THE IDENTITY OF GOD
Modern and Biblical Theological Notions of God

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Introduction

Under the line
It was during my studies that I first became acquainted with what is known as ‘the religious scientific critique of God and theology’, a popular approach to religious studies today. The confrontation with this critical approach to theology eventually culminated in an intellectual and personal crisis. The crisis is best described in terms of a challenge. I was faced with the challenge to rethink and to reevaluate the theological assumptions that I had become accustomed to and that I had, to a certain degree, taken for granted. The research question for this dissertation emerged precisely out of this sense of crisis.

The argumentation in class went like this: on a white-board, a line was drawn; above the line the word God was posited; under the line, at the bottom of the board, a couple of matchstick figures were drawn. The line on the white board indicated the divide between the natural and the supernatural, in philosophical terms the physical and the metaphysical. God was thus part of all that is metaphysical, and humans of all that is physical. The matchstick figures symbolized the major religions in the world today: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Above these figures, on a second row, books were drawn. These indicated that all religions have a certain ‘holy book’ that contains their teachings. Above the books, closest to the all-dividing line between humanity and God, the name was written of a key figure, from the respective religion, the one who provides access to God.

The drawing is based on certain assumptions about the reality of the religious experience and the consequent scientific analysis of it. The first assumption is that this image of religions today is the most scientifically responsible, since its analysis is objective. The one engaged in the study of religions must not be biased by any of the religions under consideration. In the scientific community the researcher of religion must take the position of methodical atheism, which guarantees scientific objectivity. The second assumption is related to the first: because religion is objectively analyzed, the scientific approach presupposes certain similarities between human religious experiences. From an objective and uninvolved perspective all religious experiences seem quite similar; after all, they all have a holy book, an exceptional figure and a God. The third assumption has to do with what is above the line: God. God is posited above the all-dividing line between the physical and the metaphysical. Above the line, God exists as an undefined, unidentified and, by consequence unhistorical entity. The fourth assumption is that the religious experience is a one-sided affair. The arrow, which indicates the dynamics of the religious experience, points only in one direction, from bottom up. This ultimately means that all that there is above the line is out of reach. All that there is under the line is what matters. On a fundamental level this means that the line cannot be crossed either way. The ultimate assumption is that the Divine is not an entity on its own, but it is intrinsically bound to the projections of the human mind.

As a Christian theologian, taking into account the above criticism, I am challenged to consider the possibility of theology as talk about God. In order to do this I have to present my view of theology, as I understand its scope and aims. By doing this, I place my work in the wider context of the theological field. What I am about to challenge in this dissertation is the religious scientific approach to theology, specifically its ‘generic conception of God’ in terms of ‘the highest divine being’. It is evident that from a Christian theological perspective there are some problems with the above-mentioned critical approach. These problems and the consequent theological engagement with these problems form the core of my thesis.
The heart of the problem is that a nonspecific conception of God, in terms of divinity, does not do justice to the Christian theological talk of God. The reason is that, from a religious-scientific (Religionswissenschaftlich) perspective, God is defined as a distant, faceless, mute being who is decorated with superlatives. It is a God with no history, no people and no places. God is a generic term, which stands for ‘a being up there’. The irony is that this divine being is on the one hand unidentified, and on the other well described by abstract definitions like all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present etc. But ultimately this God has its home in the human consciousness and ability to project a superior higher being. It is no longer a talk about God as such, i.e. theology, but talk of the religious feelings of human beings. In post-Kantian terminology, God is a projection of the human mind. Since human consciousness is bound to all that is under the line, everything beyond that line is projection and in the final analysis non-existent. This implies the obvious conclusion: God is not an entity on its own but just another faculty of the human imagination. This is precisely the underlying principle, which is at the heart of the modern criticism of theology as a discipline. It is this criticism that this study regarding the identity of God wishes to address.

As a theologian I have been asking the following question: what about the identity of God? From a Christian theological perspective, I was familiar with the fact that theologians talk about God as a well-identified entity. God is not just a general concept, but has a Name, can be identified, can be called upon and thus, has a history. In history, God has acted at given times and in certain places to a specific group of people. So God is well identified through the stories told by his people through the ages. God is talked about in terms of appearing, meeting people, speaking to them and acting in their lives. The consequent stories, songs, laws, wisdom sayings and testimonies document Gods history with these people. God has an identity. It is this theological understanding of God that does not match the modern scientific perspective of the divine. In the discrepancy of these two perspectives lies the challenge and the sense of crisis is most apparent. In this dissertation the identity of God has to do with the biblical theological understanding of who God is and how that understanding helps us to address the problems of a religious-scientific approach to theology and God.

The study of the identity of God is rooted in theology and specifically, in my understanding of what theology is. Theology does not stand alone as an intellectual discipline, but it is rooted in the Church and in a certain theological tradition. My Christian theological perspective is shaped by the broad protestant tradition. At the same time I remain committed to a more global understanding of theology. In what follows I want to address some of the critical issues related to theology and the identity of God in the context of modern academia. The issues raised here will constitute the main lines of the study and will lead towards the concrete formulation of the main question the dissertation is raising and attempts to answer. From this point on I abandon the first person singular voice and I will move to the plural. This has to do with doing justice to the rootedness of my work. I do not study nor write theology in a vacuum. I do not stand alone in this but rather stand on the shoulders of those who came before me. My theological perspective is co-inherent with those that came before me and will come after me. This slight shift in voice also marks the move from a strictly personal towards a more formal approach. During the course of the dissertation we will be referring to the theologian. The profile we have a mind is a woman or a man who actively participate in the study and work of a theologian. We will also often refer to humanity and human beings and these terms will be used in their generic sense.
What is theology?
Beyond our personal motivation lies a certain understanding of what the discipline of theology is. The main research question is embedded in that understanding. By making explicit how we understand theology, the main theme of this dissertation, *the identity of God*, will also become more evident. In order to understand what Christian theology is, it is wise to first look at some well-known definitions by representative theologians through the various stages of Christian theology. We will present our definition of theology alongside these definitions, as a way of showing our specific take on the matter. Definitions often carry within them the unspoken presuppositions which lie at the heart of one’s theological work.

Anselm of Canterbury’s classic formulation, *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding”¹ is one of the most well known definitions of theology. It is a classic definition, which is still popular and much appreciated by theologians. According to the *anselmian* formula, theology is a discipline by which the believers seek to express their beliefs in a reasonable and ordered way. Theology then is a process of rationalization of the believer’s faith experiences. These experiences are related to a certain tradition, to a certain community and to the individual person. Rationality, faith, experience, community and talk, are all important aspects in one’s definition of what the discipline of theology entails.

The early church fathers focused, in their theology, mainly on talking about God’s being in light of the challenges presented by the critics of the Christian faith. This faith was hallmarked by the scandalous claim that God had become a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Most theological works were dealing with the problems related Christology, and specifically the God and human relationship. Theology during this early period was fully a church discipline that belonged to the community of faith. Theology was a multifaceted discipline that gave a rational synthesis of the Church’s *Credos;*² and also elucidated the content of faith with regard to beliefs that were contrary to the *Credo*. In the Middle Ages a certain shift took place in the way theology was understood. With the emergence of scholasticism came also the uprooting of theology as a Church discipline. Theology became more of a system of thought, a subject taught in the academia, and by consequence, a scientific discipline. Theology moved, as it were, from the Church into the university. This break is significant for the way theology is understood today.³

In modernity, the character of theology has been mostly shaped by its position within the gap between church and university. Questions are often raised as one inquires about modern theology: is theology a discipline restricted to the life of the Church or is it a public discipline (meaning apart from the Church), which ought to be taught in an academic setting? If theology is strictly related to the Church, then what is its public relevance? If theology is a matter of public interest, then what defines its content and aims and what is its relevance to the life of the Church? Thus far, one could talk about a separate development in modernity, with a strict demarcation between *church theology* and *academic theology*. Modern theologians often seek to bridge this gap. On the one hand, theologians try to show the relevance of theology for public matters; while on the other hand, they also have to deal with the relevance of academic theology for the life and practice of the Church.

² By *Credo* we mean the theological and confessional achievements of the various Councils of the Church roughly before 400 AD.

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The definitions of the modern period are marked by the struggle to precisely define theology as a discipline. The following classic definitions are reminiscent of this very ambiguity.

“"Theology: is the systematic reflection on the content of the relationship, which God in Jesus Christ has established, between us and Him."”

“"Basically, systematic theology is the reflection on and the ordered articulation of faith."”

“"...theology is the thinking internal task of speaking the gospel, whether to humankind as message or to God in praise and petition – for of course the church speaks the gospel also to God, pleading it before him and praising him for it. The church’s specific enterprise of thought is devoted to the question, How shall we get it across, in a language, with signs other than linguistic – in the church called “sacrament” and “sacrifice” – or by other behavior of our community, that Jesus is risen and what that means?"”

“"Theology is reflection upon God whom Christians worship and adore."”

“"Now the matter, theology, is critical and systematic reflection of the presupposition of the Church’s ministry of witness."”

“"...Theology is about the knowledge of God. However it is not only about the human ideas about God or the human religious feelings of human beings, but also about God himself."”

Beyond the above-mentioned ambiguity of these definitions, there are some common features that unite them: first, theology is understood and defined as an intellectual discipline. The theologian’s task is to reflect on and to speak about the content of faith. Second, the content of faith, and, by implication, the content of theology, is God Himself in his dealings with the world and the ensuing good message of His works. Third, theology happens in relationship with a faith community. But the context in which theological reflection and speaking happens may vary. It may be in the church, in the academy or in the public square. Theology is ultimately related to the church in an essential way, for it finds its roots and ends in her. In short, theology is broadly defined in modernity as a discipline, related in its aims and tasks to the theologian who reflects on the content of his faith, i.e. God, in community with others, i.e. the Church.

The basic premise of our definition is that the task of theology is to talk about God. This is not a mere translation of the Greek rendering of theos – logos; rather, it is the classic understanding of what the exercise of theological work entails. To talk about God does not only refer to the act of utterance itself, but also to the broader meaning of what talk means, i.e. a discourse in verbal and nonverbal forms. Theology is an articulated exteriorization of the

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4 Berkhof, H., Christelijk Geloof, 8th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 32.
10 The word theology is the convergence the two Greek words ‘theos’- God and ‘logos’ - word of or about God. Theology in other words is talk about God. The ancient Greek philosophers used this definition for all teachings about metaphysics. Later, in Christian thinking, it became related specifically to the sum of the teachings about God in the Christian tradition.
theologian’s experiences related to God. This is not only an individualistic endeavor, but also a communal act that takes place in the context of a certain faith community, i.e. the Church through the ages. The above definition of theology might be considered a narrow representation of what the task of theology might entail in its totality. This critical note implies that theology is more than just talk about God. It is right, because in a certain sense, theology is also talk about the world and humanity. However, in this thesis, we focus on this one aspect of theology, namely talk about God. It is our working assumption that what is said about God has consequences for all other topics and issues. Therefore the understanding that theology is talk about God is central and directive in our work.

To talk about God is to talk about the identity of God. To formulate this in a question: who is this God, about whom we as theologians talk? Initially the answer to the question might seem obvious, but the contrary is true. It implies a certain way of talking about God. To talk about the identity of God is to talk about a God who is identified by specific events in time and space. The identity of God implies the actual presence of God in history. God is not a general term for some abstract ‘high being’. The identity of God also implies that God is identified by a Name, and can also be addressed. To talk about God and the identity of God is to talk about the God who is identified in and through the Biblical narratives.

On a fundamental level, our question about the identity of God is a departure from the kind of theological prolegomena developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In the standard post-enlightenment theologies, the most fundamental question the theologian had to answer was an epistemological question. This can be traced to the all-defining question of the Enlightenment: how do you know what you know? Most modern theologians struggled to justify their theologies concerning this very question. What essentially happened was that the epistemological question became the fundamental question for theology. Theology in the post-enlightenment era was no longer about God as such but much more about whether or not it is possible for humans to understand anything about God. Our critical observation considering the shift is this: the kind of question one asks influences the kind of answer one receives. The question we want to ask then is this: is it possible, in theology, to replace the epistemological question how do you know? with the question who is God? Is it fundamentally possible to ask a different question and receive a different answer? In actuality this is a turn from an epistemological towards a theological foundation and understanding of theology. To ask the question who is God? is to ask about the identity of God. In a way this is a different starting point than that of the classic post-Enlightenment prolegomena marked by epistemology.

Our work regarding the identity of God carries its own presuppositions. It is only fair to make these presuppositions clear in order to make more explicit what we mean by our terms and definitions. These presuppositions are in the form of two short statements on reality, rationality and revelation. The scope of the work does not allow us to explore them in depth. They are merely meant to give an indication of the direction of our thinking.

First statement: reality is not projected but experienced. We, as human beings, are the recipients of reality. Van de Beek summarized this idea with the following aphorism: “we are the subjects of a passive sentence.” Reality ultimately reveals itself. But with this claim, not everything is said. Some might say that the same reality is experienced in different ways, and thus it means that reality is indeed projected and thus constructed. But the diversity of

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experiences has to do with the “symbolic universe” one receives through nurture, education and experience. The “symbolic universe” is a received pair of glasses, through which one observes and interprets reality. Therefore the experiences that shaped our lives play an important role, because through them we interpret the reality we share with all of humanity.

The second statement, which flows out of the first, has a theological spin: revelation precedes language. The act of God comes before our talk about God. This means that revelation is an act of God and not of human creativity. Language, generally speaking, is thus referent to the reality one experiences. Reality is first experienced, and after this experience comes talk and language. Our talk of God is contingent on the revealing act of God, as He revealed Himself in time and space. Therefore the material record of revelation, i.e. the Bible, is essential for our work. The broad biblical literature tells about people who have experienced God and their subsequent talk about those experiences. There is a correlation between the revelation of God and the talk about God, i.e. theology. The biblical narratives are theology, i.e. talk of God par excellence. Theology is contingent on those narratives, as we will demonstrate that in the second half of our work.

Methodology
The working thesis of this dissertation is the following affirmation:

Theology is talk about God, specifically, talk about the identity of God.

Theology defined as talk about God is a contested definition. In the context of various scientific and academic disciplines, talk about God is impossible. The following is one of the most commonly used critical objections to theology: God cannot be the object of theology, as our definition presupposes, because God does not meet the empirical demands of a scientific theory. Therefore, the implicit objectification of God and the lack of empirical evidence put theology in a problematic position. In the work ahead we want to address this particular challenge to theology.

In the first half of our research, we will test the viability of our thesis in two steps: firstly from a religious scientific perspective (H.J. Adriaanse) and secondly from a theological perspective (K.H. Miskotte). The focus will be on the problem of modern theology in relation to the definition of theology as talk about God. Adriaanse, in his work, concisely and precisely formulates the problem of theology in the context of the scientific developments of the last century. His work presents us with outstanding material for a thorough exploration of the religious-scientific critique of theology. After we have tested our thesis against the religious scientific approach, we will take a second step towards a theological approach to the problem of theology. Miskotte’s work is significant here, because he sought a theological way to overcome the problem of modern theology. Miskotte’s main argument is: to talk about God is to talk about the Name of God and not merely of a human conception of God rooted in the human consciousness and self. These two approaches to theology are significant for understanding the major ideological tendencies in the field of theology. Thus, the first half of the dissertation is a formal discussion on theology as talk about God.

In the second half of our research, we will focus on the content of theology, i.e. the identity of God. Our definition of theology as talk of God and the identity of God is fundamentally determined by biblical theology. It is the vast content of the biblical literature that identifies

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God for the Christian theologian. We will focus on several loci that are significant for a theological discourse on the identity of God. The key loci are: 1. the Revelation of the Name of God (Exodus 3:14); 2. the Restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 20 and 36); 3. the Hymn in Philippians 2: 5-11. The criteria by which we have identified these passages as key is that they all address in a significant way the Name of God. While working with the biblical material, methodologically, we find ourselves on the converging field of exegesis and systematic theology. The two complement each other in the construction of our systematic theological discourse. We interpret these passages in the context of a theological tradition that dates back to the fathers of the church, through the Middle Ages, up to modernity. What these theological traditions have to say about these passages is significant for our own interpretation of these passages.

Braided through this study are three recurring systematic-theological themes: 1. the theology of God, 2. the theology of revelation, and 3. theological methodology. The three themes are congruent; one can find them throughout the whole of the research. Our main interest is in the theology of God, specifically the identity of God. The theology of God covers a vast area and that is the reason why we will focus on the Name as a systematic denominator. The Name, as a systematic locus, also allows us to do biblical theology with a systematic-theological interest. We realize that the theology of God has also far-reaching implications for rationality. That is why the second theme, revelation, is just as important. Revelation is the theological locus that addresses most of the issues related to knowledge and theological rationality. In turn, revelation also has far-reaching implications for one’s theological method. From our work, it will be apparent that we are critical concerning the specializations of various theological disciplines such as exegesis, biblical studies and hermeneutics, church history etc. In an attempt to bridge this, we will engage in a theological exercise in which the various specializations converge into one fruitful systematic talk about God.

Strictly speaking the methodology of our dissertation has to do with text analysis. But there is much more than that, because the texts themselves point toward certain, realities, ideas, presuppositions and ideologies. Through text analysis we engage in critical discussions of the ideas and ideologies presented. The first part of the dissertation is a critical exercise. In it we test our own definition and conception of theology. It is a formal discussion of the issues at hand. The second part of the dissertation is more constructive, since it deals with the content and the method of theology. It is also a convergence between biblical theology and systematic theology. In conclusion we will gather our findings and develop it into a theological discourse on the identity of God.

