amsterdam School does not use a uniform method of interpretation of the Bible, but they do share a number of principles. The most important of which is that all the interpreter’s attention should be focused on the text itself, and therefore also on understanding the text in all its aspects. Characteristic elements of the Amsterdam School are: idiolectic translation method, colometric arrangement of the text, attention to the keywords of the text, close reading with attention to theological expressiveness.

Key words

The Amsterdam School, Exegetical Method, Close Reading, Idiolectic Translation, Colometry, Frans Breukelman, Karel Deurloo

The ‘Amsterdam School’

In the sixties of the last century, in the Netherlands, a movement of biblical scholars arose who became proponents of a completely different approach to the Bible than that of the conventional, historical-critical method. They soon became known as the ‘Amsterdam School’¹ – a term coined by the Old Testament scholar Liet van Daalen² – and to which ‘so-called’ was added by

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¹ For other essays on the ‘Amsterdamse School’: N.A. van Uchelen, ‘Bijbeluitleg volgens de zg. ‘Amsterdamse School’ of een goede verstaander heeft een half woord nodig’, *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 79 (1979), 201-214; K.A. Deurloo, ‘De zogenaamde “Amsterdamse School”’, in: A.F.J. Klijn (red.), *Inleiding tot de studie van het Nieuwe Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1982), 165-172; B. Maarsingh, ‘De Amsterdamse School’, *Theologia Reformata* 25/2 (1982), 89-101; Karel Deurloo & Rochus Zuurmond (red.), *De Bijbel maakt school: Een Amsterdamse weg in de exegese* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1984); K.A. Deurloo, ‘Exegese naar Amsterdamse traditie’, in: A.S. van der Woude (red.), *Inleiding tot de studie van het Oude Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1986), 188-198; R. Oost, *Omstreden bijbeluitleg: Aspecten en achtergronden van de hermeneutische discussie rondom de exegese van het Oude Testament in Nederland. Een bijdrage tot gesprek* (Kampen: Kok, 1986); M.J. Paul & N.C. van Velzen, *De Bijbel exegese van de Amsterdamse School* (Amersfoortse studies, 1) (Amersfoort: Stichting tot Bevordering van Bijbelgetrouwe wetenschap, 1989); Uwe F.W. Bauer, *כל־הדברים האלה / All diese Worte: Impulse zur Schriftauslegung aus Amsterdam: Expliziert an der Schilfmeer erzählung in Exodus 13,17-14,31* (EHS, XIII/422) (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), 25-195; Martin Kessler, ‘Introduction’, in: Martin Kessler (ed.), *Voices from Amsterdam: A Modern Tradition of Reading Biblical Literature* (SBL.SS) (Atlanta GE: Scholars Press, 1994); K.A. Deurloo & G.J. Venema, ‘Exegesis according to Amsterdam Tradition’, in: J.W. Dyk *et al.* (eds), *The Rediscovery of the Hebrew Bible* (ACEBT.SS, 1) (Maastricht: Shaker, 1999), 3-14; Jopie Siebert Hommes, ‘De “Amsterdamse School”’, in: P.J. Knegtman & P. van Rooden (red.), *Theologen in ondertal: Godgeleerdheid, godsdienstwetenschap, het Athenaeum Illustre en de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003), 177-196; Uwe F.H. Bauer, Art. *Amsterdamer Schule*, in: *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet* (www.wibilex.de), 2006; A.W. Zwiep, *Tussen tekst en lezer: Een historische inleiding in de bijbelse hermeneutiek. Deel II – Van moderniteit naar postmoderniteit* (Amsterdam: VU University, 2013), 111-114 (‘De Amsterdamse School’); P.-B. Smit, *From Canonical Criticism to Ecumenical Exegesis: A Study in Biblical Hermeneutics* (SRT, 30) (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 86-102 (‘The “Amsterdam School of Exegesis”’); G. van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen: Het Bijbels-theologisch project van Frans Breukelman* (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2019), 139-164.

² Siebert Hommes, ‘De “Amsterdamse School”’, 188.

one of the spokespersons, Karel Deurloo, because they are not a real school, as they repeatedly say of themselves. The Amsterdam School does not use a uniform method of interpretation of the Bible, but they do share a number of principles. Those who consider themselves to belong to this school, comprise an extremely diverse group that consists not only of biblical scholars, but also of dogmatic theologians, liturgists, and practical theologians. They may be called ‘Amsterdam’, but that does not mean that all the members are from Amsterdam. What can be said of them, is that they share a strong relationship with the (former) theological faculty of the University of Amsterdam.³

How can this diversity of theological disciplines be explained? This has to do with the fact that the Amsterdam School has several tracks: (1) an exegetical track, which Deurloo characterizes as ‘literary-structural’; (2) a closely related biblical-theological track, which is strongly associated with the name of Frans Breukelman; (3) a systematic-theology track, with the most well-known name being Nico Bakker; (4) a liturgical track, in which Joop Boendermaker and Dirk Monshouwer are central figures, and (5) a political-theological track, with Dick Boer and Rinse Reeling Brouwer⁴. The primary focus is on the exegetical, and biblical-theological track. They are, as one of the representatives of the Amsterdam School says, in a dialectical relationship to each other: ‘In the explanation of biblical texts, an increasingly complete ‘biblical theology’ automatically emerges from the exegesis of texts, and conversely, the biblical theology that emerges from exegesis in its turn begins to function as a hermeneutical horizon, within which the exegesis is to be performed.’⁵

Can we determine the beginning of the Amsterdam School more precisely? Jopie Siebert-Hommes considers the beginning in the formation of the *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis* (SHA) in 1961⁶, founded by the professor of Old Testament at the University of Amsterdam, M.A. Beek.⁷ However, another location also must be pointed out, namely the parsonage of Simonshaven, where Rev. Frans Breukelman lived in the fifties of the last century. From about 1959 onwards, his manner of interpreting the Bible began attracting the attention of an increasing circle of interested parties. Pastors came to him, but soon also theological students from Leiden, Utrecht and increasingly from Amsterdam. In the last part of this contribution I will elaborate on his reading of the Bible.

Who belong to the Amsterdam School? That question is not easy to answer, because it is not a homogeneous group. There are quite a lot of differences between the various theologians of the Amsterdam School. I would like to represent four different circles:

(a) The core of the Amsterdam School consisted of two people in particular: Frans Breukelman (1916-1993) who presented himself mainly as a biblical theologian, and the Old

³ The ecclesiastical institute (‘Kerkelijke opleiding’) in Amsterdam closed in 2001. As a result, the Theology Faculty at the University of Amsterdam was closed in 2002. This brought an end to the academic home of the Amsterdam School (see Siebert-Hommes, ‘De “Amsterdamse School”, 192-195).

⁴ From 2012 to 2019, Rinse Reeling Brouwer held the Miskotte/Breukelman chair ‘voor de theologische hermeneutiek van de bijbelse grondwoorden’ at the Protestantse Theologische Universiteit) in Amsterdam, on behalf of De Nieuwe Bijbelschool.

⁵ F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie 1/1: Schrift-lezing - Een verhandeling over de kolometrische weergave van bijbelse teksten als hulp bij het lezen en als grondslag voor de exegese* (Kampen: Kok, 1984), 9

⁶ The history of the SHA has been recorded several times. At the twenty-fifth anniversary by K.A. Deurloo & F.J. Hoogewoud, ‘„Communi ardore ad litteras hebraicas inflammati” (bij het vijfentwintigjarige jubileum van SHA)’, in: J. de Roos et al. (red.), *Driehonderd jaar oosterse talen in Amsterdam: Een verzameling opstellen* (Amsterdam: Juda Palache Instituut, 1986), 91-105. At the fortieth anniversary by A.J.C. Verheij, ‘„Commune ardore ad litteras hebraicas inflammati” – II: Bij het veertigjarige jubileum van de Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis (Amsterdam, 2001). At the fifty-fifth anniversary by F.J. Hoogewoud et al. (red.), *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis 1961-2017. Jubileum-uitgave* (Bergambacht: 2VM, 2017).

⁷ Siebert Hommes, ‘De “Amsterdamse School”’, 180.

Testament scholar Karel Deurloo (1936-2019).⁸ But the New Testament scholar Rochus Zuurmond (1930-2020) should also be mentioned, together with the dogmatic theologian Nico Bakker (1934-2015), and the New Testament scholar (of the Katholieke Theologische Hogeschool Amsterdam) Ben Hemelsoet (1929-1999). Together these can be regarded as the central figures of the Amsterdam School.⁹

(b) The circle immediately around this core group consists of the Old Testament scholars: Liet van Daalen¹⁰ (1922-2000), Niek van Uchelen (1930-2022), Jopie Siebert-Hommes (1937-2023),¹¹ Frits Hoogewoud (1941) and Klaas Smelik (1950), as well as the church historian Dick Boer (1939) and the systematic theologian Rinse Reeling Brouwer (1953).

(c) Those of the third circle are those who obtained their doctorate under Karel Deurloo: in 1991 Uwe Bauer¹², in 1992 Wout van der Spek¹³ and Jan Mazurel¹⁴, in 1996 Cok den Hertog¹⁵, in 1997 Joep Dubbink¹⁶ and Ype Bekker¹⁷, in 1999 Richtsje Abma¹⁸, in 2000 René Venema,¹⁹ and in 2006 Ad van Nieuwpoort²⁰. Finally, Marco Visser who obtained his PhD under Rinse Reeling Brouwer and Klaas Spronk in 2021, can be mentioned.²¹

(d) Around these, there is a large group of theologians who feel connected to the Amsterdam School, among whom the writer of this article counts himself. Their names can be found in various collections published by representatives of the Amsterdam School.

⁸ Cf. J. Kahman, 'Methoden van exegese: Verworvenheden en ontwikkelingen', *Praktische Theologie* 8/1 (1981), 5-21, esp. 9: '[The Amsterdam School] is led by prominent figures such as F.H. Breukelman and K.A. Deurloo in Amsterdam.'

⁹ Tom Naastepad, Roman Catholic priest in Rotterdam and good friends with Hemelsoet and Zuurmond, was strongly inspired by the way of interpreting the Scriptures of the Amsterdam School.

¹⁰ Her dissertation *Simson: Een onderzoek naar de plaats, de opbouw en de functie van het Simsonverhaal in het kader van de Oudtestamentische geschiedschrijving* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1966) can be regarded as the first publication of the Amsterdam School.

¹¹ Jopie Siebert-Hommes obtained her doctorate in 1993 under the supervision of Karel Deurloo with the dissertation *Laat de dochters leven!: De literaire architectuur van Exodus 1 en 2 als toegang tot de interpretatie* (Kampen: Kok, 1993) (published in English as *Let the Daughters Live! The Literary Architecture of Exodus 1-2 As a Key for Interpretation* [BIS, 36] [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1999]).

¹² Uwe F.W. Bauer, האלה כל-הדברים / *All diese Worte: Impulse zur Schriftauslegung aus Amsterdam: Expliziert an der Schilfmeererzählung in Exodus 13,17-14,31* (EHS, XIII/422) (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991).

¹³ Wout van der Spek, *De Messias in de Hebreeuwse Bijbel: Over het eerste Samuëlboek* (Gorinchem: Narratio 1992).

¹⁴ Jan W. Mazurel, *De vraag naar de verloren broeder: Terugkeer en herstel in de boeken Jeremia* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1992).

¹⁵ Cok den Hertog, *Het zonderlinge karakter van de Godsnaam: Literaire, psychoanalytische en theologische aspecten van het roepingsverhaal van Mozes (Exodus 2.23-4.17)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996).

¹⁶ Joep Dubbink, *Waar is de Heer? Dynamiek en actualiteit van het woord van JHWH bij Jeremia* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 1997). In 2007 he succeeded Karel Deurloo as professor by special appointment of Biblical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, on behalf of the Dirk Monshouwer Stichting.

¹⁷ Ype Bekker, *Zoon van God, Messias, Mensenzoon. De structuur van het Evangelie naar Johannes: Een bijbels-theologische studie* (Kampen: Kok, 1997).

¹⁸ Richtsje Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (SSN, 40) (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999).

¹⁹ René Venema, *Schriftuurlijke verhalen in het Oude Testament: Deuteronomium 9-10; 31; II Koningen 22-23; Jeremia 36; Nehemia 8* (Delft: Eburon, 2000) (published in English as: *Reading Scripture in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 9-10, 31, 2 Kings 22-23, Jeremiah 36, Nehemiah 8* [OTS, 48] [Leiden: Brill, 2004]).

²⁰ Ad van Nieuwpoort, *Tenach opnieuw: Over het Messiaanse tegoed van het evangelie naar Lukas* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2006). For a critical consideration of this dissertation, see Smit, *From Canonical Criticism to Ecumenical Exegesis*, 93-102, under the title 'Presentation of a Representative Exegesis'.

²¹ Marco Visser, *Pars pro toto: Analyse van de figuur van het pars pro toto in het werk van F.H. Breukelman en uitwerking aan de hand van de teksten over de knecht van JHWH in Jesaja. Een bijbels-theologisch onderzoek* (ACEBT.SS, 18) (Amsterdam: SHA, 2021) (for my review, see www.nicoriemersma.nl, blog April 8, 2022).

J.L. Palache, M.A. Beek and K.H. Miskotte

As far as biblical scholarship is concerned, Frans Breukelman and Karel Deurloo may be regarded as the frontmen of the Amsterdam School, which does not mean that there had not already been Dutch exegetes and theologians who possessed a certain, critical attitude towards the historical-critical method preceding them. Three names should be mentioned in this context: Juda L. Palache (1886-1944), Martinus A. Beek (1909-1987) and Kornelis H. Miskotte (1894-1976). They can be seen as the inspirers of the Amsterdam School. Below I outline their contribution.²²

Juda L. Palache

From 1925 to 1941 Juda Palache was Professor of Semitic Languages and Literature at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, and Professor of Old Testament at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Amsterdam.²³ It was his inaugural lecture ‘Het karakter van het Oud-Testamentisch verhaal’ of 26 January 1925 that has become an important source of inspiration for theologians of the Amsterdam School.²⁴ In this lecture, he questioned the historical-critical approach to the Old Testament as it was practiced at many universities, including Dutch universities. Whereas this method is mainly interested in the *genesis* of the Old Testament (and New Testament), Palache wondered whether this criticism brings us much closer to a deeper insight into the soul of the text, which has a prominent history of *existence*. Otherwise, the texts themselves threaten to fade into the background. One must have an eye for the motifs and content of the story, as well as for its form, its style, and its meaning.²⁵ Palache sees more value in the comparison with stories in related Semitic literature than in literary criticism. Whereas the biblical writers in the historical-critical method were often seen as compilers, who merely edited the material encountered, with great piety for the tradition, Palache was of the opinion that the writers were much more independent of the material and composed much more themselves than is usually assumed. Characteristic of the ancient-oriental, Semitic tales is (1) that they are the representation of a thought or the answer to a question that has presented itself to someone; (2) the freedom they wield, not only in the face of reality, but also in the face of tradition; (3) the motive of the need for concrete, visual representations, in such a way that they can almost be acted out; (4) the freedom of treatment can lead to what we tend to call inconsistencies, but the variations serve the liveliness of the story; (5) they are not historical, but rather didactic and paraenetic in nature. The story is not told because it happened, but conversely because it is told, it becomes reality.²⁶

It is these characteristics that Palache wanted to bring to a reading of the Old Testament narratives, because such an understanding does much more justice to these narratives than is done by literary criticism. Unfortunately, these reading principles are not further elaborated in his subsequent work.

²² See also Klaas A.D. Smelik, ‘Vertellingen in de Hebreeuwse Bijbel: De benadering van het bijbelse verhaal door Palache, Beek en diens leerlingen’, *ACEBT* 9 (1988), 8-21.

²³ J.L. Palache was relieved of his position in 1940 because he was Jewish, and dismissed in 1941. He and his wife were deported to Theresienstadt in 1944 and then transferred to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.

²⁴ J.L. Palache, *Het karakter van het Oud-Testamentisch verhaal: Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het hoogleraarsambt aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger, 1925) (reprinted in: *Sinai en Paran: Opera Minora van wijlen Dr. J.L. Palache, hoogleraar aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam* [Leiden: Brill 1959], 15-36) (published in English as ‘The Nature of Old Testament Narrative’, in: Kessler (ed.), *Voices from Amsterdam*, 3-22).

²⁵ Palache, *Sinai en Paran*, 19.

²⁶ Palache, *Sinai en Paran*, 30.

Martinus A. Beek

Martinus Beek ‘succeeded’ Juda Palache at the University of Amsterdam in both faculties.²⁷ He was professor from 1946 to 1974. At first he did nothing with Palache’s ideas. This may have to do with the fact that he was above all interested in the history of religion. In the second part of his professorship, Beek became increasingly interested in a literary-analytical approach and in the theological persuasiveness of the Old Testament texts. In the 1960s, new insights and methods from English and German literary studies (‘New Criticism’ and ‘Work Interpretation’) were used by biblical scholars such as Umberto Cassuto, Luis Alonso-Schökel and Meir Weiss. Beek, his co-workers, and students were inspired by these biblical scholars. In this context, Beek wrote an article ‘Verzadigingspunten en onvoltooide lijnen in het onderzoek van de oudtestamentische literatuur’²⁸, which Deurloo rightly called ‘programmatic’.²⁹ You could call Palache’s inaugural speech the *first* manifesto of the Amsterdam School, in this article we are dealing with the *second* manifesto.³⁰ Beek wrote this article at the invitation of the Groningen Old Testament scholar Roel Oost for the magazine *Vox Theologica*, of which Oost was editor. He had invited Beek, among others, including Niek van Uchelen, Liet van Daalen and Karel Deurloo, for an article in a special issue on methods of biblical interpretation.³¹ That Beek is also critical towards the historical-critical method becomes apparent when he makes a plea to understand the larger units of narrative and the poetic, ancient, Israelite literature as a whole ‘as opposed to the atomizing analysis of historical-literary criticism’.³² In this article, Beek draws attention to the work of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, especially to the ‘Leitwortstil’ (= the motif words) that is used in the Hebrew Bible, in which he points out, following Frans Breukelman, that the motif word must be translated concordantly. Without explicitly mentioning Palache, Beek speaks in this article of ‘(a circle of) creative writers’ of these narratives and not of ‘compiling editors’. A few pages later, he does mention Palache’s statement with regard to the Old Testament authors. At the end of the article, Beek says that he wanted to draw the attention of his pupils to the work of mainly Jewish biblical scholars such as Palache, Buber and Rosenzweig, Cassuto, Seeligmann and Weiss, who – I would add – all always started from the ‘Letztgestalt’ of the Hebrew text. In their work he saw new, fertile paths for Old Testament scholarship.

Beek’s interest in Bible translation should certainly be mentioned in this contribution.³³ He held that it was actually impossible to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew, but accepted

²⁷ Strictly speaking, M.A. Beek was not the successor to J.L. Palache, since Palache was succeeded during the war by A.W. Groenteman (M.A.) (1879-1963) who was extraordinary professor from 1942 to 1945 (Siebert-Hommes, ‘De “Amsterdamse School”’, 179, note 17).

²⁸ M.A. Beek, ‘Verzadigingspunten en onvoltooide lijnen in het onderzoek van de oudtestamentische literatuur’, *Vox Theologica* 38 (1968), 2-14 (reprinted in: M. Boertien *et al.* (red.), *Verkenningen in een stroomgebied: Proeven van oudtestamentisch onderzoek* [Amsterdam: UvA, 1974], 8-19) (published in English as ‘Saturation Points and Unfinished Lines in the Study of Old Testament Literature’, in: Kessler (ed.), *Voices from Amsterdam*, 23-35.)

²⁹ K.A. Deurloo & F.J. Hoogewoud, “‘Communi Ardore ad Litteras Hebraicas Inflammata’: At the twenty-fifth anniversary of SHA”, in: J. de Roos *et al.* (red.), *Driehonderd jaar Oosterse talen in Amsterdam: Een verzameling opstellen* (Amsterdam: UvA, 1986), 91-105, esp. 94.

³⁰ Henk van Putten, *Niet te vergeten: Frans Breukelman: Kan er uit Amsterdam iets goeds komen?* (Master thesis, University of Groningen, 2009), 28, calls Beek’s article ‘the first manifesto’.

³¹ N.A. van Uchelen, ‘Bijbelexegese en literaire kritiek: Verslag van een verkenning’, *Vox Theologica* 38 (1968), 14-26; Aleida G. van Daalen, ‘Het bijbelverhaal in de context’, *Vox Theologica* 38 (1968), 26-38; K.A. Deurloo, ‘Enkele notities bij de Verdeutschung der Schrift van Buber-Rosenzweig’, *Vox Theologica* 38 (1968), 39-43.

³² In his article ‘Achtergronden van Martin Bubers Bijbelvertaling’, *Vox Theologica* 3 (1952-1953), 65-73, esp. 67, he presents Buber and Rosenzweig as opponents ‘against the attempts at atomization of 19th century criticism’.

³³ M.A. Beek wrote several articles on the translation of the Bible: ‘Noodzaak en mogelijkheid van een nieuwe vertaling van het Oude Testament’, *Theologie en Praktijk* 8 (1948), 65-75; ‘Achtergronden van Martin Bubers Bijbelvertaling’, *Vox Theologica* 3 (1952-1953), 65-73; ‘Vertalen en vertalen is twee’, *Benedictijns tijdschrift voor evangelische bezinning* 31 (1970), 93-96; *Uit het Hebreeuws in het Nederlands – uitdaging aan de bijbelvertalers* (Haarlemse voordrachten, 33) (Haarlem: Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen, 1973) (herdrukt in: Lenie

that it had to be done – as he ended a lecture for the *Hollandse Maatschappij der Wetenschappen* in 1973.³⁴ From October 1946 he was a member of the Old Testament translation committee for the ‘Nieuwe Vertaling’, which later became known as the NBG translation of 1951 (abbreviated to NBG’51). In his article ‘Herinneringen aan het werk van de Nieuwe Vertaling (NBG)’³⁵ he mentions that he always had the *Verdeutschung der Schrift* of Buber and Rosenzweig at hand and that he pleaded a number of times for its handling in Dutch, although he also expressed himself critically about this *Verdeutschung*. He did so in the article ‘Achtergronden van Martin Bubers Bijbelvertaling’.³⁶ The article ends with a critical discussion of the rendering of the name of God with ‘ER’ (= ‘He’). He calls the scriptural foundation of ‘ER’ as an equivalent of YHWH – where the name of God was often rendered ‘the Eternal’ in Jewish Bible translations – ‘weak’. It is striking that while the NBG is critical of the determining role of etymology, Beek can still appreciate a number of translations. He is much more critical of translating a given Hebrew word always with the same word in Dutch, but he puts it kindly: ‘This seems to me to be an impossibility.’ In this article Beek discusses more than the three principles of the translation of Buber and Rosenzweig, several times he mentions the name of ‘Rev. Breukelman’, who had previously shown great appreciation for the *Verdeutschung*. At the beginning Beek expresses his ‘admiration’ for the ‘seriousness and expertise’ of Breukelman, whose articles – after the publication of the Nieuwe Vertaling in 1951 on which Beek had contributed intensely – had appeared in the magazine *In de Waagschaal*, founded by Miskotte. He called the articles ‘excellent’, in order to go on to freely criticize a number of points, precisely in respect of Buber’s translation.

Kornelis H. Miskotte

Kornelis H. Miskotte throughout his career, paid a great deal of attention to Judaism and therefore also to the Old Testament.³⁷ In 1932 he obtained his doctorate in Groningen with the thesis ‘Het wezen der Joodsche religie: Vergelijkende studie over de voornaamste structuren der Joodsche godsdienstfilosofie van dezen tijd’.³⁸ In it, he treats Judaism in a phenomenological way and introduces thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Max Brod, Ernst Bloch, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig into Dutch theology. A second, large phenomenological study appeared in 1939 under the title ‘Edda en Thora’,³⁹ in which he compares the Germanic religion to the Jewish religion. At the end of the Second World War, in 1945, he became ecclesiastical professor of dogmatics at the University of Leiden, a position he held until 1959.

van Reijendam-Beek (ed.), *Hier blijven half alle ogenblikken’: Keuze uit het werk van M.A. Beek* [Baarn: Ten Have, 1988]); Hoofdstuk 3 ‘Vertalen’, in: M.A. Beek, *Wegwijzers en wegbereiders: Een halve eeuw oudtestamentische wetenschap* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1975), 24-35; Martien Beek, ‘De vertaling van Buber’, *Summa* 15 (1983), 3-4; M.A. Beek, ‘Herinneringen aan het werk van de Nieuwe Vertaling (NBG)’, in: K.A. Deurloo & F.J. Hoogewoud (red.), *Beginnen bij de letter Beth: Opstellen over het Bijbels Hebreeuws en de Hebreeuwse Bijbel voor Dr. Aleida G. van Daalen* (Kampen: Kok, 1985), 74-79.

³⁴ Beek, *Uit het Hebreeuws in het Nederlands*.

³⁵ Beek, ‘Herinneringen aan het werk van de Nieuwe Vertaling (NBG)’, 74.

³⁶ Beek, ‘Achtergronden van Martin Bubers Bijbelvertaling’, 65.

³⁷ He derived his interest in the Old Testament from H.F. Kohlbrugge whom he admired, and who saw the Old Testament as the fundamental to the New Testament. This because for the writers of the New Testament the Old Testament was the foundation of their preaching.

³⁸ K.H. Miskotte, *Het wezen der Joodsche religie: Vergelijkende studie over de voornaamste structuren der Joodsche godsdienstfilosofie van dezen tijd* (Amsterdam: Paris, 1932).

³⁹ K.H. Miskotte, *Edda en Thora: Een vergelijking van Germaanse en Israëlitische Religie* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1939).