**Going about the work**

In the first chapter the problem of Modern Theology will be analyzed in more detail, as it is presented in the work of the H.J. Adriaanse. His work provides the material backdrop for our analysis and the subsequent discussions around the theme of modern theology. First we will start by analyzing Adriaanse’s theory of rationality and scientific method in the broader context of the Enlightenment, as his proposed modus operandi for scientific theories. Second, we will show Adriaanse’s conclusions regarding the impossibility of classic theology and the impossibility of the talk of God in light of the criteria of modern scientific theory. Third, we will discuss the alternative he presents for a scientifically acceptable study of religion and its relationship to theology. Fourth, we will address a recurring theme in Adriaanse’s work, the issue of reductionism.
The second chapter is an analysis of the work of K.H. Miskotte as an example of a theological approach to the problems of modern theology. First, we will analyze Miskotte’s anthropology, because in it, he deals with the problems of modern theology. Second, we will show Miskotte’s theological approach to these problems in terms of his appreciation of the *Torah and the primacy of the Old Testament*. Third, we will analyze the all-defining centre of Miskotte’s theology, the *Name*. Fourth, we will consider the importance and relevance of Miskotte’s theology in the present theological climate, from a reformed perspective.

The third chapter is an analysis of the revelation of the *Name* in Exodus 3:14. Theologically, it is a foundational text because it deals with the core of this study. First, we will consider the revelation of the Name in the context of the Exodus narrative with the following focus: the *absence of God in the narrative and as a human experience*. Second, we will look at the correlation between the revelation of the Name and the *identity of God*. Third, we will focus on the impact of Exodus 3:14 on the *history of interpretation* through the works of Athanasius, Thomas, Calvin and Barth.

In the fourth chapter, we will focus even more on the significance of the Name in the history of Israel. Theologically, this is significant because it becomes apparent that the *identity of God* is not merely a theological construct but a historical reality. What we are dealing with is, in essence, the history of a living God. Central in this chapter is the book of the prophet Ezekiel and specifically the Name and Glory theologies of his prophecies, as a *biblical theological reception* of the revelation of the Name. Returning in this chapter are the themes of the *presence and absence of God*. We will discuss the *presence of God* in terms of God’s *Glory* and *Name* as it manifests in the Temple cult and in the history of Israel, marked by *judgment* and *restoration*. We will also discuss the *absence of God* as a theological understanding of the *judgment* and *exile* of Israel.

The fifth chapter is a further elaboration of the Name and the identity of God in its Christological sense. This is probably the most significant considering the identity of God. The focus in this chapter will be on the Hymn from the apostle Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. The Hymn deals with the Name’s fullest identification in the person of Jesus Christ. First, we will broadly sketch Paul’s *talk about God*, i.e. theology, as it relates to the Philippians Letter. Second, we will analyze the content of the Hymn by specifically focusing on the *identification of Jesus with the Name*. Third, we will look into the impact Philippians 2:5-11 has had on various periods of interpretation, *the patristic, the reformation and the modern period*.

The sixth and concluding chapter is a focused discussion on the various themes that have emerged from our study as they relate to the identity of God. The aim is to develop a theological discourse that underscores the significance of the identity of God for theology today and into the future.
First Part

Modern religious-scientific and theological notions of God

Chapter 1. – The loss of the ‘talk of God’ and theology

1.1. Introduction
At the tail-end of the twentieth century the general feel in the field of theology was that the talk of God was not only problematic but also impossible. Our research deals with this very issue. The impossibility of theology is the main problem our work first wants to understand and second wants to answer. Part of understanding the problem of modern theology is to identify as clearly as possible what the problem actually is. To avoid the risk of entering into a meta discussion of the subject, we have identified the work of the Dutch theologian H.J. Adriaanse. He has been the professor of Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Encyclopedia of Theology at the University of Leiden, from 1979 until his retirement in 2001. His over-all work is an outstanding exposition concerning the problems of twentieth century theology. Thus Adriaanse’s work provides the vocabulary and the conceptual framework for our analysis of modern theology.13

Adriaanse in his work presents a clear and systematic proposal on the problem of modern theology, which becomes evident in the contrast of classic theology and the demands of modern scientific research. Our aim in this chapter is to sketch an adequate picture of Adriaanse’s argument. By grappling with his work and the challenges it posits we will gain more insight into the issues we face as theologians. By the end of the chapter we will not have resolved the problems of modern theology, but rather come to a fuller understanding of them.

The structure of Adriaanse’s argument is clear and succinct. It comes down to four points, which consistently can be traced throughout his work. The first point he makes is that both science14 and theology have shifted and changed throughout the ages. Therefore one has to establish historically and formally the development of the scientific and theological method. Second, he shows how classic theology does not meet the demands of a modern scientific theory, and considers therefore theology and God talk scientifically impossible. Third, the only way one may talk about God, according to Adriaanse’s argument, is by examining the religious tendencies of human beings. Therefore another scientific discipline must be established, which works with this method, i.e. religious science. Adriaanse’s fourth and last point is the issue of reductionism. By struggling with reductionism and not affirming it in its totality, he shows his concern for clear thinking and working with integrity in the field of theology and religion.

13 For clarity’ sake, the word modern in this context is not used in the sense of contemporary or today; rather we use it to refer to the theological era which spans from the beginning of the eighteenth century up to the end of the twentieth century. Modern: in the sense that it deals with the core of Enlightenment ideology.
14 Science in this context does not refer to natural sciences or to a discipline as such. It is meant here in the sense of the German word Wissenschaft, meaning both a body of knowledge and the act of knowing.
1.2. The established order of knowing

One of Adriaanse’s observations is that there is a certain order by which it can be established how one knows and what one knows. We will approach Adriaanse’s observation from three different perspectives: historical, formal and systematic. The order of knowledge is subject to historical processes. What today is accepted as valid knowledge can be traced in the history of philosophy of science. The historical overview provides us with a broader perspective on the issues Adriaanse raises and also clearly defines his position in the field. After the historical considerations we will look at some of the formal aspects of the established order of knowing. In it we will be able to formally analyze Adriaanse’s conception of experience, knowledge and rationality. From a systematic perspective we will see Adriaanse’s definition of what constitutes a valid theory of knowledge in its relationship to modern scientific method.

The work of Adriaanse is intrinsically connected to the developments of the philosophy of science in general. Therefore it is important to shortly trace these developments. Karl Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations* is an excellent introduction to the history of the philosophy of science. *Conjectures* is the guide by which we trace the main tendencies of two major periods in the philosophy of science, the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment. Throughout history, what was considered science, meaning: how do we know what we know? has gone through a series of changes. Not only what constitutes knowledge has gone through changes, but also the method of acquiring knowledge. Both the content and the method of knowledge are of interest here. Adriaanse often notes that changes in scientific theory have had great influence on theology, as a discipline, on the whole and that theology has struggled to define itself in accordance with the ever-developing findings of science.

The troubled relationship between theology and the sciences is a field of study on its own. Natural sciences have had a great influence on theology. Most often one thinks of creation vs. evolution as an example of a science vs. theology debate. However from the eighteenth century on the rise of psychology, social studies, the new anthropology and alpha sciences such as: history, linguistics, cultural studies etc. have had a significant impact on theology. To what degree these changes have happened is not our main focus. The point is that with the development of the scientific theory, theology itself has gone through a series of changes of its own.

In *Conjectures* Popper has a clear epistemological perspective through which he accurately traces the history and development of the theory of science. Together with Popper we will look into the fifteenth and sixteenth century tendencies through the juxtaposition of two representative philosophers: Bacon and Descartes. Following that will be the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the impact Kant had on the philosophy of science. Popper’s treatment of Kant offers us keen insights into the shape of the scientific theory during the eighteenth century. In it we find a certain correlation between, Kant’s *Critique*, and its

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See O’Hear’s assessment of Poppers importance in the field of the philosophy of science: “Large claims are made for Popper by his admirers. He is frequently compared with Kant, and is seen by some as the bearer in the twentieth century of the Kanitan torch; that is, he is a believer in reason and in the power of reason to solve our problems.” His main contribution has been to the philosophy of science. “Popper’s philosophy of science is marked by a deep hostility to any profession of certainty or attempt to claim justification for one’s theories.” “Popper’s philosophy of science involves putting falsification center stage, and abandoning any futility at verification or justification. As falsifying our theories is the one thing we can do effectively in science that is what we should do: test our theories empirically against the predications which follow from them, and see if they survive. If they do not, we should abandon them, and devise a new theory to account for the data – and it is worth underlining here that Popper sees the forming of theories as a matter of imaginative conjecture.” A. O’Hear (ed.) *Karl Popper, Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vol.1, (London: Routledge, 2004), 3-6.
ensuing age of rationalism, and the shape of theology in the twentieth century. Modern theology is mainly characterized by the influence of Enlightenment rationality. Adriaanse’s work is part of this wider framework and his critique of classic theology is embedded in this kind of rationalism.

The Reformation and Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth century brought about a certain “epistemological optimism, by the most optimistic view of man’s power to discern truth and to acquire knowledge”.\textsuperscript{16} At the heart of this optimism is the presupposition that truth is manifest, in other words it may reveal itself; if not it may be uncovered by human beings. This very thought contributed to the birth of modern science. Popper follows two streams in the development of the English and the European theories of knowledge and science. By following and contrasting these two, Popper leads us to the fundamental understanding of modern theories of science.

The first stream of thought is classical empiricism (Bacon), in which the ultimate source of knowledge is observation. Bacon’s doctrine “might be described as the doctrine of the veritas Naturae, the truthfulness of Nature. Nature is an open book. He who reads it with a pure mind cannot misread it. Only if his mind is poisoned by prejudice can he fall into error”.\textsuperscript{17} Bacon further distinguishes between true and false Method. True method is none other than the true reading or interpretation of Nature that leads to true knowledge, episteme. False method, on the other hand, is the anticipation of the mind, or prejudice, or superstition, which leads to doxa, or conjecture or hypothesis. The second stream is classical rationalism (Descartes), in which the ultimate source of knowledge is the intellectual intuition of clear and distinct ideas. “Descartes based his optimistic epistemology on the important theory of the veritas Dei. What we clearly and distinctly see to be true must indeed be true; for otherwise God would be deceiving us. Thus the truthfulness of God must make truth manifest”.\textsuperscript{18} Both Bacon and Descartes agree that there is no need to appeal to a higher authority; all humans have the source of knowledge in them. Popper’s critical analysis shows that “Descartes’ method of systematic doubt is also fundamentally the same (as that of Bacon): it is a method of destroying all false prejudices of the mind, in order to arrive at the unshakable basis of self-evident truth”.\textsuperscript{19}

It may be somewhat strong to suggest, but it seems like the efforts of both Bacon and Descartes are an attack on prejudice and naïveté, i.e. anti-authoritarianism. However, Popper raises the critical question of whether they truly managed to rid themselves of their dependency on authority for their optimistic epistemologies. Popper critically concludes: “We can see more clearly why this epistemology, not only in Descartes but also in Bacon’s form, remains essentially a religious doctrine in which the source of knowledge is divine authority”.\textsuperscript{20}

New authorities have been erected: instead of Aristotle and the Bible, the senses and the intellect were the authorities, which seemed to function, in Popper’s opinion, as divine authorities. “Bacon and Descartes set up observation and reason as new authorities, and they set them up within each individual man. But in doing so they split man into two parts…. Thus we are split into a human part, we ourselves, the part which is the source of our fallible opinions (doxa), of our errors and of our ignorance; and a super-human part, such as the

\textsuperscript{16} Popper, \textit{Conjectures and Refutations}, 5.
\textsuperscript{17} Popper, \textit{Conjectures and Refutations}, 7.
\textsuperscript{18} Popper, \textit{Conjectures and Refutations}, 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Popper, \textit{Conjectures and Refutations}, 15.
\textsuperscript{20} Popper, \textit{Conjectures and Refutations}, 15.
senses or the intellect, the part which is the source of real knowledge (episteme), and which has an almost divine authority over us.” 21 At stake here is the freedom of man to think. Most historians of philosophy agree that humanity has gone from the ‘darkness’ of the Middle Ages to the ‘light’ of the Enlightenment and Modernity. We understand this as humanity’s struggle for independent thinking. It is thinking without being conditioned by outside authorities, Nature or God. The contribution of this ‘rebellion’ was and still is the affirmation of the autonomous human being as the ultimate and true agent of knowledge.

A step beyond classical empiricism and rationalism is Popper’s treatment of the Enlightenment. Kant, as the most prolific figure of this period, is the one who systematized the achievements of classical empiricism by declaring the independence of ‘pure reason’ in his major work, the Critique of Pure Reason. Kant’s work provided the intellectual backbone for the new era on the European continent. Popper places the significance of Kant’s oeuvre alongside the American and French revolutions. 22 The student of theology who wants to understand the shape of modern theology has to take into consideration the impact Kant’s thinking has had. The kind of rationalism that has been defining the European mind-set, the last couple of centuries, has had a major influence on contemporary theology.

Popper’s analysis of Kant starts with a quote from Kant on the definition of Enlightenment: “[it is] the emancipation of man from a state of self-imposed tutelage… of the incapacity to use his own intelligence without external guidance. Such a state of tutelage I call ‘self-imposed’ if it is due, not to lack of intelligence, but to lack of courage or determination to use one’s own intelligence without the help of a leader. Sapere aude! Dare to use your own intelligence. This is the battle-cry of the Enlightenment.” 23 Kant’s definition clearly summarizes the basic program of the Enlightenment: the freedom of the individual human beings to think and to define reality for themselves. Where Bacon and Descartes were cautious, Kant made the next step, a step towards the liberation of the human intellect from any outside agency.

Popper outlines two basic steps in the work of Kant. The first step is the clear definition of the limits of knowledge. If it is a knowledge freed from ‘authorities’, then the critical question is how far can that kind of knowledge or intellect reach? To answer the question one must look into Kant’s relevant ideas on time and space. He asserted that “our ideas of space and time are inapplicable to the universe as a whole” 24. They can, however, be applied to ordinary physical things and events. Human knowledge thus cannot reach beyond what is given in the world. Popper explains “Kant wrote his Critique in order to establish that the limits of sense experience are the limits of all sound reasoning about the world”. The limits of the human intellect are determined by time and space. Beyond that, there is no certain knowledge only speculation. Popper also notes that “in Kant’s own striking formulation of this view ‘our intellect does not draw its laws from nature, but imposes its laws upon nature’”. 25 In other words, Kant turns the whole Cartesian understanding of the method of knowledge on its head. It is not a deductive knowledge anymore, but an inductive knowledge, i.e. projection.

Kant’s second step, in Popper’s analysis, is the humanization of knowledge. Since knowledge is not found ‘out there’, but only in the human intellect, the human being becomes a free

21 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 17. Popper elsewhere points out that this is none other than Kant’s principle of autonomy.
22 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 175.
23 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 178.
24 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 179.
25 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 180.
agent. The theory of the free thinking human being crystallizes most evidently in Kant’s ethics. Popper observes the following, “Kant humanized ethics, as he had humanized science. …The doctrine of autonomy - the doctrine that we cannot accept the command of an authority, however exalted, as the ultimate basis of ethics”.26 Within the parameters of the Kantian understanding of Ethics, this means that there is no outside authority, but that the human being himself is the one who is the judge of the truth of an ethical demand.

Popper’s survey of Kant and the two steps are important, because they precede Kant’s critique of religion. In Kant’s critique of religion, we see even more clearly the relevance of the above overview. Since the Middle Age there has been a gradual move towards the independence of human consciousness and reason. Adriaanse’s critique of classic theology in rooted in this rationality. Popper highlights the following words from Kant: “much as my words may startle you, you must not condemn me for saying: every man created his God. From the moral point of view… you even have to create your God, in order to worship him as your creator. For in whatever way the Deity should be made known to you, and even… if He should reveal Himself to you, it is you… who must judge whether you are permitted [by your conscience] to believe in Him, and to worship Him”.27 The freed human being has reached his/her own maturity by becoming the subject of his or her own history. This self-actualization is one of the main factors which determine the context of twentieth century theology. The free human being, who does not accept any ‘higher’ authority anymore, but projects his or her own God, is at the heart of modern theology. Through Popper’s review of the main tendencies in the philosophy of science we come to clearly understand the ideological context in which Adriaanse poses his critique of classic theology.

1.2.1. Experience, knowledge and rationality

The nineteenth and twentieth century theology is dominated by Descartes’s epistemological dictum ego cogito ergo sum. It is formulated more often as a question: how do you know what you know? In other words the certainty of knowledge had to be established in a rational way. Kant provides the systematic basis on which this epistemological rationality rests. The Enlightenment is the main paradigm which to a large extent defines contemporary scientific rationality. We turn our attention now to Adriaanse’s conception of experience, knowledge and rationality. In our view, these are the key loci that hold Adriaanse’s argument together. They are foundational to his critique of classic theology and his theory of religious education.

We have already noted that theology did not develop in a vacuum, but struggled to adapt itself to the demands of science, specifically to the various theories of knowledge. In what follows, we will trace in Adriaanse’s work what he sees as the dominant factors on the field of experience, knowledge and rationality. Theoretically speaking we are dealing with Adriaanse’s thoughts on revelation. Revelation as a theological locus is foundational for all systematic theologies. It is the place where theologians have to come to terms with the presuppositions of their theology in relation to the demands of the scientific theory. Rationality, for Adriaanse, is not only about the “how”, or the methodology of knowledge. He takes one step further and explores the possibilities and the validity of knowledge.28 The usual theological locus where the issues related to experience, knowledge and rationality are discussed is the prolegomena.