Two books that have had a major influence on the theological ideas of the Amsterdam School are ‘Bijbelsch ABC’⁴⁰ and ‘Als de goden zwijgen: Over de zin van het Oude Testament’⁴¹. In the first book, Miskotte spelt out key words taken from the Old Testament, during the Second World War, keeping his audience alert to the dangers of ‘the new pagan religion’ (= Nazism) in which very different words are central. ‘Als de goden zwijgen’ is best known for Miskotte’s talking about the surplus of the Old Testament. He considers ‘this margin of ideas’: scepticism, rebellion, erotics and politics to be an excellent companion in the confrontation with the ungenue nihilism, which he spoke of in the first part of the book, which he characterized as a ‘Small mirror of our times’.⁴² In this book, too, he opposes ‘a ‘religious’ interpretation of the Old Testament’, as he did earlier in ‘Bijbelsch ABC’.⁴³ The central notion here is also (the preaching of) ‘The Name’ – ‘I will be what I will be – as a critical power against this religion as well as against nihilism – the Name, only be known in its actions.’⁴⁴ Miskotte considers Scripture to be the multifaceted testimony of this one Name, which is groundless and central, which breaks the silence of the gods, and dwells on earth to be with men.⁴⁵ It is these notions that are seen as essential in the Amsterdam School and are therefore discussed again and again. Although Miskotte is not likely to be considered to be a representative of the Amsterdam School, nonetheless he is regarded by representatives of the Amsterdam School as a great source of inspiration.⁴⁶

Frans Breukelman and Karel Deurloo

These three people, Palache, Miskotte and Beek, laid the foundations on which Frans Breukelman and Karel Deurloo continued to build. Breukelman further elaborated Miskotte’s thinking in biblical-theological terms. Deurloo initially continued and expanded on Beek’s standpoint, but he was also strongly influenced by Breukelman,⁴⁷ especially when it came to the interpretation of Genesis. Joep Dubbink attributes the success of the Amsterdam School at the time mainly to Deurloo. In his opinion, Breukelman was too polemical to do the same.⁴⁸ Dubbink does not do justice to the fact that many, students, pastors and parishioners, were

⁴⁰ K.H. Miskotte, *Bijbelsch ABC* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1941). A second revised edition was published by Ten Have in 1966 with the title ‘Bijbels ABC’, a third in 1971, a fourth in 1973, a fifth edition in 1977, a sixth edition in 1980, a seventh edition in 1992 and an eighth edition in 2016. An annotated version for inclusion in the ‘Verzameld Werk. Deel 16’ is in preparation (2025).

⁴¹ K.H. Miskotte, *Als de goden zwijgen: Over de zin van het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1956). A photomechanical reprint by the same publisher appeared in 1965. This second edition was supplemented with an index of Bible passages and personal names. Miskotte also wrote a new foreword. When Miskotte’s Collected Works were published, an unaltered reissue appeared in 1983, with the addition of the indexes from the second edition, the two prefaces, plus a list of errata from the 1956 text, a comparison with the German translation by Hinrich Stoevesandt and an afterword by the compilers A. Otter and D. Monshouwer. A digital version, provided by Willem van der Meiden, was published in 2023. The book is published in German under the title ‘Wenn die Götter schweigen: Vom Sinn des Alten Testaments’ by Chr. Kaiser in Munich. It ran through three editions in a relatively short time: 1963, 1964 and 1966. In 1983, Hartmut Spener in Waltrop published a facsimile edition of the third, revised edition. This German edition is the source text for the English translation by John W. Dobberstein, which was published in 1967 by the publishers Harper and Row (New York/Evanston) and William Collins (London) under the title ‘When the Gods are Silent’ (I take this information from ‘In the digital (fourth) edition of *Als de goden zwijgen*’ by Willem van der Meiden.)

⁴² Miskotte, *Als de goden zwijgen*, 143,145-229.

⁴³ Miskotte, *Als de goden zwijgen*, 59.

⁴⁴ Miskotte, *Als de goden zwijgen*, 99-111.

⁴⁵ Miskotte, *Als de goden zwijgen*, 282.

⁴⁶ For a concise introduction to the theology of K.H. Miskotte, see Martin Kessler, *Kornelis Miskotte: A Biblical Theology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press 1997).

⁴⁷ Bauer, האלה כל־הדברים / *All diese Worte*, 126: ‘K.A. Deurloo ist ... ein Schüler Beeks, Die entscheidendsten Impulse erhielt er jedoch von Frans Breukelman.’

⁴⁸ Joep Dubbink, *De tekst mag het zeggen: Bijbellezen volgens Karel Deurloo* (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2020), 106-107 (for my review, see www.nicoriersma.nl, blog June 8, 2020).

particularly touched by what Breukelman put forward at lectures and teachings with regard to biblical testimony, and also that Deurloo was to a large extent dependent on Breukelman from a biblical-theological point of view.⁴⁹

Frans Breukelman

Breukelman, then a pastor in Simonshaven (1948-1968), gained fame in both ecclesiastical and academic circles with a series of no less than twenty articles on the occasion of the publication of the Nieuwe Vertaling of 1951 of the Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap in the magazine, edited by K.H. Miskotte, *In de Waagschaal*.⁵⁰ His criticism, which was extremely sharp and had a strongly polemical tone,⁵¹ focused on the non-concordant ('*einheitlich*') translation of the key words of Scripture, the central Old Testament concepts. Otherwise, the reader can no longer see the connections between the different texts in which the same key word occurs.⁵² One translation that made a big impression on him is the *Verdeutschung der Schrift* by Buber and Rosenzweig.⁵³ That translation – together with the Statenvertaling – is for him an impressive example of what a Dutch Bible translation should look like. The translation issue has been an important issue for the Amsterdam School ever since. I will come back to that below. In addition to Buber and Rosenzweig, Breukelman was strongly influenced by Miskotte with his strong emphasis on the Old Testament as anti-pagan testimony⁵⁴, and by Karl Barth who, in Breukelman's view, brought dogmatics back into line with the structure of biblical testimony.

In 1968, Breukelman was appointed, not uncontroversially, to the University of Amsterdam⁵⁵, not as a lecturer in Biblical Theology, as one might expect, but as a senior lecturer in Hermeneutics, with G.C. van Niftrik (1904-1972).⁵⁶ Under M.A. Beek at UvA, Breukelman did not come in for promotion. Breukelman was much more of a (gifted) speaker than a writer. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt says: 'The biblical texts are given the liveliness of persons in him.'⁵⁷ Gerard van Zanden mentions his perfectionism, his mood swings and the regular despair

⁴⁹ Cf. Kessler, 'Introduction', xix, 'F.H. Breukelman ... an eloquent and influential exponent of the Amsterdam tradition.'

⁵⁰ Miskotte had previously invited Breukelman to sit on the committee for the assessment of the NBG '51.

⁵¹ He says later of his fierceness in 'Miskotte's inspiratie: Tenach en dogmatiek', in: K.H. Miskotte, *De weg der verwachting* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1975), 34-50: 'If I had known what would come later in terms of Bible translations, I would not have been so fierce in those twenty articles.'

⁵² The twenty articles from *In de Waagschaal* of the years 1952-1953 are included under the title 'Een beoordeling van de Nieuwe Vertaling' in: Frans Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie II/2 – Sjemot: De eigen taal en vertaling van de bijbel* (Kampen: Kok, 2009), 361-496. The same collection also included four other pieces by Breukelman on translation: 'De kerkvader Hieronymus en het grondbeginsel van bijbelvertaling' (283-308), 'Het probleem van de bijbelvertaling als gesprekstema in de correspondentie tussen Augustinus en Hieronymus' (309-337); 'De Latijnse bijbelvertalingen in de zestiende eeuw als achtergrond van de Statenvertaling' (339-360) and 'Bijbelvertaling en apostolaat' (497-518), where Breukelman responded to the article 'Enkele opmerkingen over de Nieuwe Vertaling' by dr. D.J. Hoens in: *Kerk en Theologie* 4 (1954), 97-103 (this article was also published in BT II/2, 519-525) (cf. Hoofdstuk III 'Hoe moet de Bijbel vertaald worden?' in: Bekker, *Gesprekken met Breukelman*, 49-68). BT II/2 does not include the article he wrote with B.P.M. Hemelsoet: "Van 'Nieuwe Vertaling' naar 'Groot Nieuws': Over het grondbeginsel van bijbelvertalen", *ACEBT* 6 (1988), 9-22.

⁵³ For the historical context of Buber's conceptual world, see Lourens de Vries, 'Vroomvogels en aankondigengelen: Idiolecte bijbelvertalingen in de Lage Landen', in: Paul Gillaerts *et al.* (red.), *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen: Elf eeuwen van vertalen* (Heerenveen: Royal Jongbloed, 2015), 865-871.

⁵⁴ For this view of Miskotte on the OT, see Mirjam Elbers, *The Anti-Religious Testimony of the Bible as Self-Critique: K.H. Miskotte in Conversation with Jan Assmann* (PhD, Leuven, 2024).

⁵⁵ See Eward Postma, *Dilettant, Pelgrim, Nar: De positie van C.W. Mönnich in cultuur en theologie* (Delft: Eburon, 2008), 318-319.

⁵⁶ The course Biblical Theology was taught between 1968(!) and 1984 by Prof. Dr. C.H. Lindijer, ecclesiastical professor of Practical Theology, Biblical Theology and Ethics (Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*, 23, noot 54).

⁵⁷ Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, 'Horst Dzubba (19.7.1913-9.12.1978): Ein Berliner Nachbar von Frans Breukelman', *Texte und Kontexte* 90/2 (2001), 4-31, esp. 7.

about his exegetical discoveries as possible causes for Breukelman's non-promotion.⁵⁸ Karel Deurloo speaks of 'incompatibility of characters' between Beek and Breukelman.⁵⁹ Breukelman worked at the theological faculty for twelve years until 1980, indebted to Miskotte, of whom he says that he gave him the elementary orientation, and that he did not do more than to explain that view 'down to the smallest details, and to prove that he is right.'⁶⁰

Initially, around 1956, Breukelman intended to name his project 'Dogmatics as hermeneutics'.⁶¹ He wanted to study the design of the *doctrina* from the consideration of the extent to which it corresponds to the structure of the biblical testimony. Breukelman advocated a continuous interaction between exegesis and dogmatics. In the sixties he began to work on the project 'Theology of the Tanakh',⁶² in which he wanted to map out the theological structure of the Old Testament writings on the basis of the key words. Later he published the entire work, consisting of four volumes, under the title 'Biblical Theology' (abbreviated in the notes as BT).⁶³ The first and the third part contain studies of the two books of the Bible, which Breukelman had been busy with all his life, namely Genesis as the book not only with which the Bible opens, but which also opens the Scriptures, and the book with which the New Testament opens, the Gospel according to Matthew, in which the evangelist demonstrates that he is aware of the great theme of Genesis: the becoming of Israel. The Gospel according to Matthew continues that story with the story of the becoming of Jesus Messiah. The second part can rightly be called 'biblical theology', because here Breukelman shows the coherence of the biblical testimony, with his sketch of the four basic words (*jāmim*, 'days', *hā-êrêts tāchat hās-jāmim*, 'the earth under the heavens', *sjemōt*, 'names', and *debārim*, word-deeds).⁶⁴ The fourth part considers the question of the resemblance of protestant theology with the structure of the biblical testimony. The interlocutor here is John Calvin. Breukelman published several

⁵⁸ Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*, 27.

⁵⁹ Karel Deurloo "'Teruggeworpen op Tenach'" (een pro-Frans getuigenis)', in: Nico Bakker *et al.* (red.), *Eén zo 'n mannetje: Frans Breukelman en zijn invloed op tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 2004), 98-101.

⁶⁰ F.H. Breukelman, 'Miskotte's inspiratie: Tenach en dogmatiek', 41.

⁶¹ For the table of contents of this project, see 'Bijlage II', in: Frans Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie IV/2: Theologische opstellen* (Kampen: Kok, 1999), 421-422; for the design, see 'Dogmatiek als hermeneutiek' in: BT IV/2, 5-75.

⁶² For a description and analysis of Breukelman's 'Bijbelse Theologie', see G. van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen: Het Bijbels-theologisch project van Frans Breukelman* (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2019) (for my review, see www.nicoriemersma.nl, blog December 1, 2020); G. van Zanden, 'De Bijbelse Theologie van Frans Breukelman in Amsterdamse context', *ACEBT* 30 (2015), 37-52.

⁶³ For his 'Omschrijving van het begrip "Bijbelse Theologie"', see F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie I/1: Schrift-lezing - Een verhandeling over de kolometrische weergave van bijbelse teksten als hulp bij het lezen en als grondslag voor de exegeze* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 9-35 (reprinted in: Rinse Reeling Brouwer & Wim Kloppenburg *et al.* (red.), *Bijbelse theologie in praktijk* [Om het Levende Woord, 20] [Kampen: Kok, 2012], 1-25) (published in as 'Umschreibung einer Biblischen Theologie', *Texte und Kontexte* 31-32 [1986], 3-39). For a valuable review of the four-part 'Bijbelse Theologie', see Rinse Reeling Brouwer, 'Frans H. Breukelman – De man en zijn karwei', in: Jurgen Beumer (ed.), *Zo de Ouden zongen ...: Leraar en leerling zijn in de theologiebeoefening (tussen 1945 en 2000)* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1996), 37-52, esp. 45-47; Rinse Reeling Brouwer, 'De tien cahiers van de *Bijbelse Theologie*: Een overzicht', in: Rinse Reeling Brouwer *et al.* (ed.), *Bijbelse Theologie in praktijk* (Om het levende Woord, 20) (Utrecht: Kok, 2012), 27-45; Rinse Reeling Brouwer, *De man en zijn karwei: Over Frans Breukelman (1916-1993)* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 2012), 29-72.