26 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 181.
27 Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 182.
In the problematisation of revelation, it becomes clear how Adriaanse thinks about the issues related to theological method and theological rationality. But before we engage with Adriaanse’s problematisation of revelation, we want to present a common understanding of revelation in its formal and theological definitions. The formal structure of revelation may be approached from the one hand from the perspective of the author and on the other from the perspective of the recipient of revelation. From the perspective of:

the author (A), who reveals himself in situation (B) in its Gehalt (C) (content) for the recipient (D) with the effect (E). From the perspective of the receiver: in the act of revelation, the recipient (D) gains an insight (E), of a certain Gehalt (C) (content), in the revelatory situation (B), from the author of revelation (A).

The predominant discussions in theology related to revelation are focused on the possibilities (or impossibilities) of what may or may not happen between the author and the recipient of the revelation.

In theological terms, this is how the formal structure translates:

Israel's God, the almighty Creator (A), reveals Himself, in the apostle's life situation marked by the apparent failure of the mission of Jesus (B), however through the raising of the Crucified One his will for communion with, (in Christ-atoned), His creatures, manifests His character as Truthful Love (C), through which he gives certainty about the truth to those who listen to this message (D), and through which he enables life in faith as life in the certainty of truth (E).

It is apparent from this definition that God is the author (A) of the revelatory act, and at the same time, His will and His character, is the content of revelation (C), makes the truth of the message certain, and enables its execution (E). The recipient of the revelation (D) understands his life situation (B) as brought to light by this act of revelation.

At stake here is the following critical question: what happens between the sender and the receiver in the act of revelation? What does the receiver ‘get’ or what does he come to know from or about the sender? Or to ask the same question differently: what is the difference, if there is any, between reason and ‘otherworldly’ or ‘received’ knowledge? It is often assumed that the kind of knowledge that revelation provides and the nature of human reason are mutually exclusive. In the Middle Age, the presuppositions were more optimistic about the relationship between revelation and reason. There was an obvious correlation between human intellect and divinely revealed knowledge. However, since the Reformation the focus has shifted mainly towards reason as the place of revelation. The dawn of the Enlightenment went beyond this and brought this traditional relationship of revelation and reason into a problematic relationship.

In a nutshell, this is the main challenge: can there be any genuine correlation between humans and God? The answer to this challenging question is twofold. Firstly, yes there is correlation between God and humans in the act of revelation. Theologically revelation implies the disclosure of God to humans. Thus God is not the projection of the human mind but the subject of revelation. Secondly, when revelation is seen as an act of self disclosure of God, then what is the human faculty that receives this act? In other words: when God reveals himself where does revelation land in the human consciousness? These critical questions shed light on the problems of human rationality and the knowledge of God. One of the most

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significant examples of these issues is the discussions about the theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth. Both theologians answered these questions in their own way. Schleiermacher sought to define revelation in terms of the human consciousness as “the feeling of absolute dependence,” thus identifying the human intellect and emotion as place where the revelation of God landed. By consequence the line blurred between God and humans. There was no distinct subject and object relationship, but only the thinking and feeling of human beings. Barth on the other hand sought to reaffirm the otherness of God and thus distinguished the subjectivity of human consciousness from the objectivity of God. Barth in a certain sense refused to locate the act of revelation in the human. He rather focused on the true subject of revelation, God. As the recipient of revelation humans are unable to think of or know God. Barth’s conclusion was then that without revelation there is no correlation possible whatsoever between God and humans.

These theological and philosophical considerations are at the basis of Adriaanse’s rejection of the classic understanding of revelation. His assumption is that there is no correlation between God and human beings. Finite humans are confined to time and space (classic Kantianism) and therefore they cannot reach beyond what is given in time and space. ‘God’ is a product of human consciousness and it is ultimately bound to it. Furthermore this means that the possibility of conceiving God as an entity on its own is impossible. So talk of the ‘beyond’ does not have the character of time and space, and therefore one cannot rationally justify the belief in God. This is precisely the core of Adriaanse’s argument for the impossibility of the rationality of classic theology.

The heart of the problem is not so much the initial experience of God, i.e. reception of the revelation, but the more significant issue of the talk about God or the act of rationalization and coherent speaking about what one has experienced and what has been revealed. The question which Adriaanse seems to be positing is this: regardless of whether revelation is possible or not, can one still rationally justify, or even talk about what has happened and what has been experienced? The problem of rational justification is the main point of criticism Adriaanse advocates. This is precisely what we have to deal with.

So far our study has introduced the rationale of Adriaanse’s arguments. We will continue with the systematic formulation of Adriaanse’s theory of knowledge and scientific method, according to which he proposes that all theological work and talk of God ought to be measured by.

1.2.2. A theory of knowledge and the scientific method

We have considered the wider context of Adriaanse’s work. It is part of the larger movement on the field of sciences, which spans back to the seventeenth century up to the twentieth century. It is a movement that takes us through the early years of the Protestant Reformation and through the Revolution of the Enlightenment. Now we have arrived at the point where we can look in more detail at Adriaanse’s systematic formulation of the theory of scientific knowledge. Here we have to make an important remark, which has to do with translating Adriaanse’s work from Dutch into English. He often defines science as an openbare discipline, meaning that science in its entirety is an open matter and accessible for everyone who engages in it. It is not a private matter, because it ought to be present on the public

square, as widely accessible as possible. This helps us to understand Adriaanse’s objections against classic theology.

We have to examine at this point the two aspects of the scientific method Adriaanse proposes. First, we have to see how Adriaanse defines a scientific theory. So what is a scientific theory? Adriaanse uses the following definition to identify a scientific theory: it is a system of thoughts and definitions, and particularly not contradictory statements, about a concrete part of reality that is formulated in such a way that it is possible to deduce examinable theories from it. It is a rational system of thought and definitions, as accurate as possible, and preferably non-contradictory in nature. These definitions have to refer to a concrete part of reality; scientific theories cannot be about the whole of reality; rather, they must be a well-defined part of it. (Adriaanse in his inaugural lecture criticized Pannenberg on exactly this point.) Science is not supposed to concern itself with the totality of all there is, only with a part of it. Finally, scientific theories must be verifiable.

Second, there is also the how of scientific theories. What are the right steps towards developing a scientific theory? Or what are the right conditions that make scientific theories possible? Adriaanse lists five conditions that determine how a scientific theory must work:

a) Precision – It has to be clearly stated which part of reality one is attempting to describe. Scientific theories cannot refer to reality as a whole; they have to demark the specific area which they are about to address.

b) Consistency – There should not be any contradiction within the whole of the argument, in other words, logical consistency is required in the formulation of a coherent theory.

c) Empirical adequacy – There must be sensory experiences which can be correlated with a specific theory. Since theories are claims about reality, one should be able to see, touch, taste, measure and so on.

d) Accuracy – The hypotheses which come from a certain theory must be confirmed by facts. This point strongly connects to point ‘c’.

e) General acceptance of presuppositions – every scientific theory works with a certain accepted presupposition (as in historical studies, one assumes that he or she may know the past).

In other definitions of scientific theories, one might come across one more point which Adriaanse omits from his own system and that is repeatability. A scientific phenomenon ought to be repeatable at all times with the same exact results. However, in the field of humanities and in studies such as history, repeatability is not possible. When events happen only once, the task of the historian is to recover with as much accuracy as possible what has happened. Therefore Adriaanse is not concerned with this aspect of the scientific theory. Repeatability is much more relevant for the natural sciences.

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These methodological considerations bring us to our next point. Adriaanse, having established what science and adequate scientific theories are, goes further in search of a so called scientific theology. This search is in actuality about the possibility of theology in an age of science. To formulate this in a question, Adriaanse asks: Is theology possible in the present context of the scientific demands in a university? And if so, what are those possibilities?

1.3. The impossibility of theology

Earlier in the introduction we have presented our definition of theology. We have argued that in its strictest sense theology is talk about God and specifically talk about the identity of God. By examining Adriaanse’s criticism of theology we submit our definition to be tested. Adriaanse criticizes precisely this understanding by posing the critical question: what can publicly, in the sense which is universally valid, be said about God? In other words: what can be scientifically asserted about God? His answer is that there is nothing to be said about God in a scientific way. The reason is that, according to classic theology God makes Himself known. Or in theological terms: God cannot be known unless He reveals Himself. Revelation, according to Adriaanse, is not in any way public and therefore the irreconcilable difference remains between the practice of public science and the talk of God. Another critical point Adriaanse makes is that because classic theology is talk about God, God is the object of theology. This very objectification of God is impossible. These are two critical reasons why Adriaanse considers classic theology as being not scientific.

1.3.1. Classic theology and the demands of the modern scientific method

Adriaanse analyses theology by measuring its scientific merit. We already have seen the five conditions necessary to establish a theory as scientific. The next step is to put classic theology against these conditions. We want to understand the arguments Adriaanse presents and the way he applies the above definition and conditions of scientific theory to classic theology. The main question here is: how does classical theology measure up to the demands of modern scientific theories? The answer is:

1) Precision – because classical theology deals with the totality of reality (i.e. God and the world as creation) it does not correspond to the condition of scientific precision, which is needed. Theology cannot pretend to deal with reality as a whole; it ought to focus on a specific point of reality.

2) Consistency – essentially consistency is possible in classical theological theories; however, in reality it is much harder, considering issues related to theodicy (e.g. if God created the world good, then why is there evil? Good vs. evil is hard to explain consistently).

3) Empirical adequacy – is clearly impossible for the statements about God. They are theoretical in character thus miss empirical adequacy. The critical question is often asked here of how can one talk about something one has not seen?

38 Science deals with all that is in the world and not with the world itself.
4) **Accuracy** – based on the above empirical in-adequacy, the condition for accuracy is also impossible.

5) **General acceptance of presuppositions** – the presupposition which all classical theologies share is that there is a God. However, in today’s understanding of science all theories are developed from the vantage point, or presupposition of atheism.\(^{39}\)

The conclusion of the above consideration is that theology only on one point, consistency, is able to measure up to the standards of modern science. Therefore Adriaanse’s argument establishes the following: *classic theology does not correspond to the demands of a scientific theory therefore is not considered to be a scientific discipline.* This is the reason why theology has to be classified as a pseudo-science. Where does this leave classic theology? What are the consequences? First, it loses its position as one of the sciences in the universities. Second, in order to be able to maintain any standing, it has to fall under general religious studies, which in turn has an effect on its methodology and content. And third, probably the most important point for our work: talk of God in a university setting is deemed impossible. This is ultimately what we mean by the loss of the talk of God.

Theology thus, as understood in the classical sense, is in a situation of crisis. Historically, one can trace the development of theology through the ages and come to the conclusion that it is a living discipline. It has always sought to define itself on its own and in the context in which it was practiced. We think here of the early church fathers who did theology in the context of various competing philosophies and theologies. We also have in mind the reformers who in the context of the church developed and reformed theology. In modern times, theologians are faced with the same kind of challenges, presented by the scientific developments. This constant growth, adaptation, redefinition and affirmation of theology we call a *living discipline.* From the vantage point of the scientific method and philosophy of science theology as a discipline faces one the most critical challenges of our time. It is a challenge that goes right to the heart of what theology is. Adriaanse through his critique addresses this very challenge. At this point we will not venture to answer this challenge. All we want to do now is to come to a partial concluding statement about what we have been talking about so far. The partial conclusion is this: *classical theology when measured by the standards of science is no science, because by its method and content it only provides pseudo-knowledge.*

### 1.3.2. The complete loss of the “talk of God”

The implication of the above argumentation is that scientifically there is nothing to be said about God. Here we understand the word ‘God’ to mean an entity in itself who can be experienced in his revelation in time and space. This is what it comes down to eventually: *the complete loss of the talk of God.* The question is: what is the way forward, if there is nothing to be said about God as such? Adriaanse is not about to discard theology; rather, he qualifies its object, God. He suggests that the theologian cannot talk about God, but only about ‘God.’ Here ‘God’ means a conceptual entity of the human mind. The theologian has to talk about ‘God’ only in terms of what human beings think about ‘God.’ Thus, the ultimate object of theology is not God but the human beings who talk about ‘God.’ Therefore, scientifically, one can only ask about religion, meaning the human attitude towards ‘God.’\(^{40}\) When ‘talk of God’ is lost, all that remains is talk of human religiosity. This is a significant move. It is a shift from theology to anthropology. This often causes uneasiness for theologians trying to find their way in this new constellation of sciences.

\(^{39}\) Adriaanse, *Het verschijnsel theologie*, 57-63.

\(^{40}\) Adriaanse, *Het verschijnsel theologie*, 63.
This turn, to the subject, has had a political and administrative influence on the organization of the public universities and their faculties in the Netherlands. Since 1876, the public universities function as *duplex ordo*, which means that there is a separation between public universities and church theology. As one might expect classic theology is only taught in faculties which are affiliated with a specific church and denomination. In the public faculties religious science is increasingly taught of as part of the greater humanities. Here classic subjects such as exegesis come under the department of arts, church history under the general department of history, practical and pastoral theory under psychology and-so-forth. This kind of organization has led to the decentralization of theology and to the compartmentalization of the various theological disciplines. The general tension between religious science and theology remains. We will further explore this difficult relationship. Therefore, we turn now our attention to the ideological justification of Religious Science.

In the English-speaking world this demarcation is also present. There the separation is between religious schools or divinity schools and seminaries. On the one hand religious schools offer the broader religious scientific program, not necessarily focusing only on one religion but on all religions as a global phenomenon. Seminaries on the other hand are usually connected to a specific denomination or church, and exist to offer training for those that will be working in the church.

1.4. The relationship between Religious Science and Theology

1.4.1. Religious science as a valid scientific alternative for classic theology

In the previous two points, we have seen, in Adriaanse’s analysis, the conclusion that classic theology is not a scientific discipline, nor is there such an alternative possible as ‘scientific theology.’ Only religious science meets the norm of a scientific discipline. Therefore theology as a discipline in an academic setting has to make place for religious studies. We do have to consider the following questions: What is religious science? What is its methodology? What does a scientist of religion do? With these questions in mind we continue to analyze Adriaanse’s broader argument. Even though we have seen how classical theology is eclipsed by religious studies in his argument, we are of the opinion that there is still a relationship between the two. To understand this relationship we have to first answer the above asked questions. The answers will define the essence of religious science.

Religious science is a fairly recent development in the field of sociology and cultural anthropology. Since the Enlightenment, religious science has found its home in cultural studies, where religion is researched as a cultural phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, the thinking of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach further shaped the form of religious studies. Religion is understood to be the deepest longing of human beings; the human subject can be studied and researched. Christianity, during this century, has moved from its dominant and privileged position into being considered, one religion among other religions. Religious philosophy, closely related to religious science, also finds its roots in this age. Religious philosophy is not about showing the truth of one religion against the other, as is the case with dogmatics; rather, it presents and explains religion as a universal human possibility. 41

We previously have seen what the loss of the ‘talk of God’ entails as meant by Adriaanse. This in turn begs the question: How does one talk about God in a publicly responsible way? The short answer to this question is religious science. Adriaanse further develops the

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following differentiation to show the essential divergence between religious science and theology:

Theology must be about ‘God’, meaning a ‘God’ as talked about by people. Theology in this sense is about religion. Religion understood as an expression of a whole range of human projections on ‘God’, i.e. a divinity. This might seem speculative in nature but it is a real differentiation. The quotation marks have a very specific purpose in defining the division. The focus, in theology, is no longer on the *Theos* but on the human being. By consequence it is religious anthropology. In philosophical terms, this move is a move from metaphysics to religious and cultural anthropology. Only a human definition of ‘God’ is valid matter to study for the theologian or the scientist of religion. God, seen or talked about as an entity of its own reality, is impossible. Only the human word about ‘God’ is the object of research and science.\(^{42}\)

Adriaanse then concludes that the scientific character of religious science can be maintained as long as there is a clear demarcation from classic theology.\(^{43}\) This demarcation has to be maintained as strictly as possible. However, this is not only an ideological differentiation but also an administrative one.

### 1.5.  The issue of reductionism

#### 1.5.1. Theology in its ‘rightful’ place

Adriaanse merely considers the possibilities of a classic theology within the current scientific context with all its implications. Therefore this last point, on reductionism, is no surprise. After having searched the edges of the theological and scientific world, he takes into account the issue of reductionism. The impossibility of ‘God talk,’ i.e. theology, is the result of the scientific contestation. It is only logical to conclude the obvious that classic theology, considering the scientific requirement of this day and age, is a pseudo-scientific discipline.

Now we are dealing with the heart of theology and its identity. The main issue here is that if theology is to maintain its public and scientific relevance, *how far will it have to reduce itself* before theology becomes lost in the mix of ethical sciences, cultural anthropological sciences, sociology and so on? This is one of the most pertinent questions related to theology today.

Adriaanse does not do away with theology; he only defines its ‘rightful’ place among the other sciences in a public university. Its rightful place is in the department of religious studies, studying the phenomena of religion and the religious human being. He proposes various scenarios for different classical theological subjects. Church history, instead of concerning itself with *Heilsgeschichte*, would research the history of the church throughout the ages. Thus it could find strong bonds with the faculty of history. Another example is exegesis. This discipline instead of concerning itself with understanding the ‘word of God’, would research the Bible (and its text) as a religious book. Thus exegesis might be brought under the faculty of humanities. There are more options and possibilities like these.

Adriaanse also gives some recommendations for those who are theologians in a *duplex ordo* context teaching theology: theologians (*godgeleerden*) ought to be careful with their thoughts, words and deeds with respect of what they can affirm about God. Theology in a university is

\(^{42}\) Adriaanse, *Het verschijnsel theologie*, 63.