⁶⁴ F.H. Breukelman, *Biblische Theologie II/1: Debharim – Der biblische Wirklichkeitsbegriff des Seins in der Tat* (Kampen: Kok, 1998); *Bijbelse Theologie II/2: Sjemot – De eigen taal en de vertaling van de Bijbel* (Kampen: Kok, 2009). In a review of this last book in *Interpretatie* 18/8 (2010), 25-27, I referred to Mieke Bal who demonstrates in *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen: Inleiding in de narratologie* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1980) that stories have four building blocks: time, place, story characters and history. At the time that Breukelman formulated these four fundamental terms, narratology did not yet have the place it occupies today, also in biblical scholarship. Can you say that Breukelman was ahead of his time, in the sense that Breukelman recognized the building blocks of the story, as early as the fifties of the last century? What he did, was giving biblical theological names to it.

volumes himself, but most of his work was published posthumously – Breukelman died in 1993.⁶⁵ Finally, it must be said here that his influence on the Amsterdam School was significant, although he could also be strongly opposed to it: ‘Can’t we just stop about the Amsterdam School?’ he said in his last interview – in 1993.⁶⁶

Karel Deurloo

In 1967, Karel Deurloo obtained his doctorate under Beek with his dissertation ‘Kain en Abel’.⁶⁷ That he is critical of the historical-critical method is clear from the start when he speaks of a ‘process of demolition’, but that does not mean that he would deny the value of the historical-critical method. The problem however, is that the exegete is literally left with fragments, Deurloo argues – and he does so in imitation of the Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad – that we should let the form in which we eventually received the text, the ‘Jetztgestalt’ and ‘Letztgestalt’, determine the interpretation. That brings us to Deurloo’s adage: ‘The text itself may speak.’ The exegete should concentrate on the text as it now stands, and not be distracted by all kinds of side streets, unless they are helpful to an understanding of this text. This also means that you try to burden your reading as little as possible with your presuppositions and preoccupations, and that you are critical of preconceived academic explanations or ecclesiastical traditions of faith. Deurloo does not want to – or should you say – cannot avoid the one presumption that is, the idea that the text has something to say that is essential to the listener. No less fundamental is it for him to read the text first of all within the context of the Tanakh and the Bible as a whole. This view *of* and approach *to* the text has been characteristic of Deurloo’s entire career.

In 1975 he became Professor of Old Testament at the University of Amsterdam⁶⁸, succeeding his supervisor M.A. Beek. That he was one of the best-known professors of Old Testament in the Netherlands, has to do with the fact that he wrote for a much larger audience than just the academic forum. He often wrote together with others (including Nico Bouhuijs, but also Karel Eykman, Rochus Zuurmond and Ben Hemelsoet). It was mainly narrative material that had his attention. The book of the Bible that fascinated him throughout his career was Genesis.⁶⁹ It was a love he shared with Breukelman. In 1996, Deurloo became ecclesiastical professor of Biblical Theology, also at the University of Amsterdam. He held this chair until his retirement in 2001 and then from 2003 to 2006 he became professor by special appointment of Biblical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, a chair established by the Dirk Monshouwer Stichting.

⁶⁵ For the above passage I mainly used Reeling Brouwer, ‘Frans H. Breukelman – De man en zijn karwei’; Rinse Reeling Brouwer, ‘Tien boeken vol geschreven woord: Bij de verschijning van het laatste cahier van de *Bijbelse Theologie* van Frans Breukelman’, *Interpretatie* 20/6 (2012), 20-23, en Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*. For an outline of his theology, see N.T. Bakker, ‘De ene naam: Over de theologie van F.H. Breukelman’, *Wending* 32/4 (1977), 220-226. For an outline of his hermeneutics (in reaction to criticism by J. Muis) R. Reeling Brouwer, ‘Hermeneutiek bij F.H. Breukelman: Enige antwoorden op de vragen van J. Muis (1)’, *In de Waagschaal* 19/3 (1990), 89-95; R. Reeling Brouwer, ‘Hermeneutiek bij F.H. Breukelman: Enige antwoorden op de vragen van J. Muis (2)’, *In de Waagschaal* 19/4 (1990), 106-110. Other introductions to Breukelman are: Y. Bekker *et al.* (red.), *Gesprekken met Frans Breukelman* (‘s-Gravenhage: Meinema, 1989). For the extent of Breukelman’s influence on other scholars, see N.T. Bakker *et al.* (red.), *Eén zo’n mannetje: Frans Breukelman en zijn invloed op tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 2004).

⁶⁶ W. Klouwen & A. van Nieuwpoort, “‘Hou nou toch eens op met die Amsterdamse School’”: Gesprek met Frans Breukelman’, *Interpretatie* 1/6 (1993), 2,4-9.

⁶⁷ K.A. Deurloo, *Kain en Abel: Onderzoek naar exegetische methode inzake een ‘kleine literaire eenheid’ in de Tenakh* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1967). He had chosen the subject in consultation with Breukelman (so Deurloo, in: “‘Teruggeworpen op Tenach’” (een pro-Frans getuigenis)’, 100.

⁶⁸ The official title was: ‘Gewoon hoogleraar Hebreeuwse en Aramese taal- en letterkunde tot in de eerste eeuw na Christus, de Israëlitische oudheden, de uitlegging van het Oude Testament en de geschiedenis van de Israëlitische godsdienst.’

⁶⁹ See F.J. Hoogewoud, ‘Karel Deurloo over Genesis’, in: R. Abma *et al.* (red.), *Nog dichter bij Genesis: Stellen over het eerste bijbelboek voor Karel Deurloo* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1995), 161-174.

It was in this period that his ‘Kleine Bijbelse Theologie’ appeared. In it he wanted to ‘point out something thematic within the great diversity of the biblical testimony (...) that would at the same time highlight the coherence between the collected books’.⁷⁰ He called it a ‘Small Biblical Theology’. It should be seen as a supplement to Breukelman’s ‘Biblical Theology’. While the Exodus may be the big theme in the Tanakh, the return from exile is the other big theme. The first part is therefore called ‘Exodus en Exil’.⁷¹ In the second part, two problematic issues with regard to the time spent in the country are discussed: kingship and the temple.⁷² What Deurloo demonstrates with regard to every theme, is that the initiative always lies with God, and that God keeps his covenant with the people of Israel, even when there is resistance from the people.⁷³ It may be clear, as Joep Dubbink rightly says, that Deurloo’s heart lay with the core of the biblical testimony, and that he paid less attention to the outer corners and side streets of the biblical testimony.⁷⁴

While Breukelman had been extremely sharp in his criticism of the ‘Nieuwe Vertaling’ of 1951, Deurloo – together with Nico ter Linden, the author of ‘Het verhaal gaat ...’, - expressed himself extremely critically of the first version of the Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling (2004)⁷⁵ half a century later. Their criticism is ‘that, in our opinion, the NBV hinders rather than opens up access to these ancient texts for today’s readers and listeners’, where they had initially applauded the initiative of the Dutch Bible Society (NBG) to make a new Bible translation.⁷⁶

Much appreciation and robust criticism

In many churches (Reformed [Hervormd and Gereformeerd], Lutheran and Mennonite) the Amsterdam School has been highly appreciated for a long time. Representatives of this school were often asked to give lectures or to perform in bible study groups. They were very well able to translate their latest insights into biblical texts, also to a non-religious audience. The television broadcasts of the IKOR/CK – the later IKON – in the sixties to the early eighties of the last century contributed to the fame and appreciation of the Amsterdam School. Central figures in this were the student pastors – one in Amsterdam, the other in Leiden – Karel Deurloo and Nico Bouhuijs, who brought the biblical stories into the spotlight in a surprising, topical way. Their texts were subsequently always published by Ten Have (Baarn).⁷⁷ Voices from the Amsterdam School were also regularly heard in *Rondom het Woord*, the theological program of the NCRV.

⁷⁰ Karel Deurloo, *Exodus en Exil* (Kleine Bijbelse Theologie, 1) (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 7.

⁷¹ See note 68.

⁷² Karel Deurloo *et al.*, *Koning en Tempel* (Kleine Bijbelse Theologie, 2) (Kampen: Kok, 2004).

⁷³ The titles of the other two volumes are: *Onze lieve vrouwe baart een zoon* (Kleine Bijbelse Theologie, 3) (Kampen: Kok, 2006) en *Schepping: Van Paulus tot Genesis* (Kleine Bijbelse Theologie, 4) (Kampen: Kok, 2008).

⁷⁴ For the above passage I have gratefully made use of Dubbink, *De tekst mag het zeggen*. For a characterization of the person and the work of Karel Deurloo, see also Rochus Zuurmond, ‘A Man of Letters: Karel Deurloo as a Theologian’, in: Dyk *et al.* (eds), *Unless some one guide me*, 126-146.

⁷⁵ Karel Deurloo & Nico ter Linden, *Het luistert nauw: De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling, nader bekeken* Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2008); Karel Deurloo & Nico ter Linden, *Niet zo, maar zo: Honderd en enige vraagtekens bij de Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2010).

⁷⁶ Deurloo & Ter Linden, *Het luistert nauw*, 9. Others too – but not everyone! – from the Amsterdam School are critical of this new Bible translation (see ‘De beproeving: Over de Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling’, *Om het levende Woord* 15 [2005], 1-176).

⁷⁷ K. Bouhuijs & K.A. Deurloo, *Dichter bij Genesis* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1967); *Taalwegen en dwaalwegen: Bijbelse trefwoorden* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1967); *Dichter bij de profeten* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1968); *Dichter bij Paulus* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1980); Nico Bouhuijs & Karel Deurloo, *Vechten voor vrede: Dichter bij verhalen over vriend en vijand* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1980); *Een vreemdeling in ons midden: Dichter bij verhalen over de naam van God* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1980); *Gegroeide geschriften: Dichter bij het ontstaan van de bijbelboeken* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1981).

In the academic world, however, the case was completely different. There was criticism⁷⁸, but there was also polemic and strife; these words seem to me to be better descriptions than ‘dispute’ and ‘turmoil’.⁷⁹ Harsh words were spoken and written back and forth.⁸⁰ The fierce differences of opinion were sufficient reason for the ‘Raad voor zaken van Kerk en Theologie’ to set up a study committee⁸¹ in order to ‘to map out the problem in a clear way, without the need to reach a single point of view that all members would share’. The report was published in the journal *Kerk en Theologie* under the title ‘Een geschil over de uitleg van het Oude Testament’.⁸² The thorny issue that recurs again and again in all points of discussion (the texts [1], the canon [2], the speaking of God [3]) is that of the place and the appreciation of history: (1) Whereas the A-group says that the edited text may be the end product of a development, the ‘Letztgestalt’ of the text is decisive; the B-group says that the definitive form becomes clearer, if first of all the origin and historical growth of the text are traced. (2) Where the A-group is of the opinion that the Alexandrian canon division can easily support that history, and becomes the theologically co-decision-making authority in the interpretation and proclamation; the B-group is of the opinion that there is a continuous, historical line from Deuteronomy to Joshua and subsequent books. (3) Where the A-group says that God makes history, his Word comes to pass; the B-group says that history has been chosen by God as the medium of revelation. The importance of the report can be seen in the fact that the theological contradictions have been clearly expressed.

The Amsterdam School was accused – certainly in the beginning – of not meeting scientific standards.⁸³ As a result, this group had hardly any access to Dutch academic journals. It drove them to start their own journal: *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie* (abbreviated as ACEBT), which later appeared as *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese van de*

⁷⁸ The criticism focused on Breukelman’s hermeneutics: H.W. de Knijff, *Sleutel en slot: Beknopte geschiedenis van de bijbelse hermeneutiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 146-165, and J. Muis, *Openbaring en Interpretatie: Het verstaan van de Heilige Schrift volgens K. Barth en K.H. Miskotte* (‘s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1989), 504-511, but also of his unhistorical approach: C. Houtman, *De Schrift wordt geschreven: Op zoek naar een christelijke hermeneutiek van het Oude Testament* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2006), 160-163; H.M. Vroom, ‘De grote daden van God: Verhaal of historie? Overwegingen bij de discussie over de methode van de exegese’, *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 79/4 (1979), 215-246; Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*, pays attention in Chapter 5 ‘In gesprek met Breukelman’ (201-240) to the critical response to Breukelman.

⁷⁹ In 2019, another debate began. In a post on Facebook by Marcel Poorthuis, at that time professor of Interreligious Dialogue at Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, he mentioned the status and merits of the Amsterdam School, as well as its blind spots and the now defunct priorities, leading to a symposium ‘The Amsterdam School in debate’ on June 25, 2018. The various contributions are published in the magazine *In de Waagschaal* 47/9 (2018), 4-35.

⁸⁰ See C.J. Labuschagne, *Wat zegt de bijbel in GODS naam? Nieuwe bijbeluitleg en modern godsgeloof* (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1977), 61-63, but Breukelman could also be sharply critical (see G. van Zanden, ‘Het boekje van Berkhof: Frans Breukelman het vuur aan de schenen legt door James Barr’, in: E. van ‘t Slot *et al.* (ed.), *Messiaanse exegese: Bijbelse theologie met het oog op het Rijk* (Fs. R. Reeling Brouwer) (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2019), 98-107.

⁸¹ The members of the study committee were Tj. Baarda, N.T. Bakker, H. Berkhof, K. Bouhuijs, K.A. Deurloo, E. Flesseman-van Leer, B.P.M. Hemelsoet, G. te Stroete, N.A. van Uchelen, J. van der Werf and R. Zuurmond. The article refers to an ‘A’ group and a ‘B’ group without making explicit who belongs to which group.

⁸² C.P. van Andel (red.), ‘Een geschil over de uitleg van het Oude Testament’, *Kerk en Theologie* 27 (1976), 89-101, where earlier the title of the document of the committee had been: ‘Beroering rond het O.T.’, Karel Deurloo reported afterwards. The report was followed by a response from K.A. Deurloo, ‘De voorrang der werkelijkheid’, *Kerk en Theologie* 30 (1979), 265-275, who felt that the language of the report had been softened; this article was followed by a rebuttal by A.S. van der Woude, ‘Een betere weg? Een antwoord aan Dr. K.A. Deurloo’, *Kerk en Theologie* 30 (1979), 276-284.

⁸³ Also in ‘Een geschil over de uitleg van het Oude Testament’, 90, is mentioned that ‘this way of working’ had been stigmatized by theological faculties as being ‘unscientific’. Deurloo himself reports this in: P. van Midden, ‘Eenendertig ACEBT-uitgaven en vijftien “Supplements”’, in: Hoogewoud, *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis 1961-2017*, 97; Reeling Brouwer, ‘Frans Breukelman – De man en zijn karwei’, 37, says that Henk Jan ten Jonge – then lecturer in Greek at the University of Amsterdam – told him that ‘the Breukelman method’ was no good, as it was in conflict with the elementary rules of scientific practice.

Bijbel en zijn Tradities (also abbreviated as ACEBT).⁸⁴ The series, with roughly one booklet per year, started in 1980 and is still running. From 1997 onwards, a particular Biblical book was selected to be the theme of that year's issue.⁸⁵ For a long time, this was always a book from the Old Testament. That changed in 2012, when the writer of this article asked the editors to also pay attention to books from the New Testament. He pleaded for Luke-Acts. The request was granted, with an offer to the applicant to become a guest editor of that edition of the journal. The booklet was published in 2014.⁸⁶ In 2023, a second New Testament cahier on the Gospel of Matthew was published.⁸⁷ The editors may continue to feel connected to the Amsterdam School, but the authors, experts in the field of the Bible book in question, are not always so.

In addition to the Amsterdam Cahiers, other 'series' owe some or all of their origins to the Amsterdam School. First of all, there is the commentary series *Verklaring van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel*, of which twenty volumes have now been published (Genesis I-II, Exodus I-II, Numeri I-II, 1 Samuël 1-15, 1-2 Koningen I-IV, Ezechiël I-II, Jona, Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemia, 1-2 Kronieken I-II). The series was established on the initiative of Henk Jagersma (1927-2016) and his successor at the Brussels Protestant Theological Faculty, Klaas Smelik.

In addition, there is the series *Een vertaling om voor te lezen*. A translation of the following books of the Bible into Dutch has already appeared: Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Ruth, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.⁸⁸ A complete translation of the Megillot, including Esther and Lamentations, is in the pipeline.

Finally, two other series should be mentioned here. The first is the series *Om het levende Woord*. Started in December 1966 on the occasion of Breukelman's 50th birthday to fill in the gap caused by the fact that relatively little of Breukelman's work has been published to date.⁸⁹ A second volume appeared in July 1968, also containing work by Breukelman.⁹⁰ The series – published annually – only received its sequel, shortly after Breukelman's death in 1993 and ran until 2012. The second series is the magazine *Interpretatie, tijdschrift voor bijbelse theologie*, which was published for many years with eight issues a year. The magazine, with Dirk Monshouwer as one of the founders, ran from 1993 to 2014.

⁸⁴ For the history of ACEBT from 1980 to 2017, see Van Midden, 'Eenendertig ACEBT-uitgaven en vijftien "Supplements"', 97-101.

⁸⁵ 16 *Jeremia* (1997), 17 *Hosea* (1999), 18 *Psalmen* (2000), 19 *Richteren* (2001), 20 *In de woestijn – Numeri* (2002), 21 *Prediker* (2004), 22 *Jona* (2005), 23 *Deuteronomium* (2007), 24 *Jozua* (2009), 25 *Psalmen in hun traditie* (2010), 26 *Ezechiël* (2011), 27 *Genesis* (2012), 28 *Deuterocanonieke boeken* (2013), 29 *Lucas & Handelingen* (2014), 30 *Bijbelse Theologie* (2015), 31 *Wijsheid* (2017), 32 *De twaalf kleine profeten* (2018), 33 *Exodus* (2020), 34 *Ezra & Nehemia* (2021), 35 *Elia & Elisa* (2022), 36 *Het Evangelie naar Matteüs* (2023), 37 *Megillot* (2024). In 2025, 38 *Jesaja*.

⁸⁶ Nico Riemersma (red.), *Lucas & Handelingen* (ACEBT, 29) (Bergambacht: 2 VM, 2014).

⁸⁷ Nico Riemersma & Piet van Midden (red.), *Het Evangelie naar Matteüs* (ACEBT, 36) (Amsterdam: SHA, 2023).

⁸⁸ For background and overviews, see F.J. Hoogewoud, 'Stap voor stap: Een kroniek bij 'Een vertaling om voor te lezen'', *ACEBT* 1 (1980), 102-113; F.J. Hoogewoud, 'Het werk aan "Een vertaling om voor te lezen"', *Rondom het Woord* 35 (1993), 64-67; K.A. Deurloo, 'De principes van 'Een vertaling om voor te lezen'', *Rondom het Woord* 35 (1993), 68-70; Hanna Blok, 'Chronicle: A Bible Translation to Be Read Aloud', in: Dyk *et al.* (eds), *Unless some one guide me*, 375-386; F.J. Hoogewoud & Dries Blokker, 'Naar de letter vertalen om de geest op te roepen: "Een vertaling om voor te lezen" door de Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis', in: Ph. Van Heusden *et al.* (ed.), *Beter méér dan één ...: De Bijbel in het Nederlands* ('s-Hertogenbosch/Mechelen: KBS, 2009), 33-49.

⁸⁹ *Om het levende Woord* I/1 (1966) contains, in addition to the preface by K.H. Miskotte and a song by Tom Naastepad, five articles by Breukelman: (1) 'Geschiedenis als theologisch begrip'; (2) 'Uitleg en verklaring van Jesaja 55:6-11'; (3) 'De ouverture van het evangelie naar Mattheus'; (4) 'De gelijkenis van de onbarmhartige dienstknecht', and (5) 'De finale van het evangelie naar Mattheus'.

⁹⁰ *Om het levende Woord* II/2-3 (1968) contains two translation proofs: of Matthew 1,2 and 3 and of Genesis 1:1-2:4 by Breukelman, and two articles: (1) 'Im Anfang schuf Gott den Himmel und die Erde (Genesis 1:1-23) and (2) Psalm 113. Ben Hemelsoet wrote 'Mark 16,8: Slot van een herlezing van het Marcusevangelie'.

Characteristics of the Amsterdam School

How can the Amsterdam School be recognized? What are its characteristics?

(1) When it comes to the Bible then, on the basis of the progressive names of the two parts: ‘Old’ Testament and ‘New’ Testament, it may seem that the New Testament is to be preferred. However, the Amsterdam School – following its teacher Miskotte – is of the opinion that the primacy should lie with the Old Testament. It not only precedes the New Testament but more importantly, the New Testament cannot be read without the Old Testament. The apostolic *kerygma* can only be explained if the Old Testament is allowed to function as a framework, is Breukelman’s formulation, but attributed by him to Miskotte.⁹¹

(2) Karel Deurloo calls the Old Testament a special case within ancient Near Eastern literature. Why ‘a special case’? Because this collection was borrowed from the synagogue and the church, according to Deurloo.⁹² It is not clear to me why Deurloo immediately adds that the academy can and should also read this collection in the context of Oriental studies. I would prefer therefore to formulate it a little differently: Within Old Testament scholarship, a discipline within theology, the Old Testament is not read as ancient Eastern literature – that happens within Orientalism – but rather as the book of two religious communities: synagogue and church, who listen to this book as being authoritative for life.⁹³

(3) The fact that in the Old Testament we are dealing with a Jewish book, should not be ignored, and therefore also not the Jewish interpretation of that book. Within the Amsterdam School, the term Old Testament is used, but people prefer to speak, with the synagogue, of Tanakh. The use of that name is more inclusive: one acknowledges the division of the book into *Torah* (Law), *Neviim* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). This recognition contains a critical component, in the sense that the Alexandrian canon classification, which is based on the Septuagint, and is used in the Christian church, is rejected as being too historicizing (see also above).⁹⁴

(4) Scripture, according to opinion within the Amsterdam School, first needs to be heard. The Jewish characterization of Scripture as *Mikra* (= ‘what is called out loud’) is therefore seen by the Amsterdam School as extremely appropriate to this book.⁹⁵ The Scriptures should be (i) read aloud so that (ii) the congregation may hear what it says (iii) and then respond with their actions. That’s an essential trifecta for the Amsterdam School. The view of Scripture as *Mikra* is done justice by a colometric arrangement of the text: the text is classified on the basis of cola (a colon is a unit of breath). The *Verdeutschung der Schrift* by Buber and Rosenzweig is seen as the prime example of a colometric representation.

(5) An important characterization that is frequently used for Scripture, especially by Breukelman, is that of ‘biblical testimony’. The word ‘testimony’ has to do with (the revelation of) the Name. All biblical texts are seen as bearing witness to the reality of the revelation of the Name. This is the point that the Amsterdam School learned from Miskotte.

(6) The diversity of voices in Scripture is often mentioned in the Amsterdam School, but the emphasis is on the unity of Scripture. It is the Name that ensures the unity of Scripture in the midst of the diversity of biblical texts.

⁹¹ Breukelman, ‘Miskotte’s inspiratie: Tenach en dogmatiek’, 37.

⁹² Deurloo, ‘Exegese naar Amsterdamse traditie’, 190; Deurloo & Zuurmond, ‘Ter inleiding’, in: Deurloo & Zuurmond (red.), *De Bijbel maakt school*, 7; cf. Deurloo & Venema, ‘Exegesis according to Amsterdam Tradition’, 9.

⁹³ Cf. P. van Midden & K.A. Deurloo, ‘De Bijbel op zijn Amsterdams’, in: K. Spronk *et al.* (red.), *De Bijbel vertaald: De kunst van het kiezen bij het vertalen van bijbelse geschriften* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum/Kapellen: Pelckmans, 2007), 165-179, esp. 177.

⁹⁴ See also Rochus Zuurmond, ‘Twee voetnoten bij K.H. Miskotte’s theologie van het Oude Testament’, in: Miskotte, *De weg der verwachting*, 26-30.

⁹⁵ See the title of the festschrift for F.J. Hoogewoud: J.W. *et al.* (red.), *Om voor te lezen – Miqra* (Fs. F.J. Hoogewoud) (ACEBT.SS, 4) (Maastricht: Shaker, 2004).

(7) In the Amsterdam School, people generally tend to date the Old Testament texts later than was usual in the sixties, seventies and eighties of the last century. The exile was considered to be an important creative period, when new material was included in the text. Within the Amsterdam School, people are inclined to date a lot of material even later than that, into the post-exilic period, and even into the Hellenistic era.

(8) Essential to the Amsterdam School is the *simplex cognitio Dei*. The double knowledge of God – the idea that we know God by the creation, and from scripture, as the ‘Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis’ article 2,⁹⁶ tells us, is vehemently rejected. We know God only from Scripture. The Amsterdam School here reminds us of the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation.

(9) The exegete should therefore concentrate fully on the text itself, and not on that which lies behind the text or precedes the text (sources or history). To formulate this as precisely as possible, it is about concentrating on the ‘Jetztgestalt’ and ‘Letztgestalt’ of the text – in the case of the Old Testament on the Masoretic text. In order to understand the *kerygma* of the text accurately, the exegete must pay attention to all aspects and all parts of the text before him. This requires ‘close reading’.

(10) A particular point of interest of the Amsterdam School – which is done in imitation of Buber and Rosenzweig – are the motif words in a text or a book of the Bible. Buber and Rosenzweig speak of ‘Leitworte’. They provide coherence (for a text, for a book of the Bible). ‘Key words’ [‘grondwoorden’] are spoken of when it comes to the great, determining theological words of all Scripture.