\(^{43}\) Adriaanse, *Het verschijnsel theologie*, 73.
nothing else than religious science, a truly empirical discipline concerning itself with the complexities of the phenomena called religion. This is what one gains at the end of the day, a defined place for theology among other sciences. However this is not merely a change of label but at its core is a change of identity. For not only the name changes but its methods, objectives and subject matter. For if theology cannot be called ‘theology’ anymore but ‘religious science’, the critical question remains: Can theology as defined in its classical sense, keeping to her identity remain a fully academic discipline in a university? Adriaanse’s answer is an unambiguous: ‘No!’

1.5.2. The Christian’s unfortunate awareness

Faith fails the tests of rational knowledge. For example: in asserting that “God knows your hearts” (Lk. 16:15) it is difficult to come to an understanding of what God or know or heart means in this sentence. It is not a matter of vocabulary but a matter of our understanding of what reality is. In a post-Kantian day and age, words like ‘God’, ‘heart’ or ‘know’ have been redefined according to the principles of common rationality. Words as these have no referential base in reality; therefore they are void of any concrete meaning. This is the reason why Adriaanse understands faith claims to be inherently ambiguous. This is the point where, for the theologian, the problems we have discussed above become acute. For this is the ultimate criticism of the knowledge and talk of God.

The way modern humans experience reality today is mostly defined by ‘scientism’. Scientific methodology and historic developments led to the definition of what we today call science. Theology also followed in certain aspects these developments and developed a kind of scientific theology. But nothing came of it, for the scientific was irrelevant for theology, and vice versa. Again, testing plays an important role. How is faith knowledge possible without the presupposition of faith? It is not. And that is exactly what makes theology unscientific.

The development of natural sciences and specifically that of anthropology helped the emergence of cultural sciences: history, sociology, and letters. History is the one that dealt the biggest blow to theology. The prime example is the search for the historical Jesus. A quest that turned out to be impossible, because there is nothing to be asserted with historical certainty about the man called Jesus. The ultimate blow of science is that it not only undermines classic theology but faith as well, since faith is so closely related to one’s self-consciousness it does something on a very personal and existential level. This is what Adriaanse calls the unfortunate consciousness of the Christian. It is knowing more than one can assert publicly and in a scientific way. This unfortunate consciousness is what today’s theologian has to live with. How is then the theologian supposed to work as a theologian?

Adriaanse’s answer is: by keeping it a secret. Disciplina Arcani is a term borrowed from Bonhoeffer. For him this is the essential discipline of the Christian life. Even though one has deep convictions, they do not materialize in concrete and explicit discourse. Instead, the Christian has to exercise, for the time being, the discipline of keeping a secret. This is about a kind of secret of which he is aware, but does not make explicit in his concrete reality. Adriaanse uses the disciplina arcani in order to define the profile of today’s theologian working in a state university. This is what he says in essence: if a theologian has any sense of awareness of God, he ought to keep it to himself. This awareness ought not to interfere with

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45 Adriaanse, Eens christens ongelukkige bewustzijn, 13.
46 Adriaanse, Eens christens ongelukkige bewustzijn, 15.
his work as a scientist; otherwise he runs the risk of being seen as a pseudo-scientist. Adriaanse calls for methodological atheism. All science, religious or not, must share the basic presupposition that there is no God as such. Theologians are no exceptions to this rule. If one is convinced otherwise he ought to keep it a secret.

But can this secret be kept? Can the knowledge of the heart be separated from rationality and saved from the violence of criticism? It is this question that explains the unfortunate consciousness of the Christian. It cannot be separated. Adriaanse asks: “was sind die Situationen, in denen einem Menschen – mir und auch einem anderen – das Wort ‘Gott’ einfällt?” – what are those situations, in a man’s life, mine or another’s, that the word ‘God’ breaks through? When we put this question in the context of our work it would sound like this: What is the public or private sphere where ‘talk of God’ does happen regardless the philosophical, scientific or personal consequences? From the question it is apparent that there still is a struggle in the mind and the life of the theologian.

Adriaanse answers the question by quoting a passage from the historian J.S. Henriques. The paragraph is about the telling of an event during World War II of the deportation of Jewish people. “Ich muste ihn wie ein Kind unterstützen und sehe jetzt, indem ich schreibe, seine guten, treuen Augen noch auf mich gerichtet, als er wortlos von mir Abschied nahm und, mit Schmerzen in allen seinen Gliedern, niederkauerte neben der Kattone: Gott kann das nicht deutlicher gesehen haben als ich selbst.” In the face of suffering the heart is compelled to talk of God. This is not a rationally calculated talk but the answer of the heart to a tragic event. There is a certain compulsion that neither the philosopher nor the theologian can escape. It is precisely the Christian’s unfortunate awareness of God that makes him talk of God. In the face off all the rational, existential, scientific criticism there still remains a place where the word ‘God’ falls. The moment, the word ‘God’ falls, is the ultimate falsification of Adriaanse’s work. To elaborate more on this here would be mere speculation and would not do justice to the work of Adriaanse. However it is fitting to close this chapter with some ambiguity about Adriaanse’s work and the talk of God. We do not mean to detract or to down-play the importance of what Adriaanse has to say. On the contrary it shows the complexity of the issues we are faced with as we work with Modern Theology.

1.6 Conclusion

Adriaanse makes his position clear with lucid argumentation and critique. This is what it entails. Human life is lived under the line, all that there is and all that can be talked about happens under the line. What is above the line is not accessible from under the line. This is Adriaanse’s most fundamental position and basic starting point for his theological and religious scientific theory. Since there is no metaphysical framework left everything has to be talked about in terms of an immanent reality. This becomes most evident when it comes to talking about God. God above the line as such is inaccessible from under the line. Therefore theologians cannot and should not talk about God as a reality above the line. They only may talk about ‘God’ as human projection.

48 Adriaanse, Vom Christentum aus, Aufsätze und Vorträge zur Religionsphilosophie, (Nijkerk: Kok Pharos, 1995), 296. The word einfällt is borrowed from Levinas, and it means something that comes or falls in from the outside, here it refers to human consciousness, which reacts to a life situation with the word God.
49 Adriaanse, Vom Christentum aus, 296 - "I had to support him like a child and realize now, while writing, his good and loyal eyes still fixed on me, when he bid a wordless farewell and with pain in all his limbs, crouched next to the ‘Kattone’: God could not have seen it clearer than me.”
Evidently Adriaanse engages with the uttermost questions of rational human beings. He helps give words to those experiences, which are reminiscent of the absence of God. God is absent, in his argument, for the mere reason that we as humans live our lives under the line and God is above the line. The line is so all-defining that there is no way in which we or God can cross the line. If God is absent, there is no point of talking about God. Based on this Adriaanse criticizes theology as an academic discipline on the whole.

For Adriaanse, all that remains is religious scientific research from a historical perspective. This kind of historicity understands itself as bound by time and space and absent of any anomalies. If there are any anomalies, they can be explained under the line and, if not, then in the light of future discoveries they will be explained. Adriaanse in his critique points to the ambiguities a believer or a theologian experiences. He puts his finger on a sore place for an honest theologian. Knowing God is not something obvious or linear.

In the face of the historical realities of the deportation of the Jews, Adriaanse seems ambiguous, because it is precisely in the light of those circumstances that the word ‘God’ may fall. Adriaanse is truly committed to understand the realities of history from the perspective of the absence of God. But there remains a certain longing to reach beyond the line, or for encountering God who crosses the line. This small opening in his work is to his credit, because it is a sign of the academic who understands that his position is not absolute. There might be a knowledge of God that is experienced in a subtle way on the plains of history. The perspective of this experiences is however of a specific kind. When speaking about academic knowledge Adriaanse focuses on ‘hard’ facts that can be proven by strict argumentation. In the case of God, this would imply that He reveals Himself and His revelation should be accessible to research. The remarkable thing is however that Adriaanse points in another direction when wondering whether the word ‘God’ should not be considered, moreover, when it comes into human consciousness, in the depth of the deportation of the Jews. That might be a way of thinking about God in a different perspective that ultimately undermines the whole system. The road of the knowledge of God is paved with the reality of experiencing horror, pain and suffering. These experiences make theologians wonder and doubt.

Therefore Adriaanse’s basic position even though it is tempting remains unsatisfactory, even in his own thought, because its view of history only accounts for the measurable and predictable experiences one has. This approach is too one-sided and closes the door to those experiences, which cannot be accounted for outside a strict scientific paradigm. There are still experiences that make us as theologians wonder.

The main point of this chapter was to understand the problem of modern theology. At the outset we presented the following thesis: theology is God talk and specifically is talk about the identity of God. The thesis relates to the nature of theology and to the task of the theologian. As a first step we wanted to test this specific affirmation about theology by engaging with the criticism presented by the religious studies school considering the developments of modern scientific theory.

According to Adriaanse the problems of modern classical theology lie in the following three points:

1) the rational justification of God talk (pg. 14-20).
2) in the unscientific character of theology considering the scientific demands of an academic discipline (pg. 20-24).
3) the act of speaking about God in the public sphere.(pg. 24-27).
Adriaanse’s formal challenge to theology is this:

4) does theology deserve the adjective ‘academic’? Is there a kind of God talk that is justified or at least plausible for such an academic discourse?

Considering the overall argument of the dissertation it is best not to answer these criticisms and questions at this point. We will leave that until the final conclusions. This first step was not about a critical discussion with Adriaanse, but about understanding and presenting as clearly as possible the problems related to theology and our understanding of theology as God talk and specifically talk about the identity of God. The next step will be to look at a theological engagement with the problems of modern theology. We will do that by considering the work of K.H. Miskotte. His work is relevant because in face of a secularising society he found a theological way of engaging with the problems of modern theology by focusing on the Name of God. It will be interesting to see how he deals with the problems raised by secularism and the theological solutions he finds address those problems.

Summary
The aim of this chapter was to present the problems of theology in modern times as they relate to the ‘talk of God.’ In presenting this problem we have turned to the work of the Dutch theologian H.J. Adriaanse. We have analyzed the work of Adriaanse on four points: 1) the rationality of science, 2) the impossibility of classic theology, 3) theology vs. religious science, and 4) theology and reductionism.

First we sketched a short overview of the history of philosophy of science, seeking to understand the work of Adriaanse in its larger context. It became apparent that there has been a general move towards the liberation of human reason from external authorities, whether it is the Bible or Nature. Kant systematized the autonomy of reason and by that elevated reason to the position of sole authority of human consciousness. How do you know? is the question all scientific endeavors have to answer. Theologically, reason and rationality come together under the theme of revelation. For the theologian, knowledge of God is based on revelation. Adriaanse criticizes precisely this point and it is his most fundamental critique of classic theology. The correlation between God and humanity is impossible, because humanity is limited to time and space whereas the divinity is not. Thus, ultimately, nothing can be said about God rationally.

Theology, when tested against the demands of modern scientific theory, it became apparent that it is not a scientific discipline. This meant for Adriaanse that theology had to be reconfigured, which implied a basic turn from a theocentric to an anthropocentric understanding of theology. The main object of research then, for the theologian, is the religious human being. Further, in a public context like a university, theology became religious science. This process of reconfiguration, in our opinion, is reductionistic. Adriaanse addresses the issue of reduction in a sympathetic manner. The theologian, who works in a public university, should practice Disciplina Arcani. Because God is a matter of faith, and it does not belong to the sphere of common rationality, therefore for the theologian to avoid the risk of being accused of pseudo-science, God is better kept as a secret.

We ended the analysis of Adriaanse’s argument with a short note on the complexity of his work. The note shows an actual struggle on the side of Adriaanse. Even though he firmly rejects the public relevance of God talk, i.e. classic theology, there remains a place where talking about God is not only possible but it is also appropriate.
2.1. Introduction

In the middle of the twentieth century, K.H. Miskotte emerged as one of the most significant theological figures of the Netherlands. First as a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church and later from 1945 till 1959 as a professor of dogmatics at the Faculty of Theology in Leiden. Two topics have been the hallmark of his theological work: first, the Theology of the Old Testament and its continuity for the Church; second, the secularism and nihilism he observed in the lives of his contemporaries. He has also written on many other subjects and the publications of his sermons have been widely read and appreciated. However we are particularly interested in these two main topics. The reason is that Miskotte, in his Old Testament theology, also focused on the Name with regards to a secular context. Miskotte offers a theological approach to the problem of secularism and the problems related to modern theology. It allows us, by focusing on these topics, to present a coherent view of Miskotte’s theological thinking. Many who have engaged with the writings of Miskotte have come to the conclusion that his skillful, creative and at times poetic use of the Dutch language is not easily systematized or translated. By refining our focus we will be able to better analyze his work.

Miskotte’s work has been influenced by the theology of Karl Barth. He is also credited with introducing Barth to the wider Dutch audience. However to place them in the same boat is a stretch of the imagination. Their respective theologies are different from each other in their aim. Whereas Barth’s theology is a theology for and of the Church, focused on the centre of the Christian confession, Miskotte had a strong commitment to the edge of the Church and those living beyond the margins of it. This is not to say that he was not rooted in the Church; on the contrary, his theology always had homiletic implications. His focus on the margin and his clear intuition about the modern secularized human being makes his work all the more interesting.

One might also wonder at this point: what it is that connects Miskotte with Adriaanse? What is the rationale of connecting the two theologians? Let us start with some secondary reasons: although they were both active on the Faculty of Theology in Leiden, Miskotte preceded Adriaanse by several decades. They both had a very good understanding of the times they lived and worked in. They both had specific responses to those times. In our opinion these very responses are precisely what connect them. Then there are the primary reasons for considering the two side by side. Adriaanse, on the one hand, realized that theology in its classical form couldn’t function in the parameters of modern science anymore. Therefore it had to change. It had to move from classic theology, i.e. talking of God, to talking about ‘God’ as a human concept. Miskotte on the other hand, advocated the rediscovery of Old Testament theology and the Name (i.e. talking of God) as a way of critically engaging with his context. Whereas Adriaanse reconfigured theology, Miskotte rediscovered theology. They both represent two sides, two reactions to the problems of Modern Theology. By working with both, we are forced to recognize the complexities of theology in the modern period. This does not mean that they dealt with the exact same problems of modern theology. What is interesting is that they both had a certain way of dealing with the secularization in their own specific contexts, Miskotte in the church and Adriaanse specifically in the academy.

We are interested in Miskotte’s anthropology and theology. Anthropology in the work of Miskotte is in essence theological anthropology. The theological aspect of his anthropology
forms also his criticism of nihilism and secularism. Thus it is important to first sketch the Zeitgeist because out of it emerges the secular humanity, profiled by Miskotte as the ‘fourth man.’ This is the man to whom he talks through his theology, which is rooted in the Old Testament. Themes such as Torah, Name and Revelation are some of the main building blocks on which his theology rests. We do this also to capture the main lines of argumentation in Miskotte’s vast work. In short this is our attempt to systematically deal with the work in front of us.

2.2. Miskotte’s theological anthropology and the ‘fourth man’

2.2.1. The Times of the fourth man

The two World Wars inaugurated a new era in Europe, both historically and theologically. A deep disappointment in the modern world ruled over every aspect of life. How was it possible for an enlightened humanity to commit such atrocities? This is just one example of the kind of questions theologians, thinkers and critics wondered about. Karl Barth inaugurated this new theological era with the publication of Der Römerbrief. It was a biblical theological critique of modern humanism, positivism and idealism. The basic criticism came down to this one thought: nineteenth century idealism led humanity to believe in their own divinity rather than God’s divinity. This imbalance and completely anthropocentric theology needed revision, and Barth in his life work provided the main voice. His theocentric and christocentric theology was the counter-part of the Modern Liberal Protestant theology. Miskotte was one of the Dutch theologians who picked up this theme from Barth and popularized it in the Netherlands.50

In the introduction of When the Gods are Silent Miskotte offers us what he calls a ‘Kleine Tijdspeigel’.51 It is a very important piece in his work, because it is Miskotte’s critique of the society and the church he lived and worked in. We find this a fascinating description of the context in which Miskotte’s work took place. The context, like in all theological work, has had a categorical influence on the whole of his thinking. He was truly a theologian of his own time. This mirror will be the focal point of the first part of this chapter. We want to describe in more detail what the times that Miskotte lived and worked in looked like. This will not be a historical recounting of events; instead, we want to focus on some of the main ideological tendencies, from the beginning, right through the middle, of the twentieth century. Since we are convinced that Miskotte was a theologian of his time, this short overview is essential for understanding his work. In the second part of this chapter we want to focus specifically on his profile of the ‘fourth man’.52 We believe that his theological work has been geared towards the ‘fourth man’. We would dare to say that the ‘fourth man’ was his gesprekspartner – his conversation partner - directly or indirectly.

The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by the disastrous fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Third Reich. The two Wars became critical instances that inaugurated a new era in the European consciousness. There was a drastic change in mood.

50 Van de Beek, A. Van Kant tot Kuitert, De belangrijkste theologen uit de 19e en 20e eeuw, (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 126-132.
51 Trans.: Little mirror of our times.
52 This is a term that Miskotte borrowed from A. Weber. This is what the translator notes: “In Weber’s book the first man is the prehistoric Neanderthal man; the second man the playing fluctuations of the ice age, the man of the magic cults; the third man the homo faber, the bearer of history who makes and shapes history. The fourth man, however, is no longer conscious of history but is only the product of the technicizing of human existence.”
Any optimism or idealism, characteristic of the nineteenth century, had become a problematic matter. There was a deep dissatisfaction with all that was related to human power and capacity. The Church, which had been in a delicate position during the Wars, saw herself abandoned by many of her followers. Ultimately this turned out to be the true beginning of secularization in Europe. The ideology that was foundational for this secularization became known as nihilism. Miskotte addressed this ideology, since it was the dominant Zeitgeist of his time.

Nihilism was not only the ideology of the initiated few, but its social Gestalt took form in the wide secularization of Europe. To understand secularization we have to shortly note some of the theological problems of this period. The fundamental problems originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century enlightenment idealism in the form of the immanence of religion. Essentially it meant the humanization of religion. The human being became the sole subject and object of religious study and research. In other words it meant the de-metaphysication of religion and the rise of natural religion and theology. From this perspective religion and religiosity is seen as an innate human ability to live in relation to the divine. One of the main exponents of this perspective was the German theologian Schleiermacher. Barth became one of the main opponents of natural theology in modern times. He criticized the immanence of religion by stating that there is no formal or material connection between nature and grace. This meant for Barth that religious experiences were not rooted in human consciousness, but rather they came from the outside in. The theological implication is that, there is no direct correlation between humanity and God. For Barth the two, God and humanity, are categorically different, and are not meant to be confused, but must be kept apart. Miskotte did not only agree on this point with Barth, but also made this argument his own. However, nihilism was far more severe than mere immanent religiosity. In immanent religiosity there is still a sense of the divine, or a feeling of ‘something more to life than this’. Nihilism, as we refer to it, is the rejection of all that there is beyond the all dividing line and anything that is reminiscent of it. It is the rejection of anything that even has a metaphysical resemblance. Nihilism and secularism defined in religious and theological terms is absolute immanence.

Thus nihilism has to do with the belief in nothing or nothingness. Its roots are found in the nineteenth century German philosophical thinking. Nihilism is a certain mood that encompasses all areas of the human consciousness (hopes, ideals, norms), which in turn have lost all their meaning, and from a human perspective everything seems futile. It is a radical disappointment and turn against Enlightenment’s idealism and positivism. The work of the German philosopher F. Nietzsche was very influential at the end of the nineteenth century. In his work, one has to differentiate, on the one hand, between a frustrated theological nihilism and on the other hand a more vital constructive nihilism. Nietzsche’s criticism of theology is the well-known ‘death of God’ theology. The ‘spiritual’ (all which is beyond the senses) has lost its power and influence on human life. It is the ultimate loss of God, not only from public life, but also from the realm of the private.

We are not about to enter into the philosophical intricacies of nihilism. All we want to do is to point out that nihilism is a reaction and ultimately a rejection of some Enlightenment ideals and achievements. It is also relevant, for our research and the understanding of Miskotte’s criticism of nihilism, to note the way in which the motto ‘God is dead’ is used in the work of Nietzsche. Often it is seen as an atheistic statement, a willing rejection of God as such. However this is a misrepresentation of what is meant by it. The phrase ‘God is dead’ was not

53 This short definition and overview is taken from Großheim, M., “Nihilismus,” RGG²/VI, 320-322.
meant as a theological or philosophical program. It was Nietzsche’s characterization of society at large, which has lost any sense or reference to God. It was a critical statement of a secularizing society that was an expression of the underlying move towards nihilism.

Miskotte, in his analysis of nihilism, makes an interesting differentiation between genuine and un-genuine nihilism. He traces the roots of genuine nihilism back to Enlightenment and specifically to the independence of the thinking subject and the elevation of the self. It is a conscious departure from the world of the Word, God, and the affirmations that have become synonymous with the Christian faith. Miskotte, in defining what nihilism is, draws on the work of three influential thinkers. First is the Russian author Turgenev’s definition of genuine nihilism: “A nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any authority, and does not take principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in”. The nihilist is the epitome of the Enlightenment project, the ultimately liberated human being who is not dependent on any outside agency for his own definition and being. The second thinker Miskotte considers is Nietzsche. He sees nihilism as the product of the thinking mind which ultimately is let down by its own projections and the emptiness. The third thinker Miskotte enlists is the philosopher Heidegger. His contribution is summed up in the question: “Why is there any Being at all - why not far rather Nothing?” In other words, nihilism is the active contemplation of nothingness instead of being.

Most interesting is the way in which Miskotte brings his treatment of nihilism together in one critical statement about the condition of religion in his day: “When the gods and also the god whom we have constructed for ourselves by our autonomous thought go on exercising their depressive and destructive silence, it must become clear that they have always been silent gods who will always drive us to atheism, total alienation from meaning, the emptying of life, and the eclipse of ‘God.’ Nihilism is the necessary consequence of ‘our Christianity.’ And from that point of view, the word ‘our’ can be legitimate; indeed it even forces itself upon us as a confession of solidarity.” It is important to note that Miskotte does not have a phenomenological perspective of nihilism. He understands that nihilism has become the norm and shaping ethos of his generation. Christians are no exceptions, for they are children of their time. Genuine nihilism, in its essence, is also an intellectual struggle where the mind is unable to deal with its own self-reliant world.

Miskotte defined un-genuine nihilism as the nihilism of the masses. Contrary to genuine nihilism, un-genuine nihilism is not only an intellectual endeavor, but takes the totality of the human experience into account. Un-genuine nihilism is the nihilism of the religious man. It is the kind of nihilism that is brought about by natural theology. Miskotte, like Barth, is critical of natural theology. The human capacity for religion is nothing more than a disguised un-genuine nihilism. This kind of nihilism is not as rigorous as the intellectual one. On the one hand, there is the objection against classic Christianity, and on the other flirting with the spirit of the age. The ideological considerations of Miskotte’s context bring us to the next point, to the emergence of a ‘new kind of humanity’, which is fundamentally conditioned by both genuine and un-genuine nihilism.

2.2.2. The profile of a new man, of a new humanity

Miskotte, in the light of nihilism, saw the rise of a new humanity, which he profiles as the ‘fourth man.’ He was very much aware of his own context. He was very close to the pulse of

54 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 16.
55 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 18.
56 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 19.
57 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 19-24.
the ‘fourth man’. His theological commitments and proximity to the mood of the day put him into the position where he could analyze society at large, and the church in the middle of the twentieth century Holland. His work, to a certain extent, is also existential. The manner in which he describes the new humanity seems to suggest a certain feeling of ‘kinship’, but his critical approach towards the ‘fourth man’ is theologically motivated. So what we see happen in his work in relation to the new humanity are two approaches: first, solidarity, but not fully identifying with the ‘fourth man’ and second, a commitment to find a way out of the abyss of this dehumanizing condition.

Miskotte’s basic definition of this new humanity is: “the fourth man is the man who no longer believes, in the biblical sense of the term […] he is equally deaf to other gods and free from any binding power of godlike values. He is the man who no longer responds to any spiritual appeal. He lacks the ability to do so.”

Unlike Schleiermacher, who believed in an innate ability for religiosity of the human being, Miskotte is more pessimistic. He, like Barth, sees the default human condition as actually non-religious. The changing times did not create this new humanity, nor did this humanity come of age by shedding all its religious pretensions; it is the unmasking of the true nature of the human condition. The changing times of Europe and the two wars only intensified this pessimism and it went even deeper with the process of unmasking. “The ‘fourth man’ has been dehumanized.”

Humanity is exposed for what it truly is: not religious by nature, confused and lonely. The ‘fourth man,’ in essence, is the disclosure of the truth about humanity. It is a pessimistic view of humanity, from a theological perspective, but at the same time it is also very sobering. This is also one of the reasons his work is pertinent for the contemporary theologian.

The ‘fourth man’ is the secular man caught between his own self and the emptiness of nothingness. This kind of “secularized man no longer engages in… sacred play, he can no longer capture the earnestness of the play – this is part of his honesty.”

Dekker, in interpreting and analyzing the work of Miskotte, calls our attention to the fact that Miskotte’s concern is the ambivalent nature of religion, or, as he puts it (drawing on Barth) the problem of the immanence of religion. The problem is that humanity always struggles, on the one hand, with deep religiosity, and at the same time with a deep denial of God and anything godly. Atheism, in a way, always played a part in religiosity, closely connected, as rebellion, libertinism or as desperation.

It is important to turn our attention to Miskotte’s treatment of paganism, because it sheds more light on his thoughts on the changing times and humanity emerging in it. It is not so much that religiosity is the problem, but that the shape of the new kind of religiosity is fueled in one way or another by nihilism. This is how Miskotte explains this: “Paganism is not atheism; on the contrary it is a very strong, vital faith. Paganism is not liberalism or libertinism; on the contrary it always had a strong bond with the state and the community life based upon the veneration of the state. Paganism is not something antiquated; on the contrary it is the everlasting ferment of human life.”

Paganism in this sense is the rediscovery of the indigenous, the pre-Judeo-Christian religion. Amidst this new rise of paganism, the ‘fourth man’ comes to the realization that the gods (the ancient gods) are essentially silent. “But one

58 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 1.
59 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 2.
60 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 2.
62 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 8.
thing he [the fourth man], knows very definitely (and here he shares the bitter truth of this age and every age), and that is that the ‘godhead’, if there is one is silent and that it is experienced as a total silence.”63 This is when humans discovered gods to be figments of their imagination. In the midst of this silence YHWH spoke. Israel discovered that YHWH speaking actually unmasked the other gods as utterly silent.

This is the ultimate critique, of the one important mood of the age, the silence of the gods man erected with the power of his imagination. It is the ultimate disappointment of humanity. Kant was still positive about the association of human intellect, imagination and religion. They all had their roots in the power of the human intellect. But by the time of Miskotte, the thought that a generation ago sounded like a great idea had become an empty shell. The ‘fourth man’ is caught up in this emptiness. It is this new emerging humanity that has to rediscover, in its own entanglement, the God of Israel who speaks. That is the only way out, not only out of paganism, but also out of nihilism and the silent despair that humanity is caught up in. The remaining two points of this chapter will follow Miskotte’s theological answers to the problems of his day.

2.3. Miskotte’s theological considerations

2.3.1. The primacy of the Old Testament

Miskotte’s theology may be characterized as a post-belllic theology. During World War II serious theological compromises were made, in some theological circles, for the justification of the Third Reich. This was one of the reasons why Barth rejected many of his theological contemporaries. One of their theological leaps was the total dismissal of the Old Testament and its replacement with nationalistic folklore. Miskotte’s focus on Old Testament theology and its Jewish roots is a reaction to the replacement agenda. This specific focus not only provided discussions concerning the content of theology, but also opened issues of theological method, preaching, teaching and the backbone of Miskotte’s ideological critique of nihilism, which we have discussed above. The study of the Old Testament and its theology is essential in the work of Miskotte.

The readers are spectators of the Old Testament (this is altered by the coming of the Word of God, Christ), which in essence is the story of the covenant between YHWH and Israel. Miskotte argues that the readers are not merely spectators because the Old Testament comes to the reader as instruction. He makes this argument based on the semantics of the word Torah. However instruction is not so much about the ‘what,’ i.e. the content of the instruction, but it is about the ‘who.’ He says in his own words: “…we are referred to the ‘Word’…the breakthrough of the God of freedom with his creative speech in the midst of the masks of divine power.”64 So the act of instruction is not determined by what is said but by who says it. Formally this means that the focus is not on the object of instruction but the subject who speaks and instructs. Regarding the Scriptures this means that the attention falls on an encounter with God through the Scriptures.

Considering the importance of the Old Testament and its theology, Miskotte highlights the following dialectic: there is always a two-fold action of the Scriptures that go hand in hand. Ignoring one at the expense of the other does no justice to the complexity and the truth of the Scriptures. These two-fold actions are: Word and teaching, voice and instruction, self-

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63 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 10.
64 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 56.
manifestation and direction. By highlighting this Miskotte departs from a strict phenomenological view of Scriptures and deems them normative, because the encounter that takes place is a definitive encounter with God.

2.3.2. The Torah

We turn now in our study to one of the fundamental concepts in the work of Miskotte. It is a concept, which he borrowed from the Old Testament, and actualized theologically: Torah. Miskotte envisioned the theologian, or the pastor, as the one who is immersed in the knowledge of the Old Testament, and leads out those who are trapped in the world of nihilism. Miskotte saw this as an act of re-educating the ‘fourth man’ in the strange world of the God of the Bible, the Name, YHWH. Miskotte, in recovering the importance of the study of the Old Testament, actually re-interpreted these Old Testament term for his generation and the context they were living and working in.

Torah is often translated as ‘law’ but it also means teaching or education. Miskotte uses the latter meaning of the word. The students have to be where the teacher is, and where there is teaching that is where one has to go and learn. The kind of education or learning Miskotte proposes here is one that strongly focuses not only on transferable information but also on the dynamic of learning from someone. It is also an act of getting to know the one who is doing the teaching. He summons one to learn not only what presents itself as information, but also ‘what comes out of his mouth’ and not only what one likes, but also what one dislikes. To study is a healthy compulsion; we cannot educate ourselves; study is hard work, and it takes discipline and order. Teaching is educating in the ways of God, because one learns: what is right, how to correctly judge, and it provides direction.

This approach to education has to do with Miskotte’s theological anthropology. Miskotte is pessimistic about human capacity and self-actualization, because they are not the markers of enlightened humanity but of the nihilist humanity. The human being is passive, in the act of learning. Thus the addressed human being has to be ready: to be told, to improve and to change. This implies an unequal relationship, namely, that learning is obeying. Learning from someone implies a certain rapport, and accepting that humans cannot do it on their own. Therefore they have to learn from the one who has authority over them.

Miskotte’s view stands in stark contrast with the Enlightenment’s view of human beings. We note that Miskotte’s view is less optimistic of the human being who is left to his own devices. It is a certain disappointment with the Enlightenment vision of freeing the human capacity to endless possibilities. Naturally, human beings are not inclined towards YHWH, only to religion and idolatry. Therefore they must be taught about the ways of the Lord.

The whole of the Bible is teaching. The church as God’s servant on Earth, is at the same time the subject and the object of this education, because at times She assumes the task of teaching and some other times the task of learning. But the teaching of the Bible is not self-contained (meaning that its value is not only intrinsic, but has the power to move human beings to good works for the praise of God), and it is not one-sided (meaning that its form is to the service of truth and understanding; it uses words to depict the glory of God; no human contradictions

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65 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 56-61.
66 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 19-31.
67 For a more formal definition on this, see: A. van de Beek, “Subject van een passive zin,” in Toeval of Schepping? Scheppingstheologie in de context van het moderne denken, (Kampen: Kok, 2005), 65-72.
68 Religion in this context means the self projected religious feelings. It relies on Barth’s thinking on Religion as a human project versus a God initiated movement.
can have power over it; it does not organize a party, but gathers a people, and those people are the new humanity) and it is not monotone (meaning that its unity is in the coming together and the meeting of many voiced sounds: the teaching is a symphony; many instruments but one melody). But where does the teaching derive its power? There is a certain self-contained, one-sided and univocal message and promise: God is! This very strange fact changes everything in one’s life. Scripture does not have any universal pretentions, for it does not worship the absolute, nor absolute truths, nor absolute laws. Now the secret is that: the dethronement of the dreadful Absolute makes space for the entry of a certain something that has to be discovered as generally valid.  

Miskotte highlights the otherness of biblical teaching, which meets human beings as a stranger. It is not the product of creativity nor of idealism, but it is a teaching which goes from the outside-in. The modern human is a part of the ‘lonely crowd’ and strives on his neutralism. A neutralism characterized by the inability of responsibility and inability to make decisions which ultimately lead to nihilism. But a society cannot live on anarchy, there will come a new ‘absolute’ which will be instituted, from top to bottom, and we will realize that the holy teaching which once we disliked was indeed our protection. Because of this estrangement for the modern human learning is hard work; one has to learn a new language, a new world and has to face this stranger, i.e. the God who is. It is not about idealism, or absolutes, but an encounter with the stories, songs, and sayings about this God. And ultimately this is an encounter with the presence of God.

So far, we have looked at some of the important aspects of Miskotte’s work. The image of a secularized humanity came into focus. It was the reality of Miskotte’s days, and a reality we share with him even today. We have also seen how, through the re-reading and re-interpretation of the Old Testament, Miskotte found a theological way to answer the challenges of the new humanity. However there is one theme in his work that has the highest priority, namely, the reaffirmation of the ‘Name.’ The content of Miskotte’s theological work centers around the importance of the Name. There is no other theme that is as predominant as this. Therefore we will give due attention to it. In what follows, we will first describe how Miskotte conceives the revelation of the Name. This topic is essential for our research at large. Second, we will look how Miskotte makes use of the Name in his theology. We have shown already how important the Old Testament is for Miskotte’s thinking. The reason that it is so important is because of the Name.

2.3.3. Revelation and the Name

Following Barth, Miskotte affirms, “that we do not start with God, but he starts with us.” In the middle of the twentieth century to say this was considered extremely controversial. The nineteenth century had developed a different kind of vantage point for revelation and consequently for theology. Man, in his ultimate feeling of dependency (Schleiermacher), is the starting point of all theological inquiry. Man and God are connected in the longings of humanity.

Miskotte’s work is all the more interesting because its turn against this trend. It is precisely in this kind of incongruity that we find the essence of what he says. Instead of humanity Miskotte starts with God’s starting with us. To begin with God’s coming to us, means that there is a different kind of correlation between humanity and God. It is God, in his acts, who

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69 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 26.
70 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 30.
71 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 51.
steps forward and engages with humanity. In other words, God reveals himself. This statement is even more radical when we realize that it presupposes a certain passivity on the side of the human agent in the act of revelation. “Existential experience of God goes beyond all psychology, sociology, history, religion and piety. In this experience the man is not confronted with himself, but by Him, who he calls Abba, Father; consequently this is the man of the new world.” Revelation is not about human consciousness, but about the disclosure of God and his Name. This disclosure is the primary act of revelation and not the act of the human being. The emphasis here is on the act of God and not on the act of the human being.