(11) The interpreter’s fidelity to the given text, implies that all methods that prove useful for understanding are welcomed. Any method can be used when the interpreter is faced with a text that he does not understand. However, all data that emerges from these methods, whether they concern the literary context, the genre, the style, or the historical *Umwelt*, must be tested against the given text.⁹⁷

(12) From literary analysis we know the figure of speech *pars pro toto*, which describes a part as a representation of the whole. Literally ‘pars pro toto’ means ‘a part for the whole’. Breukelman uses the expression frequently in his ‘Biblical Theology’.⁹⁸ It has since become characteristic of the Amsterdam School. To demonstrate how Breukelman uses the expression, I quote here from the first time he uses the term in his ‘Bijbelse Theologie’: ‘The biblical texts are about what happened between God and Israel on the *êrêts* that He gave them. This history of God with Israel, is pars pro toto the history of God-with-us-all, *bā-kōl ha-êrêts*, on the whole earth. It is the history of Emmanuel.’⁹⁹ Said in the language of ‘Amsterdam’, the particular represents the universal. In this context, the word ‘representation’ sometimes sounds like a translation of the Latin ‘pro’, but I wonder whether this is the point. In this reading, the tension between Israel and the nations is lost. It is better to read ‘pro’ as ‘Vorbild’.¹⁰⁰

(13) The Amsterdam School is immediately recognised when it speaks of Scripture as the telling of an ‘unhistorische Geschichte’ (the term is from Karl Barth). In the language of the

⁹⁶ Article 2: ‘We know Him by two means. First, by the creation, maintenance, and government of the whole world: inasmuch as it is to our eyes like a beautiful book, in which all creatures, great and small, are like letters. Secondly, He makes Himself known to us even more clearly and perfectly by His holy and Divine Word, to know as much as is necessary of us in this life, for His glory, and for the salvation of His own.’

⁹⁷ I base this characteristic on Deurloo, ‘Exegese naar Amsterdamse traditie’, 191. In his article ‘De zogenaamde “Amsterdamse School”’, 170, he formulates it as follows: ‘Historical- and tradition-critical disciplines may prove to be of service in interpretation. An exegete is always forced to look for information elsewhere outside the text; but when he returns to the text, he will again criticize the information he has obtained in relation to the given text. The text itself must provide the means of entry to the text, because it does not allow itself to be forced to speak by external means. The interpreter who, other than through the form in which a pericope presents itself, wants to penetrate into the secrecy of the words within a certain larger composition, can count on remaining excluded.’

⁹⁸ For a detailed discussion, see, Visser, *Pars pro toto*, 30-114.

⁹⁹ BT I/1, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Bauer, האלה כל-הדברים / *All diese Worte*, 192.

Amsterdam School: ‘What the biblical testimony says about ‘what happened’, is not intended to be understood as ‘historia’, but as the story about the occurrence of a ‘dābār’ of God.¹⁰¹ ‘Unhistorische Geschiede’ is an expression that has always been difficult to use outside the Amsterdam School. The Amsterdam School has therefore been frequently criticised¹⁰² for its view on ‘the unhistorical character of biblical stories’, as the subtitle of a book written by Deurloo reads.¹⁰³

(14) The thesis of the Amsterdam School is that exegesis begins with the translation of the text. That is why the question of translation has always been a fundamental issue for the Amsterdam School.¹⁰⁴ We have already seen that the *Verdeutschung der Schrift* by Buber and Rosenzweig was seen as an important translation by the Amsterdam School¹⁰⁵, especially because the key words in it are rendered in a concordant manner. Roughly speaking, there may be two ways of translation, but from the outset the Amsterdam School has opposed a dynamic-equivalent translation, in which the sense of the proto text is translated into the target language. They themselves argue for what they call an idiolectic method of translation¹⁰⁶, in which one aims to do justice to the specific (Greek: *idion*) of the text as much as possible. That is a translation that ‘aims so far as possible to render the design, atmosphere, style, expressiveness and dynamism specific to the Hebrew text in Dutch’.¹⁰⁷ Whereas in dynamic-equivalent translations the receiving language is central, in idiolect translations (including the Statenvertaling and the Naardense Bijbel) the source text with its own idiom is central. The translation discussions have always been quite heated in the Netherlands. It began, as we saw above, with Breukelman sharply criticizing the NBG’51 translation, Karel Deurloo in turn – with Nico ter Linden, the author of *Het Verhaal gaat* – sharply criticized the ‘Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling’.¹⁰⁸ It might seem that the Amsterdam School only criticizes translations. That

¹⁰¹ Cf. the first thesis of the twelve in BT IV/2, 1-12.

¹⁰² H.M. Vroom, ‘De grote daden van God: Verhaal over historie? Overwegingen bij de discussie over de methode van de exegese’, *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 79 (1979), 215-246; De Knijff, *Sleutel en slot*, 146-165; M.J. Paul, ‘Bijbelexegesis naar Amsterdams inzicht’, *Wapenveld* 44/6 (1994), 175-180; W. Dekker, ‘Waarheid: Het geschiedenisbegrip volgens de Amsterdamse School’, *Wapenveld* 44/6 (1994), 181-188; H. Vroom, ‘Echt gebeurd? Verhalen of feiten? Over historische en literaire bijbelkritiek en zeggenschap van de bijbel’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28/1 (2007), 345-371.

¹⁰³ Karel Deurloo, *Waar gebeurd: Over het onhistorisch karakter van bijbelse verhalen* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1981).

¹⁰⁴ Countless articles on translation have been published by the Amsterdam School. Therefore I refer to Nico Riemersma, *Een ‘Amsterdamse’ weg in de exegese: Schets van de Amsterdamse School* (Amsterdam: SHA, 2025), 72-77. For a discussion of the translation principles of the Amsterdam School, see Eleonora D. Hof, *Vertaalprincipes van de ‘Amsterdamse School’ en de Statenvertaling: Een kwalitatieve en theologische vergelijking* (Master thesis, VU Amsterdam 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Various Old Testament scholars from the Amsterdam School have written about this translation: M.A. Beek, ‘Achtergronden van Martin Bubers Bijbelvertaling’, *Vox Theologica* 3 (1952-1953), 65-73; K.A. Deurloo, ‘Enkele notities bij de Verdeutschung der Schrift van Buber-Rosenzweig’, *Vox Theologica* 38 (1968), 39-45; Karel Deurloo, ‘Bubers laatste correcties’, *ACEBT* 2 (1981), 23-25; Martien Beek, ‘De vertaling van Buber’, *Summa* 15 (1983), 3-4.

¹⁰⁶ At the beginning, a concordant translation method was under discussion. Maria de Groot, ‘Concept voor een richtlijn’, *ACEBT* 1 (1980), 122-126, esp. 123, has characterized this method of translation as ‘idiolectic’, which she described as ‘a translation that does justice to the idiom of each book of the Bible and of the Bible as a whole’. Since then, representatives of the Amsterdam School have always spoken of ‘idiolect translation’.

¹⁰⁷ K.A.D. Smelik, ‘Idiolecte of formeel-equivalente vertalingen’, in: H.W. Hollander (red.), *Spectrum van Bijbelvertalingen* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1994), 88-101: ‘beoogt de aan de Hebreeuwse tekst eigen vormgeving, sfeer, stijl, zeggingskracht en dynamiek zo ver mogelijk in het Nederlands weer te geven’; K.A.D. Smelik, ‘Concordant of idiolect vertalen?’ *Met Andere Woorden* 20/3 (2001), 3-9; K.A.D. Smelik, ‘Idiolect, concordant of doeltaalgericht? Bijbelvertalen in het jaar 2004’, in: Pieter Oussoren, *De Naardense bijbel* (Vught: Skandalon, 2004), 1632-1642; for examples that show the importance of this method of translation, see e.g. Van Midden & Deurloo, ‘De bijbel op zijn Amsterdams’, 168-177.

¹⁰⁸ Karel Deurloo & Nico ter Linden, *Het luistert nauw: De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling nader bekeken* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2008); *Niet zo, maar zo: Honderd en enige vraagtekens bij de Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (Amsterdam:

impression must be dispelled, because the *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis* regularly publish translations themselves. They do so under the title *Een vertaling om voor te lezen* ('A Translation for Reading Aloud' (for the publications, see the end of the paragraph 'Great appreciation and robust criticism').

(15) Worth mentioning in this context is the relationship between form and content. The criticism of the dynamic-equivalent translation method is that it does not pay attention to the relationship between the form of the text and the content (message). When that relationship is abandoned, the textual connections between different passages become invisible to the reader.

In summary, you can say that the dialectic of 'reading' and 'hearing' is the hallmark of the Amsterdam School. Niek van Uchelen has aptly described this as meaning that those who represent the Amsterdam School have 'a literary eye for the text and a theological ear for the Word'.¹⁰⁹ If you had to trace that back, you could say that the literary aspect can be traced back to Beek and the theological aspect to Miskotte.

Attention for Tanakh and for the Gospel

From the above it could be concluded that the Amsterdam method of exegesis is largely directed at the interpretation of the Old Testament. Certainly the Old Testament does occupy a significant place within the Amsterdam School, but that does not mean that there is no attention for the New Testament. The names that need to be mentioned in the context of the New Testament are first of all Frans Breukelman, who has been extensively involved with the Gospel of Matthew¹¹⁰. The Roman Catholic New Testament scholar Ben Hemelsoet has written a book on the Gospel of Mark¹¹¹. Ype Bekker obtained his doctorate under Karel Deurloo for a study on the Gospel of John¹¹² and Ad van Nieuwpoort obtained his doctorate under the same supervisor for a study on the Gospel of Luke.¹¹³

This is not to say that the attention of the Amsterdam School for the New Testament is focused mainly on the Gospels. There is also attention for other New Testament writings, including that by Rochus Zuurmond and Ben Hemelsoet on the letter of Paul to the Galatians,¹¹⁴ and earlier we saw that Karel Deurloo also dealt with Paul, obviously paying attention to other aspects of the Pauline texts than is found in the regular 'Paul' research.¹¹⁵

The Amsterdam School may often have been criticized for paying too little attention to historical questions, but that criticism is too easily made. In his publications the Old Testament scholar Klaas Smelik has shown that he has a keen eye for historical questions.¹¹⁶ He does argue for an order of precedence: the historical questions can only be properly addressed after a

Van Gennep, 2010); see also Ad van Nieuwpoort & Rochus Zuurmond (red.), *De beproeving: Over de Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (Om het levende Woord, 15) (Kampen: Kok, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Van Uchelen, 'Bijbeluitleg volgens de zg. 'Amsterdamse School', 213.

¹¹⁰ F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie III/1: De theologie van de evangelist Mattheüs: De ouverture van het Evangelie naar Mattheüs. Het verhaal over de genesis van Jezus Christus 1:1-2:23* (Kampen: Kok, 1984); *Bijbelse Theologie III/2: Het evangelie naar Mattheüs als 'Die Heilsbotschaft vom Königtum'* (Kampen: Kok, 1996); *Bijbelse Theologie III/3: De finale van het Evangelie naar Mattheüs* (Kampen: Kok, 2012).

¹¹¹ Ben Hemelsoet, *Marcus* (Verklaring van een bijbelgedeelte) (Kampen: Kok, 1979).

¹¹² See note 18.

¹¹³ See note 19.

¹¹⁴ Rochus Zuurmond, *God noch gebod: Bijbels-theologische notities over de brief van Paulus aan de Galaten* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1990). B. Hemelsoet, *Galaten* (Verklaring van een bijbelgedeelte) (Kampen: Kok, 1978).

¹¹⁵ Nico Bouhuijs & Karel Deurloo, *Dichter bij Paulus* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1980); Karel Deurloo & Fred van der Steen, *Kolossenzen* (Verklaring van een bijbelgedeelte) (Kampen: Kok, 1999); K.A. Deurloo, *Schepping van Paulus tot Genesis* (Kleine Bijbelse Theologie, 4) (Kampen: Kok, 2008).

¹¹⁶ See, for example, his dissertation: K.A.D. Smelik, *Saul: De voorstelling van Israëls eerste koning in de Masoretische tekst van het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: P.E.T., 1977); 'De Hebreeuwse Bijbel als historische bron', *ACEBT* 8 (1987), 9-22; *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (OTS, 28) (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

thorough reading of the text. With regard to the New Testament: Rochus Zuurmond, professor of Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics, published – shortly after his speech on the occasion of the 361st Dies Natalis of the University of Amsterdam¹¹⁷ – a critical book about the historical Jesus.¹¹⁸

The Amsterdam School in an international context

The presence of the Amsterdam School has not been limited to the Netherlands. The School also gained fame abroad. In the eighties and nineties, for example, several German students came to Amsterdam to pursue the theological method that was being practiced here, and in particular because of the ‘Amsterdam’ method of exegesis of the Tanakh. Two of them obtained their doctorates under Karel Deurloo (and Rochus Zuurmond): Uwe Bauer¹¹⁹ and Klara Butting.¹²⁰

Studies by Karel Deurloo and Frans Breukelman were also regularly translated into German, and published in the journal *Texte und Kontexte*, a magazine founded in 1978 by the former Jesuit Ton Veerkamp (1933-2022), who lives in Berlin, and Jaap van Zwieten de Blom (1941-1982), a student of Breukelman and student pastor in Bochum. The attention from Germany for the Amsterdam School arose after a number of guest lectures by Breukelman at the Freie Universität in Berlin in the winter semester of 1975-1976, which impressed many students, but to which the theology professors did not respond.