Miskotte interestingly weaves the twin truths of revelation together, namely, that revelation is an act of disclosure and at the same it is an act of the concealment of God. For Miskotte the term ‘God’ is informed and explained by the Old Testament. One comes to know God both as revealed and hidden. Miskotte quotes Buber: “That which has come over us could by its very nature be identical with the darkness that occurs when God hides himself. Let us ask ourselves whether it may not be literally true that formerly spoke to us and now is silent, and whether this is not to be understood as the Hebrew Bible understands it, namely, that the living God is not only a self-revealing but also ‘self-concealing’ God.”

We can ask the critical question: what is the difference between the hiddenness and the silence of God? Both are Biblical theological themes and are related to the topic of revelation. The question is always about the extent of human knowledge of God. Miskotte differentiates between the two biblical concepts. The hiddenness of God is a statement of faith about God. It is a statement of the limitation of the human intellect to know God. There will always be certain questions unanswered and certain aspects of God, which remain hidden. This is not an uncommon phenomenon in human relationships. Knowing someone does not mean that one knows everything there is to be known about that person. Time and various situations bring about the growth of knowledge of a person. The silence of God is a testament to, and an acknowledgement of, the silence of the human being, which is ultimately projected onto God. For Miskotte the silence of God has to do, on the one hand, with projection and on the other with the silence of the idols, i.e. the gods of human religiosity. The revelation of God does away with all human tendencies to erect gods. Gods who are ultimately unmasked as figments of imagination and products of the human will to power.

The primacy of God in and for theology has to be maintained. We, living in the West, have to realize that our understanding of revelation has been influenced by the epistemological trends of the day. Miskotte, however, sees very sharply through this tendency: “…one comes to the conclusion that we in Europe have always in our philosophizing said that: “A proved God is no God.” Accordingly, only he who starts from God can seek him. A certainty of the existence of God, however rudimentary and intangible it may be, is a premise, not the result of philosophical activity.” Philosophers of science might have a problem with Miskotte’s quest to see God as the premise of any scientific or philosophical inquiry. However tempting it is to start a detailed discussion on this topic, we have to restrain ourselves for the sake of the clarity of our work.

Miskotte invites us to go deeper into this: “Now, it is precisely the Old Testament which can free us from such a shallow, Westernized concept of ‘revelation’, because it shows us that no human word as such is revelation, whether it be profane or sacred, New Testament or Old Testament, the language of the priests or of the great writing prophets. Neither report about

72 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 44.
73 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 50.
74 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 52.
God nor what God says can express, represent, much less take the place of the NAME.”

Even though the Old Testament is our source for knowing about God, there is nothing that compares to meeting God. Miskotte makes a simple differentiation between direct and indirect knowledge of God. And it is obvious to see which has Miskotte’s preference: the direct first hand encounter. The directness of revelation is also seen as a weakness of Miskotte’s theology, because in his work, sometimes revelation is seen as too subjective and immediate.

When we talk about revelation there is always one predominant problem: time. How is it possible for the supernatural to manifest itself in the natural? In theological terms: how is it possible for God to reveal himself in time and space? (The working assumption is that God is beyond time and space.) What we are dealing with here, in essence, is the problem of ‘theological time’. Miskotte resolves the problem of theological time as follows:

1. “In God’s revelation we are dealing with God, himself, as he unrepeatably and irrevocably unites himself with human life in Jesus Christ at one point in time. This time is at once God’s own time and the time in which we find ourselves. …To use New Testament terms, only when the Father is recognized in the Son through the Spirit, or in Old Testament terms, only when the Name of God is recognized as the essence of God (instead of a ‘secondary centre alongside Jahveh’) as it is present to his people in the sanctuary, is the difference between the times relativized and the times related to God.”

2. We only have indirect knowledge of the revelation of God, through testimony and through his saving power. The Scriptures are the deposit, repository, codification and explication of this testimony. So there is no direct identification possible of the Bible with revelation, because the Scriptures are the Word about the ‘Word’ of the Lord.

3. One can say that the Old Testament is a kind of expectation and the New Testament is a kind of recollection. Both are relative to the time of revelation but have in common their orientation and relationship to the NAME, to the same event and Salvation. The words of both the Old and New Testament attest, proclaim, point to and present the One who reveals Himself. The Scriptures are subservient to the revelation of God.

4. Words point to the one object of the Bible, to “God himself, this God who is different from all other gods, before whom the godhead vanishes, as a dream, is himself the power that brings into a unity all the love and devotion, all the living and the striving of man which is directed through Him to Him.”

5. Trust as a factor of unity, “… that while the gods are silent, the ‘Name’ rises above us, as it once rose above Abraham, Moses, David and countless persons unnamed, who, if they had been left to themselves, would have remained caught in the ambivalence of religion. But in the presence of that Name they found fulfillment and expectation in the Voice that cleaves the spectral silence between heaven and earth to find its mark in the heart of man.”

There is a definite historical gap between the original act of revelation and people’s lives today. How can this gap be bridged? What do Old Testament events have to do with life

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75 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 107.
76 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 111.
77 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 114.
78 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 115.
today? This is where the understanding of theological time becomes essential for the doctrine of revelation, as we have seen above. “What is more unending is the endless time, when our time and God’s time together are: the space of Meeting.” The divide can only be bridged when one strictly keeps to the doctrine of theological time. “The doctrine of the theological time evaporates if both sides of the structure of the Old Testament are not accepted as real, namely, (1) that YHWH is the Other over against the gods and the godhead, and (2) that a large part of the testimony concerning him comes to us in a garment of language which was originally cut to fit the god as godhead.”

This leads us to the content of the act of revelation. God, YHWH is not only the content, according to Miskotte, but also the subject of revelation. This is most apparent in the revelation of the Name of God. We continue in our next point with showing the place of the Name in the theology of Miskotte.

2.3.4. The Name

Miskotte fully recognizes the religious nature of the biblical stories. For him religiositas is something that is very basic to human nature. But it stands in stark contrast with the revelation of the Name. So for Miskotte the biblical stories have something of an anti-religious and anti-pagan notion about them. Here one can see how Miskotte follows Barth, in his critique of religion. Even though the biblical language is strongly influenced by general ancient religiositas, the two are categorically different. One is the product of the human longing for the divine; the other is the product of the revelation of God. By the discontinuity between religion and Biblical revelation, Miskotte turns from the nineteenth and twentieth century optimism about natural knowledge of God. This also connects to what Miskotte sees as paganism. It is in this clear contrast that the revelation of the Name is imbedded.

To put it in theological terms, paganism is the World irrespective of the revelation of the Name. That is why the Scriptures sound strange. The tendency is to read and to listen with pagan eyes and ears. Since there is no natural inclination towards the Name, only to a vague divinity or idol, this has to be taught to humanity. For Miskotte, the right place next to the church is the beth midrash. This is the place where one engages with the Scriptures and specifically with the Old Testament. It is in learning and hearing about the stories of the Scriptures that humanity is confronted with the presence of God, i.e. the Name. For Miskotte is not so much about learning in itself but learning as an encounter. This has to do with his understanding of revelation as well. Revelation and being taught has to do first and foremost with encounter, with participating in the presence of the One who reveals and shares Himself, God.

So far we have seen how the Name is linked to various aspects of Miskotte’s theology. For him theology is talking about God as He is revealed in the Name. In a day and age when the word God had become vague and associated with all sorts of humanistic, speculative and philosophical terminologies, Miskotte talked about the Name. The Name for Miskotte qualifies the word ‘God’. The following points comprise a short treatment of Miskotte’s discourse on the Name providing further insight into how Miskotte conceives the Name:

1. YHWH is not originally an Israelite name. “This God will be the only God because in the world he distinguishes himself from the world.”

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79 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 41.
80 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 116.
81 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 120.
2. “YHWH is an anonymous name”. “The primary meaning is that the God of Israel withdraws himself from all conjuration; he cannot be conjured up with this nameless name and be made subservient to an ulterior purpose. But more specifically, (…), Israel is referring to the action that proceeds from YHWH, to what he undertakes to do, to the long journey he takes with Israel from Egypt to the promised land and, from there into the exile and the Diaspora, the ‘days’ and the ‘deeds’ which are the days and the deeds of God.”

3. “YHWH is a proper name”. “The Name, the revelation, is concentrated in a proper name. It is also the bolt that bars the way to the theoretical kind of ‘monotheism’.”

4. “YHWH is an untranslatable name and an incomprehensible concept.” “The identification ‘YHWH is God’, however, is a self-translating statement that empowers us to paraphrase the Name with general religious concepts.”

The Name, from Miskotte’s perspective, sets God apart from all other beings, gods and demons. The Bible does not have a general definition for god, and consequently does not attach other special names and images to that definition. The Scriptures speak about God as a God among other gods. The impression often is that the context, in which the Name was revealed, was an empty context. The contrary is true; the religious landscape was full with gods and religions. Amidst these gods, YHWH distinguished Himself as the God of the people of Israel and ultimately of all Creation. In relation to the other gods, people and religions the issue of identity, who is who, was essential and of utmost importance. In the Old Testament the names of persons tell something about their being and their purpose. In the same way, there is an inner connection between God and his name. Ultimately the Name is the way God reveals himself in relation to the earthly reality. According to Miskotte’s reading it is in his Name that God is known. His Name is given to an Angel, lives in the Temple and in the artist. That is the reason why cursing it, desecrating it or using the Name in vain is such a great offense (the third commandment). The Name has to be known, talked about, feared, loved, confessed, searched, expected, called out to and sanctified.

Miskotte notes: “The central place of the Name means that revelation was, and is and always will be particular revelation. God has a name, therefore He is not the unnamed; God is not the All-That-There-Is, He is known as a reality, who distinguishes Himself in this world from this world. God does not present himself to us as the most general, which can be found everywhere, rather as the unique one who is to be searched for and found in a specific place. This does not mean, though, that He is not generally omnipotent and omnipresent, but that the way to know cannot start with what is universal. In other words, we have to follow the way of revelation to meet the real, living God.”

This is a very important aspect of Miskotte’s argument. He not only presents and defines what the Name means, he also presents a specific theological method. This theological method starts with the specific revelation of God and moves towards a comprehensive conceptualization. We observe that when one starts with the specific and then moves to the universal, the understanding of what has been revealed is safeguarded. It gets its meaning, not

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82 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 121.
83 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 122.
84 Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, 123.
85 Eva, Cain, Seth, Israel, Moses, Abram-Abraham, Sarai-Sahra, Naomi-Mara, Simon-Peter.
86 Lev. 18:21; Ps. 86:11; Ex. 15:3; Jes. 47:4; 1Cor. 18:10; Ps. 105:3.
87 Ex. 20:7; Lev. 18:21; 19:12; 24:11.
88 Deut. 28:58; 1Kon. 8:33; Ps. 5:12; 34:4, 52:11; 83:17; 122:4; Isa. 26:8; Matt. 6:9; Joh. 12:28; etc.
89 Miskotte, *Bijbels ABC*, 34.

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from universal or general notions but from a specific event. This has implication for the theology of God. The theologian does not start with a general definition of God and then read, with that in mind, the biblical narratives. Methodologically it is the other way around. The specific stories give meaning to the word ‘God’, and out of that, one can begin to make universal conclusions. This is the basic logic of Miskotte’s argument. In essence it is an analytic argument. Characteristic of a deductive and analytical argument is that it moves from the specific to the universal. Specific instances determine the meaning of the universal concepts.

The Name, according to Miskotte, also means that God can be addressed, since revelation not only confronts the intellect but is experienced as an encounter. The ‘I and Thou’ encounter, which Miskotte borrowed from Buber, is understood in terms of Middle Eastern customs. In the encounter the essence of one’s being is expressed in one’s name. By using the name, the one addressed is brought closer. God spoke to people and people speak of and to Him. This is a reflexive act of the talk of God. God speaking to people is the first and most determinative act. As a response to God, the human being speaks as the addressed human being. As a side note, the significance of identity comes also into focus. God is identified by the act of speaking and in turn the human is identified by the act of the speaking of God. God is the active agent and the human is the passive agent of this exchange. This is what ultimately determines both their identities. In this we see the eclipse and the possibility of a reflexive theology, i.e. a theology rooted in the talk of God.

The next step in exploring the richness of Miskotte’s theological thinking is to do a more formal summary of the Name and Revelation relationship:

1) If we are to take this formal understanding into consideration then we have to conclude that the revelation to which the Scriptures testify is against all paganism. God presents himself as ‘smaller’ in order for us to realize that He is ‘bigger’ than our ideas of the All.

2) Natural theology is impossible because it is not possible to know God from nature as the Creator. To believe in the Creator is a result of the revelation of the Name. It is a move from the specific to the universal.

3) Specific revelation does not allow us to fall into speculations; rather it safeguards theology from degeneration into mere religious talk.

4) When we describe speaking about God as anthropomorphic, what is meant becomes clearer; we speak about God like this because of the Name. The Name has been revealed in history, and with our limited anthropomorphic language, we try to capture that revelation. We realize that this goes against the grain of philosophical idealism and its language of the divine above, the absolute, the power, the wisdom.

Miskotte also takes into consideration that the biblical stories and narratives contain many names for God. They are not a priori names, but because revelation preceded them, they are a posteriori. This means that the names ultimately contain a confession of how God was experienced by his people. These various names do not mean that there is more than one God; instead the idea is that human beings in various ways, dependent on their situation, address the one revealed Name. These situational names describe a certain aspect of the revealed Name. YHWH is the basis of the Name (Ex. 3:14) and it can be translated as ‘I am who I am’ or ‘I shall be with you as I will be with you’, meaning that God identified himself as the God who is. This way Israel may proclaim Him in a pagan world, a world where humans project
out of themselves names onto their gods. Thus, the knowledge of God cannot be attained by the human intellect; rather it has to be given to humanity.

The givenness of the Name took its Gestalt in a human being, Jesus Christ. Miskotte by considering the Christological implications of the Name, shows that he has a consistent theological argument. “God became a human being. His whole revelation is focused on humanity and took human form (gestalt) so that we alone (from all generations and peoples and languages and nations) might know, have access, confidence, and a steady trust in this ‘human’ God, who is so much ‘smaller’ than the ‘All-that-there-is’, and appears to be ‘only a human being’, and thereby unmask[s] the ‘All-that–there—is’ gods as inhuman, twisted projections and demons”.

This means that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the identification of YHWH with him is the ultimate criticism of the human project toward creating its own gods. The concrete embodiment of God in the life and work of Jesus Christ leaves no room for any other speculative thinking or definition of the divine.

We will now explore the different names of God as Miskotte interprets them in relation to the Name.

Elohim, contrary to common thinking is also a specific name rather than a generic name for the divine. One should not assume that there is a generic definition for divinity like ‘Elohim’, and that the Name is made to fit that definition. The primary meaning of the name Elohim, even though it has its roots in the Ancient Near Eastern religious language, in the Biblical stories is conditioned by the revelation of God. The revelation of the Name defines the interpretation and the meaning of the word Elohim.

El Shaddai, often interpreted as ‘God the Almighty’, actually means ‘God of the hills’. The hill or mountain is the cosmic center of the world, where God has the future in His hands. El Shaddai is not to be confused with the Creator God, whose power brought all there is into being. Instead, this is a very specific power and might. It is the power by which, from the ‘as good as dead’ body of Abraham and from the barren body of Sarah, Isaac came forth. It is the power of the new life in the context of lifelessness. This is the way the Name has revealed himself, reigning over the cycles of nature and beyond, even over death. When we want to refer to this re-creative aspect of the Name, this is how we refer to Him, i.e. God Almighty.

The Lord of Hosts is also an expression of the Name. This expression has to do with the recognition that the Name is the God of History who does not rest until the final battle is won. “God is the god of history (rather) than of nature. Nature is the ground, the basis, the building material (i.e. the context - CSB), but history is the place of the human drama where He displays His acts.”

The Name has revealed Himself as the Name in history. God in his Name has attached Himself to a people who also lived in time and space. By this He has become the God who is not only in history but gives direction to it. The revelation of the Name is not only the dislocated presence of God, but the concrete redeeming presence of His people and ultimately of all Creation.

Father, already in the Old Testament, is used to designate something about the Name, specifically, that He is the Father of the Messiah, the one to come, the Heir. This is the deepest and most meaningful confession of the Christian Church, when in the Holy Spirit we call out: Abba! We know that the Name is the Father, because in Christ we know Him as our Father who loves us and takes care of us.

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90 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 43.
91 Miskotte, Bijbels ABC, 47.
There are two basic points that we have to keep in mind considering Miskotte’s treatment of the Name. First, the unutterable Name is the standard of that which deserves to be called godhead and not vice versa; so that YHWH, when He is called ‘almighty,’ ‘just,’ etc., is like this in His own way, with His purpose and not according to the general, customary, religious conception. Second, the Name is encountered, the Name is perceived in the whole of history in which He lives and reveals Himself; He is the ‘quintessence of it meaning,’ which becomes a reality solely in his concrete presence.\textsuperscript{92} Methodologically the above indicates that the names of God are not inductive but they are deducted from specific events in the lives of those in which God, has revealed Himself. This also connects to what we have observed earlier in the work of Miskotte, namely, that in his theological method he does not move from the universal to the specific but the other way around. God, in Miskotte’s theology, is not a general concept for the divine, rather the specific revelation of the Name in the history of Israel.