At a much earlier stage, namely when Breukelman was a pastor in Ritthem (1943-1948), a friendship had sprung up between the Berlin theologian Horst Dzubba (1913-1978) and Breukelman. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt suspects that this friendship arose later in February 1949, after a conference of the ‘Duitslandcommissie’ of the Dutch Council of Churches, where they were both present.¹²¹ This friendship cooled off around 1954, as is known from a letter from Breukelman to Miskotte,¹²² when Breukelman discovered that Dzubba was publishing Breukelman’s insights in the German-language magazine *Unterwegs*, not only under Breukelman’s name, but including his own name as co-author.¹²³

At the end of the eighties, contact with another German biblical scholar was established, namely between Bernd Diebner (1939-2023), Honorary Professor at the University of Heidelberg (1999-2004), and Karel Deurloo. The Lutheran professor of Liturgy Joop Boendermaker, visiting Heidelberg, established the contact.¹²⁴ He saw in Diebner someone with similar, critical views as those of the Amsterdam School, including a late dating of the ‘TNK’, as Diebner always writes, where in the Amsterdam School ‘Tenakh’ is conventional.¹²⁵ Afterwards, they wrote back and forth in each other’s journals (ACEBT and DBAT [= Dielheimer Blätter zum Archäologie und Textüberlieferung von Antike und Spätantike]). The

¹¹⁷ This speech dealt with the same subject; it was published under the title ‘Op zoek naar de historische Jezus’ (Amsterdam: AUP, 1993).

¹¹⁸ R. Zuurmond, *Verleden tijd? Een speurtocht naar de “historische Jezus”* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Bauer, האלה כל-הדברים / *All diese Worte*. His dissertation begins with an extensive description of the Amsterdam School (see note 1).

¹²⁰ Klara Butting, *Die Buchstaben werden sich noch wundern: Innerbiblische Kritik als Wegweisung feministischer Hermeneutik* (Berlin: Alektor Verlag, 1994).

¹²¹ Marquardt, ‘Horst Dzubba (19.7.13-9.12.1978)’, 21.

¹²² Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*, 17 (note 37).

¹²³ For a detailed description of this relationship, see Marquardt, ‘Horst Dzubba (19.7.1913-9.12.1978)’, 4-31.

¹²⁴ For example, Bernd J. Diebner reports in: ‘Gottes Gespräche mit dem Propheten Jona’, in: Nico Riemersma, et al. (red.), *Van God gesproken: Opstellen over bijbelse theologie aangeboden aan Joep Dubbink* (ACEBT. SS, 19) (Amsterdam: SHA, 2023), 231-235, esp. 231.

¹²⁵ See also Zuurmond, ‘A Man of Letters’, 5-6. Diebner dated the TNK even later than Deurloo: ‘Die Biblia Hebraica ... sei als orientalischer, anti-hellenistischen Text endgültig erst in römischer Zeit entstanden.’

Festschrift for Rochus Zuurmond¹²⁶ was published as Beiheft 14 of DBAT, with Deurloo and Diebner as editors.

Deurloo's secret contacts with Prague were older – since 1968? – in the person of Jan Heller (1925-2008), professor of Old Testament at Charles University in Prague, in what was then Czechoslovakia. One of his students, Martin Prudký, came to the University of Amsterdam in 1982-1983 to study theology for a year. In 1990 Prudký became assistant professor of Old Testament, and in 2014 professor of Protestant Theology at the same Charles University. The contact between Deurloo and Prudký led to the *Colloquium Biblicum*, a conference on the Bible and Biblical Theology that has been held annually in Prague since 1992. Deurloo received an honorary doctorate in 2009 for his enormous involvement in the Prague theological faculty, after he had already been awarded the Jan Amos Comenius Medal in 1993. Two years later, in 1995, he received an honorary doctorate from the Brussels Faculty of Protestant Theology 'as a sign of the great appreciation for the exegetical approach of Deurloo'.¹²⁷ After Deurloo's death, Joep Dubbink, professor of Biblical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, and Klaas Spronk, now emeritus professor of Old Testament at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam (now in Utrecht), took over his role at the *Colloquium Biblicum*. That Deurloo had a great international appeal is also evident from the fact that his books have been translated into English, German, Czech and Hungarian.

The Old Testament scholar Martin Kessler (1927-2021) is known at the *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis* as 'Our man in the USA'. He acted as an intermediary between the Amsterdam School and the English-speaking world. He translated articles, collections and books¹²⁸ from the Amsterdam School, and ensured that the summaries of articles in *ACEBT* in *Old Testament Abstracts*, and if necessary, in *New Testament Abstracts*, were recorded. Through Roel Oost, who had become fascinated by Beek and Breukelman's approach, he had come into contact with the Amsterdam School in 1967. In 1969 he made personal contact with Beek and his pupils. And that relationship continued, supported by his visit to Amsterdam every year. The *SHA* appointed him *Socius Honoris Causa*. In his honour, a separate chapter was devoted to his work in the anniversary issue of the *SHA* in 2017.¹²⁹

Finally, 'our man in Israel' should be mentioned here, Gabriel Cohn. He obtained his doctorate in 1969 under Beek with a dissertation on the prophetic book of Jonah.¹³⁰ He is the first in a distinguished line of scholars to study the book in terms of a literary analysis based on the Amsterdam School. His name is always mentioned in the *ACEBT* as a 'correspondent'.

A representative example

As a representative example of how the Amsterdam School deals with the New Testament, I want to discuss Frans Breukelman's interpretation of the Gospel according to Matthew.

¹²⁶ K.A. Deurloo & B.J. Diebner (Hrsg.), *YHWH – KYRIOS – ANTITHEISM of THE POWER OF THE WORD* (Fs. Rochus Zuurmond) (DBAT.B 14) (Heidelberg: DBAT, 1996).

¹²⁷ As Klaas Smelik informed me in an email dated February 18, 2025.

¹²⁸ M. Kessler (ed.), *Voices from Amsterdam: A Modern Tradition of Reading Biblical Narrative* (selected and translated by M. Kessler) (SBL.SS) (Atlanta GE, Scholars Press, 1994); M. Kessler (ed.), *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (edited and translated by Martin Kessler) (Winona Lake Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004); Frans H. Breukelman, *The Structure of Sacred Doctrine on Calvin's Theology* (edited by Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer, translated by Martin Kessler) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹²⁹ F.J. Hoogewoud, 'Martin Kessler: Ambassadeur van 'Amsterdam' in de VS / 'Onze man in de VS', in: F.J. Hoogewoud et al. (red.), *Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis 1961-2017. Jubileum-uitgave* (Bergambacht: 2VM, 2017), 67-71.

¹³⁰ G.H. Cohn, *Das Buch Jona im Lichte der biblischen Erzählkunst* (SSN, 12) (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1969).

The Gospel according to Matthew as an overture

There is a specific reason for Breukelman's interest in this Gospel. He considers it to be theologically correct to open the New Testament with the Gospel of Matthew. To quote Breukelman himself: 'From the point of departure from the Tanakh, you don't come into the New Testament properly if you don't enter through Matthew. I think it is no coincidence that those who ordered the four gospels did not put John first. And nor did they place Luke at the beginning. I think they did the right thing. Matthew functions very well in that place, in the same way that the book of Genesis at the beginning of the so-called Old Testament functions as an overture to the whole.' 'That peculiar concentration on one in the midst of the others, which is so characteristic of Genesis and of the whole of Tanakh, you also find in the New Testament especially in Matthew.' 'And just as the book of the begettings of Adam, is the overture of the whole of the Tanakh, so the book of the begetting of Jesus Christ in Matthew, is the overture to the New Testament.'¹³¹

Study of Matthew

Breukelman, as he himself says, had been working on the Gospel of Matthew since his student days.¹³² He became fascinated by the way in which Matthew tells his story. A book that has been of great importance to him is the Matthew commentary by Johannes Wilkens, a book that he said he had read ten or twenty times.¹³³ It 'opened his eyes and ears to the composition and its proclamatory tendency'. If there was one thing that was important to Breukelman, it was the composition of a book of the Bible. That he could not come to a definitive decision with regard to the division of the book, is evident from the fact that his Matthew study does not begin with a discussion about the composition. More importantly, however, BT III/2 contains *two* overviews, which in turn are not in the main text, but are mentioned in the appendices (IV and V).¹³⁴ These appendices are not dated. The redactors have not been able to find out when they were written.

In Appendix IV 'Global outline of the composition of the Gospel according to Matthew', Breukelman reckons on five main parts: I. 1:1–2:23 ('overture'), II. 3:1–11:24 ('the ministry of Jesus in Galilee'), III. 11:25–16:20 ('revelation and concealment'), IV. 16:21–25:46 ('Jerusalem') and V. 26:1–28:20 (without title). In the demarcation of the larger story units, he follows Wilkens. The latter speaks of an 'Einführung' (1:1–2:23) and a 'Hauptteil' that consists of two halves: I. 3:1–16:20, which in turn can be divided into: 3:1–11:24 and 11:25–16:20, and II. 16:21–28:20, which he divides into 16:21–25:46 and 26:1–28:10.

In Appendix V Breukelman uses Wilkens' main division: 1:1–2:23 ('overture'), 3:1–16:20 ('Galilee') and 16:21–28:20 ('Jerusalem'). In addition, he wants to do justice to the two hinges around which the book revolves: 'From then on Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' in 4:17 and 'From then on Jesus began to show the disciples that he had to go away to Jerusalem and suffer much on the part of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and raised up on the third day' in 16:21.¹³⁵

¹³¹ For all three quotes, see Bekker, *Gesprekken met Frans Breukelman*, 133.

¹³² Bekker, *Gesprekken met Frans Breukelman*, 11.

¹³³ Johannes Wilkens, *Der König Israëls: Eine Einführung in das Evangelium nach Matthäus. Erster Halbband (Kapitel 1-16)* (Der urchristliche Botschaft) (Berlin: Furche, 1934); *Der König Israëls: Eine Einführung in das Evangelium nach Matthäus. Zweiter Halbband (Kapitel 16-28)* (Der urchristliche Botschaft) (Berlin: Furche, 1937).

¹³⁴ The editors of BT III/2, 15, report that it was originally Breukelman's plan to locate 'Global outline of the composition of the Gospel according to Matthew' as an intermezzo between paragraph 1 (Jesus' first word) and paragraph 2 (Jesus' last word). As the text remained unfinished, they did not do so, but included it as Appendix IV in the volume.

¹³⁵ Divisions of narrative units can be found in various other places in the volumes (see BT III/1, 22; BT III/2, 144.213-217.253-254; BT III/3, 77).

Three volumes

Breukelman's study of this gospel was presented in three volumes that together form the third part of his 'Biblical Theology'.¹³⁶ Breukelman himself was responsible for the first volume, the other two volumes were completed posthumously by his pupils. Ad van Nieuwpoort and Pieter van Walbeek edited the second volume, and Mirjam Elbers and Ad van Nieuwpoort were responsible for the third volume. As he was now no longer able to indicate how he preferred his interpretation to be structured, the editors had to make choices, some of which could have been arranged in another manner, but also congenial to Breukelman's thinking.¹³⁷

In the design of the volumes, a different division of the Gospel of Matthew was chosen: I. 1:1–2:23 (overture), II. 3:1–25:46 (middle part) and III. 26:1–28:20 (finale). The reason for defining the second part otherwise than Breukelman himself did, has to do with the fact that at the beginning of the second part we hear Jesus' *first* word about the fulfilment of all righteousness (3:15), and at the end of the second part, in 25:31–46, Jesus' speaks his *last* word, before he is handed over to be crucified. These two passages were crucially important to Breukelman and are therefore extensively explicated. And that also applies to the parable of the King as Judge (18:23–25). The interpretation of this parable (§ 3) is now placed after the discussion of Jesus' first (§ 1) and last words (§ 2), whereas it would have been more appropriate to place it in between.

Breukelman's decision to discuss certain passages and not others is often easy to determine. Overall, you can say that he always considers the beginning and the end of a larger story unit and of the book as a whole, to be of great importance.

As an example of the first: he considers Matthew 26:1–28:20 to be a story unit. The beginning (26:1–2) and the end (27:55–28:20) are discussed intensively.¹³⁸ The only other passage that is discussed in detail in this narrative unit is 27:11–26 'But Jesus stood before Pilate'.¹³⁹ This choice is justified in the words of the third Passion Announcement: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and they will deliver him up to the Gentiles to mock him, and to scourge him, and to crucify him, and on the third day he will be raised' (20:17–19, cf. 16:21 and 27:1–2). Matthew 27:11–26 is part of the section "they will deliver him up to the Gentiles" (27:1–54).¹⁴⁰

An example of the second may serve as the fact that he was intensively involved in the overture (1:1–2:23) and the finale (27:55–28:20¹⁴¹). Breukelman limits the word 'finale' here to the end of the Passion. I would say that if you use the word 'overture' for 1:1–2:23, shouldn't you keep the word 'finale' for 26:1–28:20 in its entirety? Surely being resurrected on the third day should not be separated from the movement that is outlined in 16:21: '... and suffer many things of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again on the third day' (cf. 26:1)?

¹³⁶ See note 108. Abbreviated as BT III/1, BT III/2 and BT III/3.

¹³⁷ See Rinse Reeling Brouwer, 'Een bespreking van de verzorging van de uitgave van Frans Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie III/2. De Koning als Richter* (Kampen: Kok, 1996), 286 pages', *Om het levende Woord* 7 (1997), 144–148.

¹³⁸ His exegesis of these passages is not included in one volume, see BT III/2, 62–78 for Matt. 26:1–2, see BT III/3, 1–59 for Matt. 27:55–28:20.

¹³⁹ see BT I/1, 140–173 = BT III/3, 77–111.

¹⁴⁰ BT I/1, 140.

¹⁴¹ For a review of this finale by Breukelman, see Marco Visser, 'Uit de hemel: Frans Breukelman over de finale van het Matteüsevangelie', *ACEBT* 36 (2023), 143–152.

Breukelman's method of working

This is the place where I will say something about Breukelman's working method.¹⁴² Don't even think of talking about the 'Breukelman method'. That would give the impression that something was being imposed on the text, a predetermined method that could be applied to any text. It had to be about this text and about nothing but this text. Thus a few things were essential to him:

(1) First of all there was the colometric arrangement of the text. The colometric arrangement of the text is about the words that, spoken in the same breath, – a colon is a breath unit – in this spelling as 'Abbild der Rede', are always put on one line.¹⁴³ A colometric arrangement is not only a great help for reading aloud, but also helps to get a good overview of the composition of the pericope.

(2) That it is important to have an eye for punctuation is also shown by Breukelman, on the basis of his discussion of Matthew 26:45,50 and 20:17-19. His meticulous attention to this must be seen in the light of what he says in that context: 'For the interpretation and performance of the biblical testimony, the way in which we put the words of the text on paper is of great significance. It is not uncommon for this to be based on a certain conception and explanation of the text. This applies not only to the division into chapters, pericopes and 'verses', but also to the 'distinctiones' that we apply to the way in which the texts 'punctuate'.'¹⁴⁴

(3) A third important tool in addition to the colometry and punctuation is the concordance. It is used to 'discover how words, expressions, ways of speaking and turns of sentence, function in the narrower and wider textual contexts of Holy Scripture'.¹⁴⁵

(4) Breukelman always pays attention to text-critical matters ('deviant readings'). What he does not do, as is customary in the historical-critical method, is to first determine the text, and thus discuss all text-critical issues, prior to exegesis. Breukelman always discusses text-critical-issues in the interpretation. Especially those questions that are important for the understanding of the whole pericope receive his attention.

(5) Of course it concerns interpretation, in this case the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel, which does not mean that translating the Greek text¹⁴⁶ is not part of the explanation. Breukelman's interpretation often starts with a translation of the pericopes in question. 'It goes without saying that we must have understood the biblical text in order to be able to translate it.'¹⁴⁷ The reader will conclude that a good translation actually only comes about after thorough exegesis. The Greek text is sometimes in the lead (see BT III/1), but sometimes it only gets mentioned in an appendix (see in BT III/2, Appendices I, II, III). A dynamic-equivalent translation of the Greek text cannot be considered; those 'dynamic-equivalent' translators would seem from one pericope to another ... not to be hearers of the word'. Breukelman demonstrates this with regard to *Groot Nieuws voor u* by comparing the translations of Matthew 18:10-14, the parable of the stray sheep, with Luke 15:3-7, the parable of the lost sheep. This example clearly shows that Breukelman has a keen eye for all the nuances of the text. It therefore leads him to the proposition that the evangelists always chose their words very carefully. Breukelman's criticism of dynamic-equivalent translation is that in this way the biblical text no longer has primacy, but one's own experience of reality and the language in which it is usually expressed.¹⁴⁸ Frequently Breukelman goes into conversation with a number

¹⁴² For a somewhat different sketch of Breukelman's methodology, see Van Zanden, *Bij het begin beginnen*, 57-60.

¹⁴³ BT I/1, 45.

¹⁴⁴ BT I/1, 42.

¹⁴⁵ BT I/1, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Breukelman often does not mention which Greek text he is using.

¹⁴⁷ BT I/1, 59.

¹⁴⁸ BT I/1, 59.

of translations. These can include the ancient translations, such as Jerome's Vulgate, but also modern translations. He is always on the lookout for the most accurate translation of the text.

(6) Composition is of great importance to Breukelman. Thus he often starts his explanation with a division into the different parts or scenes. A justification of the classification is not always given, nor does he formulate the indications that he finds in the text for the 'correct' division. In the story about Jesus before Pilate (27:11-26) it is the change of story characters that brings him to his division.¹⁴⁹

(7) For Breukelman, the reformational adage *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpret* is an important starting point. Therefore we should not prevent Matthew from explaining himself.¹⁵⁰ Three things are important in this context: (a) the 'Stichwort', because – in Breukelman's view – we are constantly dealing with a well-considered use of words. The exegete will always have to ask himself whether there is (a) a motif word that carries the entire text, and if so, how this is done; (b) the repetition of words. It is through the repetition of words that Matthew makes connections; (c) the sequence of the words. This must not be destroyed in a translation, so as to prevent an important element from not receiving the attention it deserves.¹⁵¹

(8) In the context of 'the exegetical method', Breukelman draws attention to three issues: (a) the interaction between the colometric method and the analysis of the composition (see above); (b) the layout of the pericopes.¹⁵² For example, he is of the opinion that according to the instruction of Matthew 20:17-19, the Passion story should not be divided into three chapters – chapters 26, 27 and 28 – but into the following four parts: 26:1-56 (the handing over to the elders and scribes), 26:27-75 (the condemnation to death), 27:1-54 (the handing over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified) and 27:55–28:20 (his resurrection on the third day);¹⁵³ (c) Breukelman may criticize the redaction-critical methods of other commentators of the Gospel of Matthew,¹⁵⁴ but if by his way of working, he finds that the Matthew text has a parallel with Mark and/or with Luke, then he will use these texts to bring out the specificity of Matthew. In Breukelman's view, the comparison should have a heuristic function and need not go back behind the texts.¹⁵⁵ I would like to add a fourth consideration, the core of what exegesis is: bringing the parts home into the whole. How to understand this word in such a way that it fits in the sentence, how to interpret this sentence in such a way that it fits in the pericope, and this pericopes in such a way that it fits within the broader contexts, etc. In the language of Breukelman: it goes without saying that an exegete starts by discussing all the elements that he finds in the text: (motif) words, turns of phrase, figures of speech, Hebraisms, forms of sentence structure, key concepts, representations and what have you. What he has to track down is how the narrator allows all those elements to function within the story as a whole. For the latter, he will have to try to envision how the story is structured.¹⁵⁶ All this is to become aware of what the narrator is actually about. Consequently you would expect to hear from Breukelman, which *kerygma* he wants to make the *ekklesia* heard.

Biblical theology

Thus the study of Matthew's Gospel has its place within Breukelman's 'Biblical theology'. Breukelman understands 'biblical theology' as

¹⁴⁹ BT I/1, 146.

¹⁵⁰ BT I/1, 165.

¹⁵¹ BT I/1, 164-168.

¹⁵² The heading 'The exegetical method' is striking, because Breukelman always refused to use a method.

¹⁵³ BT I/1, 168.

¹⁵⁴ BT I/1, 170-171

¹⁵⁵ BT I/1, 169.

¹⁵⁶ For the above, see BT I/1, 170.

‘the theology of the biblical witnesses themselves, which in all its diversity nevertheless occurs as a unifying form, as it is latent in their texts and as a reflection on the content and purport of their *verbi divini ministerium*, has formed the basis of the design of the texts. This however, has not been put into words separately by them themselves, but by us, who have to interpret their texts. It must be formulated 1st because this gives rise to the hermeneutical horizon for exegesis, and 2nd because it gives us an ever better understanding of the biblical norm by which the speech and actions of the church must be measured.’¹⁵⁷

He did not come to a formulation of this latent theology of the Gospel of Matthew, as was announced by him here. His exegesis has been limited to a number of larger narrative units (1:1–2:23; 3:1–4:11 and 27:55–28:20) and a number of pericopes (18:23-35; 25:31-46; 26:1-2; 27:11-26). Instead, I want to present an outline of Breukelman’s view on the Gospel of Matthew. What he had in mind, was to understand Matthew from the inside out, always asking why Matthew speaks the way he does.

In his discussion of the middle part (3:1–25:46) Breukelman characterizes the Gospel of Matthew as ‘the salvation message of kingship’ (he himself speaks of ‘die Heilsbotschaft vom Königtum’). This is because Matthew himself uses these words three times (4:23; 9:35; 24:14).¹⁵⁸ This salvation message of Jesus’ kingship has as its core, the fulfilment of all righteousness by the King as Judge¹⁵⁹ who before all his people places himself under judgment.¹⁶⁰ Breukelman points out – following Ulrich Luz – that 60 of the 148 pericopes of the Gospel of Matthew are about judgment, and therefore also about the King as Judge, but he only discusses those passages that mention this at crucial points. In Breukelman’s view, the king as judge requires first of all a discussion of the story of Jesus’ baptism in 3:1-17, because it is about Jesus’ first word: ‘Thus it behoves us to fulfil all righteousness.’ Breukelman reads this sentence as ‘by placing oneself under judgment, so all righteousness is fulfilled’. And it makes a discussion of the last word of Jesus, before his suffering, necessary. The passage concludes the eschatological speech (25:31-46), referred to by Breukelman as ‘the pericope about the definitive action of the King as Judge (of all the people)’.¹⁶¹ What the King is doing here is differentiating between the ‘blessed of my Father’ and the ‘cursed’ and in that judgment to identify himself completely ‘with this people of the afflicted and needy’ and to call them his brothers.¹⁶²

In the King as Judge, Breukelman sees the core of Matthew’s theology. An extremely important role – right from the beginning of his study of Matthew – is played by the parable of the merciless servant (18:23-35), hence the placement of Breukelman’s explanation of this parable in the Festschrift for Karl Barth on his 80th birthday better known as ‘das Gleichnis vom Schalksknecht’.¹⁶³ In BT III/2 the designation has been changed to ‘The Parable of the King as Judge’. Breukelman deals with this because ‘Matthew set out to summarize his entire proclamation in this parable – in the parable that he places at the end of the congregational speech’.¹⁶⁴ Why the name change of the parable? I cannot escape the impression that Breukelman is too eager to reduce the matter to one denominator, namely the denominator of the King as Judge.

Breukelman’s concentration on the King as Judge in 3:1–28:20 is not difficult to explain. This arises from the overture (1:1–2:23), very specifically from the story of the begetting –

¹⁵⁷ BT I/1, 19-20.

¹⁵⁸ BT III/2, 21-61.

¹⁵⁹ BT III/2, 60.61.

¹⁶⁰ BT III/2, 81.

¹⁶¹ BT III/2, 112-167.

¹⁶² BT III/2, 127,131.

¹⁶³ *Parrhesia, Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag* (Zürich: EVZ, 1966), 261-287.

¹⁶⁴ BT III/2, 168-193.

Breukelman himself always speaks of the ‘becoming’ – of Jesus Christ (1:18-25). A becoming that culminates in the proclamation of his name (1:21). The overture (1:1–2:23) tells of the becoming-of-his person, and consequently makes his name (*shēm*) known: ‘Jesus, for it is He who will save his people from their sins’ (1:21). The main part (3:1–28:20) then tells the story of the work (*dābār*) that this person has fulfilled: he who has placed himself under the judgment as King of Israel, only He may manifest himself as the King as Judge of all nations.¹⁶⁵

Evaluation

That Breukelman can rightly be called a representative of the Amsterdam School may be clear from the foregoing: (1) Breukelman considers it to be crucial that the Gospel of Matthew is read and understood within the framework of the Tanakh; (2) he attaches great importance to very accurate and precise translation, in view of the Matter at issue in this text; (3) all the emphasis in this reading is on the text itself in all its relationships; (4) he pays a lot of attention to the composition and therefore also to the smallest particles and the larger whole, keeping in mind the hermeneutical circle; (5) he is always on the alert for motif words in Matthew (‘to withdraw’, ‘to worship’ and ‘to call out his name’),¹⁶⁶ which provide coherence to the text; (6) there is an ongoing discussion with earlier readings and translations from all periods; (7) there is always attention for Jewish/rabbinic readings.

What will be no less clear after the foregoing is the strongly reformational character of this interpretation, with its great emphasis on the King as Judge, who has placed himself under the judgment. With this reading of Matthew’s Gospel, does Breukelman do justice to the other reformational principle *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, or does he look too much through Reformed glasses? It is a matter for further research.

Conclusion

In the sixties of the last century, in the Netherlands a movement of biblical scholars arose who became proponents of a completely different approach to the Bible than the conventional, historical-critical method. They soon became known as the ‘Amsterdam School’. Frans Breukelman and Karel Deurloo are the two most important exponents of the Amsterdam School. The Amsterdam School does not use a uniform method of interpretation of the Bible, but they do share a number of principles. The most important of which is that all the interpreter’s attention should be focused on the text itself, and therefore also on understanding the text in all its aspects. Characteristic elements of the Amsterdam School are: idiolectic translation method, colometric arrangement of the text, attention to the keywords of the text, close reading with attention to theological expressiveness.¹⁶⁷

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Y. Bekker *et al.* (ed.), *Gesprekken met Frans Breukelman* (’s-Gravenhage: Meinema, 1989).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Gerard van Zanden & Rinse Reeling Brouwer, ‘De naam van Jezus vertellen: Frans Breukelman over de Redder en zijn reddingswerk’, *ACEBT* 36 (2023), 1-12.

¹⁶⁶ BT III/2, 144-178.

¹⁶⁷ I would like to thank Rinse Reeling Brouwer, Klaas Smelik, Joep Dubbink for their comments on an earlier version of this contribution, and Alice Deken for her English translation of this article.

¹⁶⁸ For a more extensive bibliography, see Nico Riemersma, *Een ‘Amsterdamse’ weg in de exegeese: Schets van de Amsterdamse School* (Amsterdam: SHA, 2025), 57-79.

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