For Miskotte the revelation of the Name is not only a systematic theological theme. Revelation is also the correlative factor of the relationship of God and human beings. “The superior power of the Name reveals itself in the fact that finally something comes upon us and we finally come to something. It does not take us out of this world, it does not pin us to the world - it rather drives and pushes us onto life.”\textsuperscript{93} To encounter God means to encounter the wholly other beyond ourselves. To encounter God means to be confronted not with a \textit{phantasm} (Miskotte’s word) of some sort or with our projection of the divine but with the objective reality of the Name. For this reason Miskotte is such a firm believer in the recovery of Old Testament theology. The Old Testament provides the lonely dislocated, dehumanized ‘fourth man’ a way out of its self-centered and imprisoned condition. Miskotte envisions a true ‘I and Thou’ encounter, in which the ‘fourth man’ is addressed by God.

Miskotte states that the encounter between God and humanity is more than an epistemic exchange. Revelation is not only revelation of information and ideas or ultimately truths. These are only part of the act of revelation. The aim of the revelatory encounter is of a much deeper reality. For Miskotte the encounter is an act of surrender, an act of worship. “To hollow [the Name] includes putting oneself aside, dedicating oneself to him who dedicated himself, revering the Singular One for the sake of his own majesty, isolating the signs that belong to the Name, in the expectation that its exclusiveness will result in inclusiveness.”\textsuperscript{94}

There is also a danger in translating and interpreting the Name. What often happens is that a certain translation shows which philosophical school the interpreter belongs to. Miskotte is very much aware of this and suspects something much deeper. “But among Christian thinkers too it is something almost taken for granted, for they automatically, persistently, incorrigibly interpret \textit{ehyeh asher ehyeh} as ‘I am who I am’. This profanes The Name rationalistically, and turns it into the very thing that it was trying to get away from in order to safeguard our liberation from the chimera of the ‘Absolute’. This passion for the abstract One is always seizing upon the tetragrammaton in order, if possible, to undermine its content.”\textsuperscript{95} Miskotte is very tenacious about reaffirming the basic understanding of the Name and all its implications. For him there is no room for any speculative or philosophical understanding of the Name. Only the Old Testament provides the true explication of the Name, i.e. God. Any other alternative interpretation is suspect of general religious thinking.

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\item \textsuperscript{92} Miskotte, \textit{When the Gods are Silent}, 68.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Miskotte, \textit{When the Gods are Silent}, 72.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Miskotte, \textit{When the Gods are Silent}, 96.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Miskotte, \textit{When the Gods are Silent}, 97.
\end{itemize}
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Finally this is what the Name means for the theology and thinking of Miskotte: the Name is not only the foundation upon which theology is built, it also constitutes the main criticism of humanity’s religious tendencies. “But in our opinion it is much more true to say of YHWH that he constitutes a radical crisis for all religion, or, to put it another way, that this self-disclosure includes the abolition of religion.”96 The Name is the true a priori. No definition of God precedes the Name; it is the other way around. God, for those of us who read the Old and the New Testament, is the Name in His act (the act of Creation, Salvation, Liberation, etc.). In knowing God, one comes to the realization that God is bound towards humanity. In Biblical terms, He has his face turned towards us. God is not a static being, but He moves in his acts towards humanity. His acts are well-defined as acts of salvation and liberation. This is where the true salvation of the ‘fourth man’ lies, in the presence and the act of the Name.

2.4. Miskotte Today
At the end of this chapter we will consider the significance of Miskotte’s work for theology today. There is an outstanding work on the reception of Miskotte, from a Dutch reformed perspective: Miskotte’s Legacy, The Relevance of his Thought for the Reformed Theology Today.97 It is an interesting collection of articles on the significance of Miskotte’s influence on theological minds in the reformed context in the Netherlands. We note that our aim is not to review the publication but rather we want to see how Miskotte is read in contemporary theology.

2.4.1. Miskotte’s intuition
G. van den Brink, in analyzing Miskotte’s astute sense of the times in which he lived, talks about a certain Miskottian intuition.98 His intuition developed because when he preached the ones who were sitting in front of him represented society at large. His work mainly concerns the edge of the Church rather than the centre. He sought to engage the ‘fourth man,’ the archetypal secular human being of his times. His intuition, in our opinion, was right about the ‘fourth man.’ Ultimately, the self-constructed self, fallen into the abyss of nihilism, cannot find its way out. What was an intuition for him in his time, it is still, and even more, a shared reality for us today. And that shared reality is what makes his work resonant with ours.

Our own context can be defined by several characteristics. We live in a world that is post- in many ways: post-modern, post-Christian, etc. But something noteworthy re-emerged as ‘a trend’ in religion today. The characteristics of this religion stand very close to what Miskotte calls paganism. It is nothing else but the self-constructed individual’s way of coping with the ambiguities of life and reality. This phenomenon is also known as spirituality. This is a kind of religiosity, which has its allegiance only to the ‘self.’ We are not talking about mere selfishness, but about being captive to the emptiness of the self. It is a perpetual movement around ‘me.’ This is probably the most significant characteristic of our times and it is paired with the loss of a common ground on which we can talk about God. The objective frame of reference within which we were able to talk about God has evaporated. We have to start all over again in establishing those parameters within which a talk of God can take place, outside of ourselves. So Miskotte’s call to the beth midrash, to a place where we can again learn, hear, be taught (note the passive) about the ways of God in this world sounds pertinent.

96 Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, 120.
97 Dekker, W., den Hertog, G.C., de Reus, T., (ed.) Het Tegoed van Miskotte, De actuele betekenis van zijn denken voor de gereformeerde theologie, (Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2006).
98 G. van den Brink, “Alsof de Naam niet betrouwbaar zou zijn!” in Het Tegoed van Miskotte, 181.
Miskotte’s negative appreciation of religiosity, religion without God and his engagement with nihilism resonates also with our work. A negative appreciation of religiosity is a minority position, not considering the social critique of religion at large. For we have to work in a context in which religion seems to have re-emerged. The merit of Miskotte’s work is that it offers a way to theologically and critically dealing with religiosity today. This is the reason why, it is all the more important to learn how to develop a theology which is able to answer the questions raised by the context and not be lost in it. Going back to the basics, to the ABC of our theology and working our way through in the contexts in which we find ourselves is the impetus that Miskotte gives for the student of theology.

2.4.2. **Miskotte and talking about God**

The second element of Miskottes work, which is notably valuable, is the way he talks about God. In the context of rising secularism, Miskotte found a way to appreciate the Old Testament, and through it, to talk about God as the Name. Out of his work with the Old Testament the principle emerges of a living God, who stands over against humanity and addresses it. This God is not the product of humanity’s highest thoughts but He is an entity on His own. Probably, Miskotte’s most significant contribution is his affirmation of the twin truth of God’s revelation in terms of presence and hiddenness. Van der Vegt notes that Miskotte’s honest affirmation of the hiddenness of God might be a bridge towards (post-) modern human’s struggle with unbelief and skepticism.99 Miskotte’s talk about God is inviting to those on the fringe of the church and in the midst of society. Because this God is a living God and not an abstract principle, meeting Him and hearing from Him is possible.

For Miskotte, God is not a general concept into which the Name has to be fitted. God is not a ‘divinity’ as such. The revelation of the Name qualifies the word ‘God’, and that is a primary step in theology. We are of the opinion that for today’s theology the very question we asked at the outset of our work (who is God?) is elemental and essential. Any theology or any talk of God stands or falls with the answer to that question. Miskotte very well understood the fact that there is a qualitative difference between talking about God and talking about god. For him, to talk about God was to talk about the God who has revealed himself in his Name as the one who is with his people. But any god or gods erected by humanity’s longing for the divine proved to be deaf and silent. Thus Miskotte’s approach to theology and specifically to theology proper is helpful for our study on the identity of God.

2.5. **Conclusion**

The strength of Miskotte’s argument is his theological answer to the challenges of his times. Contrary to Adriaanse he developed a theological way to engage with the problems of modernity. Miskotte’s theological approach to nihilism, i.e. secularism, paves in a certain sense the way forward for us to develop our own biblical and systematic theological God talk. Miskotte’s theological method is the most apparent in his analysis of the Name. With his **Name theology** he accomplished two things: first he established theology on theological foundations; second he also gave an impetus towards the Jewishness of the Old Testament theology. In Miskotte’s theology the Name stands for the presence of God, which is also an encounter with God. By encountering the Name, the ‘fourth man’ is freed from the emptiness of being alone and dislocated. The encounter with the Name shapes the new identity, as the one who is addressed by God. Miskotte’s focus on the Name is a clear answer as a theological solution to the problems of modernity. Nevertheless there are some questions left.

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Miskotte clearly understands Nihilism and its outworking on modern society and specifically in the life of the ‘fourth man’. Over against the ‘fourth man’ he posits the Name, God, as the One who addresses the ‘fourth man’. Miskotte establishes clearly that God speaks and specifically the God of the Old Testament. God is indentified by the Name. God speaks in the face of the emptiness of the self-centered ‘fourth man’. At this point, what he does not do is to show, how this man who has been spoken to by the Name will in his turn talk about God. There is no indication in Miskotte that he is concerned about this issue at all. He clearly establishes that the God of the Bible (with a heavy emphasis on the Old Testament) does speak. The issue of the human speaking about God is not worked out. Miskotte goes so far as to say that humans have the tendency to speak about ‘God’ but those ‘Gods’ are silent. The real God of the Bible, the Name speaks, and we have to listen. The critical question we are asking at this point is this: since we have heard from God, how are we to speak about Him? This is precisely where we find Miskotte’s theology wanting. Maybe it is implied in his theology that if we talk about God we should talk about the Name, but it is not clear, though it is more in his line to state that because God is the One who speaks we should not speak about Him but just proclaim his Word.

This brings us right back to Adriaanse’s challenge, namely, the rational justification of God talk. According to Adriaanse people talk about God because they project a higher being above the sky. What Adriaanse does is that he locks God up above the line thus justifying the impossibility of theology as God talk. All that there remains is the human intuition and imagination of a ‘God’. Miskotte on his turn says that God reveals Himself in the Scriptures of the Old Testament as the Name. But Miskotte stays closely to the Word of God, the Scriptures. It is only God who speaks. The emphasis lies on the written Word, the Torah. The Torah has to be taught in the beth-midrash. It is an encounter between teacher and student or the Word and the listener. There is not a human reflection on this Word that can speak about God as a Third one.

For Miskotte the hiddenness and the absence of God in the human experience has to do with the human psyche and its turn on itself, i.e. nihilism. For Miskotte the absence of God is essentially an anthropological and sociological problem, which can be answered theoretically by calling on the revelation of the Name. Miskotte does not connect the revelation of the Name, God Himself, to the human experience. It seems that the revelation of the Name only has value as proclamation but not as a real answer to the human experience of the presence and the absence of God. God is not a reality in our world who we can speak about. God is Word and not Being. And this is the reason why Adriaanse’s challenge still stands.

Contrary to Miskotte we think that the problem of God’s absence is essentially theological. It is not the enclosure of the human being in himself as the fourth man, but it is a real absence of God who is not visible in historical experiences. The experience of God is not something obvious. This has to do with God and who He is and how He reveals Himself. It is a matter of the identity of God not of the human psyche. Thus the question we ask is this: who is this God we theologians talk about? We will start with the biblical texts since they are at the basis of our theological tradition. The reason we want to consider the biblical theological notions of God, because the texts seem to suggest that God is not merely a human projection or just the proclamation of the Word but that He is active in His presence and absence in history.100

We understand the biblical texts to be theology, God talk par excellence. Revelation is an experience of God and thus a source for human words, shortly said: it provides also

information about God. Not only is there God who speaks, but there are also human words about God as testimony and people who are signs of His presence and acts in history. This is our first and most fundamental step towards answering the challenge of Adriaanse. Namely that we do not deal with a definition of ‘God’, but God who made Himself known in the lives of His people and their consequent God talk.

Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to present the work of H.K. Miskotte as a paradigm for doing theology in a secular world. Miskotte’s work stands in contrast to the work of Adriaanse, and they represent two ways in which theology can be practiced in the context of a secularizing society and church. We approached the work of Miskotte by exploring his theological anthropology, dominated by his critique of nihilism and his theology, which is dominated by his appreciation of Old Testament theology.

In the first part of the second chapter we focused on Miskotte’s analysis of the context in which he worked as a theologian. Since the middle of the twentieth century, the Netherlands has been subject to the rise of secularism. Miskotte had an astute ear and eye for his times and recognized the problems of nihilism. It was the rising consciousness both inside and outside the Church. The product of these times was, what he called, the ‘fourth man.’ This was the archetype of the enlightened human being, who was deaf to any ‘outside’ persuasion, who lost any sense of belief in God and who, and ultimately was not interested anymore. It is to this human being that Miskotte had in mind when he wrote his theology.

In the second half of the chapter we focused on Miskotte’s theology, through which he was engaging with the ‘fourth man.’ The Old Testament provided the paradigm out of which he was able not only to engage with his times but also to criticize them. First, there was a critique of any natural theology and the human tendency toward religiosity. Second, the revelation of the Name was the ultimate crisis for any human religious constructs. The revelation of the Name is nothing less than the presence of God with his people. God, in his revelation, is both present and hidden at the same time. God is a presence who addresses us and who stands over against us. Finally, we considered the relevance of Miskotte’s work for theology today and critically engaged with the challenge of Adriaanse.

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Second Part

Biblical Theological Notions of God

In the first part we have studied the shape of Theology in the twentieth century. First we have shown, through the work of Adriaanse, some of the difficulties and problems that theologians face today. The problem of theology is that it cannot function in its classical form, considering the findings and demands of modern science. Adriaanse’s work is an outstanding example of coming to terms with the demands of the scientific theories and their effects in theology. His conclusion was that it was necessary for theology to make a transition from its classic form and become, at best, religious philosophy. After all the arguments considered, there still remain some things that a theologian cannot leave behind. It is an ambiguity that both the theologian and the philosopher of religion have to live and work with.

Second, we have looked at the work of K.H. Miskotte, a man of his time just as much as Adriaanse. Both of them searched for a viable way for theology to proceed in their own day and age. Miskotte, rediscovered the relevance of the Old Testament and its theology. Out of the Old Testament theology, he developed a critical discourse that helped him unmask one of the idols of his time: the lonely, nihilistic and self-centered humanity. In his theology the encounter with God identified by the Name, is the way out for a hopeless humanity. God, the *wholly Other*, ultimately breaks the bonds of self-centeredness and is able to shape a new humanity.

The work of both theologians is important for our research. They provide us with a frame of reference in which we are conducting our research. Through analyzing their arguments we come to terms with the issues and challenges related to contemporary academic theology. They are also representative of the dynamics that are apparent in the field of theology. On the one hand, there is a radical turn away from theology, and on the other, a radical return to theology with all its implications.

This second part of our dissertation is an exercise in biblical theological research. We realize that the term *biblical theology* carries some ambiguity with it. In the following we want to make more explicit what we mean by this. Firstly, our research is not a contribution to the field of exegesis or hermeneutics. It is a study in *systematic* and *dogmatic theology*. We do make use of exegetical and hermeneutical findings, but they are not our main focus. Both exegesis and hermeneutics contribute towards the development of our systematic theological discourse. Secondly, what we are doing is *side-noting* the biblical narratives. As you will see we do not focus on the *text* as such, but on the narrative and its dynamics. As we read through them, we note and signal some of the inherent twists and turns of the narrative. It is in these narrative dynamics that we often find theological method and content. Thirdly we move beyond the narrative reading into theological conceptualization. The narratives do not stand alone; they are part of the larger context of all the biblical stories and *God talk*. Thus, by conceptualizing, we make connections and create networks to help us understand the narrative in its wider biblical theological context. Conceptualization provides us with terminology and method for our systematic theological discourse.

One more critical note about our methodology, i.e. biblical theology, is needed. We will often use the words *narrative* and *story* interchangeably. For us, these two terms signal the following: first, that we will treat the Scriptures as stories and not necessarily as texts for analysis. We are interested more in the dynamics of the story and less in the grammar and the
nuances of translation. We will look at how the story unfolds rather than how the text itself has evolved throughout the ages and through the different editorial stages. Second, we take the biblical narrative at face value, meaning that the stories, as they are, carry in themselves a certain description of reality. These stories are not fairy tales, but stories that compel the reader in ways that mere historical facts do not. We are not discrediting historical studies. Rather, we are defining our own position with regard to historical-critical reading of the Scriptures. This again may be credited to our naivety, but we take full responsibility. Again, we want to point out that we will not disregard all the disciplines that help us better understand the narrative (exegesis, hermeneutics, and historical studies). We will make use of them as we consider them relevant for our research.

The focal points of the second part of our research are classic biblical theological passages, from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The first passage is the narrative of the calling of Moses and the revelation of the Name of God. It is a classic *locus* for systematic theology with regard to the identity of God. It becomes evident from the second biblical narrative that the identity of God in His Name is not merely a theological concept. It is also a historical reality because His identity and presence are closely related to the history of His people. Therefore we will subsequently focus on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel and God’s presence in his Name in the conflicts of Israel’s history. As a continuation to our study of the historicity of the identity of God, we arrive at the classic New Testament passage, the Jesus Hymn from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. Jesus in his abasement is identified as the Lord by receiving the Name above all names.

Theologically the three passages are foundational considering the development of the theology of the *Name* and the *identity of God* in the Scriptures. We will give adequate attention to them in the coming three chapters. The study of these passages will provide us with a biblical theological foundation to discuss the issues related the *identity of God* and how to talk about God. It is our understanding that the Scriptures are in essence *theology* and talk about God par excellence. Therefore our interest is to see how the Old and the New Testament talk about God. We will also look at the impact these passages had on the theological reception history through the ages. In order to do this we will select some representative theologians whose works contain these biblical passages and their theological interpretation. This historical overview will give us further ground to stand on in our discourse on the identity of God.

102 Note we do not say that the Scriptures are *theological*, implying that they have only theological notions. We are of the opinion that they are theology. They are well defined talk of God in terms of historical, cultic, wisdom, law, etc. writings. They are not merely reporting events as such, but in essence they talk about God. So theology is not only an element of the Scriptures but their all defining rationality.
Chapter 3 – The Identity of God in Exodus 3:14

3.1. Introduction
In this chapter we will read through parts of the book of Exodus. We will focus mainly on the beginning chapters of it. Our specific attention will go to the third chapter: the telling of the story of Moses’s calling as it relates to the revelation of the Name of God. Connected to this, we will address the following systematic themes: the absence or hiddenness of God, the revelation of God and finally the Name or the identity of God. As we have said before, we will explain what we see not only in the immediate context of the narrative but also in its broader context of the book and the Scripture as a whole. As we noted before, we are also interested in the impact the passage (Ex. 3:14) had in various theological works through the ages. Therefore we will conclude this chapter with a short reception history. We will consult some of the works of theologians who made a significant contribution to theology in their own time. This short reception history will provide a broader theological perspective of the passage beyond our own interpretations. It will also help us to place our work in the context of a theological tradition that unfolded through the ages. We are not the first readers of the Bible.

3.2. Exodus 3: a biblical theological approach

3.2.1. The absence of God

The first theme that we will look at is the absence of God. There are several reasons why we have chosen to start with this theme. First, we have come to see that the prologue to the Book of Exodus does not contain specific reference to God and His actions. The prologue is not the only place where biblical writers make such an omission; therefore we will look at other instances. Theologically these kind of literary features fall under the category of the presence or the absence of God. Second, we want to understand the absence of God from the perspective of human experiences, since the biblical passages are reflective of these experiences. Third, we will discuss the absence of God, since it is a current issue. In a secularized context, such as ours, it is one of the most relevant theological issues we can address. This last aspect we will develop in the closing section of this chapter.

3.2.1.1. The absence of God in the narrative

The prologue of the book of Exodus is the retelling of the story of the family of Jacob who, forced by famine in the land of Canaan, moved to Egypt. The handful of people grew in numbers, and over a period of four hundred years, became a nation. The word ‘nation’ might seem problematic at this point. It could be understood in terms of modern sociology, which would lead the mistaken idea that it was a well-defined entity of people with their own governance, flag and all other symbols that define nations. Old Testament scholars and historians often point out that Israel before the exodus was a group of people united by their common heritage and family ties. They were tribes, that one way or another were united by a shared identity and were governed by elders. Therefore the way we understand the above is that the group of people had grown to the size of a nation. The introduction to the book not only connects the past (from Abraham to Joseph) with the present (Israel in Egypt) but also

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104Ex. 3:16.
provides the setting for the further development of the events. The memory of Joseph and what he had done in Egypt was lost among the Egyptian rulers. Israel, as a nation within a nation, became a problem that had to be dealt with. They were numerically a significant minority and they had to be reckoned with.

The new Pharaoh, who had forgotten who Joseph was, issued an edict to harden the labor of the Israelites. Contrary to expectations, there was again a significant raise in the population of the Israelites. What is it about hardship that makes a people resilient? The response of the Pharaoh was to issue another edict, this time to the midwives of the Hebrews, summoning them to kill all newborn male babies. In ancient times, male babies represented the continuity and the viability of a group of people; symbolically this was an attack on the future of the people of Israel. Life for the Israelites was an oppressive combination of hard work and threatening infanticide. However, there was still hope. The story indicates that the midwives feared God and spared the newborn, disobeying the Pharaoh’s commands. The irony was that they did not obey the visible, the apparent Pharaoh-God of the Egyptians, but the invisible God of the Israelites. To make life even worse, the plan of infanticide had been entrusted into the hands of the Egyptians.  

As we read the story, we notice here a gradual increase of distress, a mood dominated by fear. In the midst of it, Moses is born. We get the impression that the possible savior of the people is born. In a fateful turn of events, he is found in the water by the Pharaoh’s daughter and subsequently raised in the Egyptian court. But his heart is still a Jewish heart, and he sees the present oppression of his people. He takes matters into his own hands and kills an Egyptian who was abusing one of his own. But Moses’ act of heroism is not well received. He is wanted for murder and he flees to the land of Midian. There he marries and becomes a shepherd for his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, Ruel.

One of the striking features of the prologue to the book of Exodus is the omission of the mentioning of God from the main act of the events. The only god here seems to be the Pharaoh, who is holding the destiny of the Israelites in his hand. God, Elohim, is mentioned only in passing, only as a reference: “the midwives feared Him, and He blessed their faith.” Therefore, we talk here about the absence of God, more specifically about the absence of God from the narrative. There is no explicit claim whatsoever that God might have intervened in the course of events.  

“The Pharaoh, the midwives, Moses’ mother and sister, the Pharaoh’s daughter and Moses himself are living by their wits, as these stories are told.” To go one step further, we can categorize the events in the first two chapters as ‘secular’ in nature. Also, we can argue for the political genius of the Pharaoh, the humanity of the midwives, the care for the weak in the daughter of the Pharaoh, the perseverance of Moses’ family, and finally, the sense of justice in Moses. These very events, however, would look very different when told with God as the main character.

The ‘absence of God’ as a literary feature is not unfamiliar in the narratives of the Old Testament. In the story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50) “no direct divine intervention is recorded.” Only in retrospect, in the words of Joseph do we come to know that, “it was not you [the

105 In Ex. 1:22 ‘all his people’ refers not to all the Egyptian population but to the people who were in charge in the court of the Pharaoh.

106 The priest of Midian is identified by two names during the narrative: Ruel (Ex.2:18) and Jethro (Ex. 3:1). Most commentators note the difference, however they agree that the two are the same. Source critics would see here a difference in sources. (According to Judges 4:11 the name of Moses’ father in law was Hobab, while in Exodus this is his brother in law).


108 Gowan, Theology in Exodus, 2.

109 Gowan, Theology in Exodus, 2.
brothers] who sent me here, but God.‖ God is the one who orchestrated the life of Joseph and the deliverance of Jacob’s family. Elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives, particularly in Job, in the Prophets and the Psalms, the absence of God is also a significant feature. Unfortunately, the scope of this work does not allow us to look into the whole of the Old Testament. There is, however, one prime example that we will consider for our further understanding of the absence of God in the Old Testament narratives, to show how they relate to the first chapters of Exodus.

The book of Esther has been the cause of many discussions and endless arguments for the very reason we are singling out. Its place in the Canon has often been debated, because it seems to be a ‘secular’ book compared to the other books of the Canon. God is not mentioned, not even once in the storyline. In most other books of the Old Testament, God is the main subject of action; in the Esther narrative He is completely left out. But, the book was still kept in the Canon. One of the major reasons is that it marks the traditional feast of Purim in Israel. During the celebration the book is read as a remembrance. Some theologians are of the opinion that, even though God is not explicitly spoken of, He is still presupposed as the One who orchestrates the life of Israel. We should note this basic presupposition as an important point for our further understanding of the absence of God.

The narrative events in the book of Esther are, in some ways, similar to the narrative events in Exodus: the oppression of the Jews by a foreign ruler, the attempt to totally annihilate them, and their salvation in extremis. The major difference between the two books is that God is not mentioned at all in whole of the book of Esther. From the story-line of the book we get the impression that Esther and Mordecai, through their wits and bravery, manage to make a favorable turn in the destiny of Israel. And this leads us to the following critical question: how are we to talk about God or how are we to theologize regarding the book of Esther? The answer to the question may lie in the canonical interpretation of the book.

Another possible approach would be a theological interpretation of the book. So “we must be all the more careful to differentiate God as he appears in this narrative and from the God of so much of biblical tradition, whose presence is visible, audible and dramatic. Esther’s God is one who works behind the scenes, carefully arranging events so that justice based on the principle of ‘measure for measure’ will triumph and the Jews will survive and flourish.”

The God of Esther is a hidden God. He is not a non-existent, but rather a non-apparent God. Even though God is not apparent in the story, the reader still can recognize the events as orchestrated so that the salvation of the nation of Israel is realized. This is the very hope of Mordecai, who assures Esther that even if she refuses to carry out her mission, “relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.”

His hope is that someone greater than Esther was at work in the destiny of Israel.

Theologically, we talk about God’s hiddenness, God as the non-apparent. He intervenes in the events as they develop, even though He is absent from the main action of the events, He is ultimately present as the object of human faith and hope. The midwives in Egypt had faith and feared God in the same way as Mordecai hoped that God would intervene and bring about the salvation of the nation. The first aspect of the absence of God is a literary feature. It is being

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110 Gen. 45:8, 50:20.
111 The use of the word is the same as earlier. It means that there is no direct mention of God’s presence and involvement in the main story line. The story makes sense with or without God.
112 This means that the book has to be interpreted in the light of the whole of the Biblical account, and not as a single book on its own.
114 Est. 4:14.
used to show this one important characteristic of God, namely His *hiddenness*. In His hiddenness, God is absent from the forefront of the events. But He is intimately involved in the unfolding story. So the first chapters of Exodus present us with a God who is non-apparent, to further prepare the narrative for what is to come. The second aspect of the absence of God is the human experience. The struggles of Israel in Egypt are typical of other biblical characters, like Job, or the Psalmist expressing and describing experiences lamenting a sense of the absence of God. \(^{115}\) The Prophets are also no exception; we have in mind here Jeremiah and his Lamentations. The next step we take is a step towards understanding *the absence of God as a human experience*, from the prologue of the book of Exodus.

3.2.1.2. **The absence of God as a human experience**

We have seen so far that the author of the Exodus narrative has omitted God from the prologue of the book. God was mentioned only marginally, as the object of faith of the midwives. In comparison with other biblical narratives and the rest of the book of Exodus, we may talk about the *absence of God*. So far, we have argued that it is a literary device to show one important charter of God, namely, His hiddenness. It is not a hiddenness of non-existence; it is rather the hiddenness of a nonparticipant. By the word ‘nonparticipant’, we mean that God in His hiddenness is not passive, but that He is absent as the main subject from the forefront of the narrative. He is present as the One to whom the Israelites cry out to in despair. It is in their cry that the absence or the hiddenness of God becomes evident.

Verses 23 to 25 of the second chapter mark a transition in the narrative, “After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.”\(^{116}\) This passage marks several transitions. The short phrase ‘the king of Egypt died’ marks a new era in the lives of the Israelites and in the life of Moses. There might be some hope for change. It also means that Moses can return to Egypt. Theologically, it also marks, the transition from the *absence of God* to the *presence of God*. Chapter three, compared to the prologue of the narrative, contains a very rich picture of God. He now hears, takes notice, remembers, looks. In other words, God is introduced into the narrative. Before, He was absent from the forefront; He is now on stage for the main act.

Two key words give us a glimpse into the experiences of the Jews under the Egyptian oppression. The verbs נָּגַא\(^{117}\) and קָצִיל\(^{118}\) describe the experience of the Israelites. The two words indicate a desperate state. In the immediate context they groan because their workload is unbearable, and they cry in mourning, because their children are killed as they are born. From a broader perspective, however, these words present us with a gateway into the human experience of the absence of God. Groaning here is the “groaning of one severely wounded or dying” and it also “expresses a groaning in desperate supplication,…in prayer to God.”\(^{119}\) The word ‘cry’ here denotes a cry of distress, pain and lamentation.\(^{120}\) The absence of God, in this case, is a very intense experience in the lives of the Israelites. It is not only a theological aspect of God, i.e. His hiddenness, but also a deep existential moment in the human experience. Hiddenness, or the absence of God, is not a positive statement about God, but one

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\(^{115}\) Ps. 3, 4, 5, 10, 13, 22, 28, 55, 61, 64, 74, 80, 79, 82, 83, 94, 102.

\(^{116}\) Ex. 2:23-25 Italicus are mine, to emphasize some of the words.

\(^{117}\) Eng. ‘sigh’, ‘groan’ or ‘gasp’.

\(^{118}\) Eng. ‘cry’, ‘cry out’, ‘call’.

\(^{119}\) Thompson, D., from NIDOTTE vol. III, 6-7.

\(^{120}\) Konkel, A.H. from NIDOTTE vol. I, 1131-1132.
that is negative, a complaint. In modernism and certainly in post-modernism, the mystery of God, the hidden aspect of God is emphasized as something positive. Biblical theology, however, gives a broader perspective by emphasizing the negative aspect of the experience of the hiddenness of God.

The Psalms, in a more vivid manner, provide us with a picture of what the human experience of the absence of God means. The psalmist often cries out:

“How long, oh LORD? Will You forget me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
having sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?”

This is the experience of God’s utter hiddenness. The Psalmist feels that he is left alone, that God has left him, and that God hides from him. God is nowhere to be seen in life, he has turned away. All that there is, is the sad reality of the enemy.

“Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, ‘I have overcome him,’
and my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.”

The enemies are becoming more and more overpowering. The reality of life is unbearable without God. Nothing is left but a cry, a very intense cry: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” The questions are not the questions of the doubter but of the suffering believer. These are the questions of one who has tasted the goodness of God. The immediacy of the taste has gone and bitterness has taken over. The questions are directed at God, thus there is an expectation and a presupposition that He will hear and respond. God seems far away and uninvolved in life. In other words, “in the psalms of lament God’s absence is not explained as the result of sin, rather the psalmists express their bewilderment at his silence…” God’s hiddenness and silence are characteristics that have puzzled theologians over the ages. However, the Bible seldom explains this puzzling phenomenon. God is hidden and silent, while Israel knows Him as the One who is present and speaking. So how can we talk theologically about God’s hiddenness, silence or absence?

Psalm 13 does not end there, as most of the Psalms of complaint do not. It does not end in total despair in the face of the hiddenness and silence of God. It does not stop at the experience of the absence of God. Rather, the psalmist’s bewilderment ends with a confession of hope in God:

“But I have trusted in Your loving-kindness;
My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
Because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

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121 Ps. 13:1-2.
122 Ps. 13:3-4.
123 Ps. 22:1.
125 Ps. 13:5-6.
There is always hope amidst of the experience of the absence of God. There is hope that God will come, and that He will end the present state of evil, for one can trust God’s hesed in the face of distress. Talking about the absence of God is, in fact, a statement of faith and hope. For God is ultimately the content of faith. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” says the author of Hebrews, and puts the life of Moses into perspective, in faith’s perspective: “By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”

What catches our attention in the first chapters of the book Exodus is the omission of God from the text, and in turn, from human experience. This helps us go further and see how not only the prologue of Exodus, but also the rest of Scripture is filled with the expression of the absence or the hiddenness of God. It is both a literary device and an expression of a deep human experience. It is ultimately closely tied to the theology (speaking of God) of the character of God. The author of Hebrews does exactly what we would have expected in the first place from the author of Exodus. He theologically reinterprets the epilogue of Exodus from the perspective of the believer who has faith in the God Who is not visible. The experience of the absence of God does not last forever. What we have just seen in the previous part is important for our quest, because it sets up for what is about to come, the calling of Moses and the revelation of the Name of God.

3.2.2. The identity of God

3.2.2.1. Prelude to the revelation of the Name

We have seen so far how the ‘absence of God’ functions as a literary feature in the opening chapters of the book of Exodus. In the wider context of other Old Testament narratives, we have seen that it is not coincidental that God has been left out from the introduction. Such omissions are usually connected with negative events like cruel slavery, genocide, or severe sickness. However, in the course of the events, we can see ‘traces’ of God. He works ‘behind the scenes’ orchestrating events in such a way that salvation becomes reality. Theologically, we speak about the hiddenness of God. The absence of God is also a human experience. Agony, distress, and loneliness are words that best describe this human experience. This is not a strange phenomenon in the Old Testament. Through the Psalter we catch a glimpse of the innermost feelings of the absence of God. Humans experience the hiddenness of God on the one hand, as distress, and on the other as hope: hope that God will intervene in the course of the events and that salvation will finally come.

126 Psalm 88 might be considered an exception. The only hope in the Psalm is that the Psalmist calls out to God as ‘God who saves me’. Only in the belief of God that He is the Saviour, is there a glimpse of hope for the psalmist.

127 Heb. 11:1.

Moses, in service of his father-in-law, was tending the flocks near the mountain Horeb, the ‘mountain of God.’ This place turns out to become important for the life of Moses and for the history of Israel. The Angel of the Lord appears here in flames of fire, a fire that does not consume the bush. The sight of the Angel of the Lord draws Moses closer, to see what precisely is happening. “Such ‘messengers’ (angels as we call them) appear in the early parts of Scripture, regularly without names and at the same time with no personal being; they are none other then the visible interventions of God in events, which sometimes are made even more clear by alternatively identifying them (the messengers) and YHWH himself as the speakers.” Thus the messenger is often identified as God, who comes to speak.

This is not the only time that the angel appears surrounding the events of the Exodus. The angel leads the way out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him.” God asks Israel to follow and obey the angel, for He identifies Himself with the angel. Just how closely the presence of God and the angel are related is evident from the later part of the book of Exodus. After ‘the golden calf’ incident, God says to Moses that an angel will lead them (note that it is not the “angel of the Lord”) but the Lord will not go with them, even though Moses insists that the manifest presence of God is essential for the further journey of the Israelites i.e. the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. These considerations from the book of Exodus further indicate our assertion that it was the presence of the living God, who was talking to Moses from the burning bush.

It was the strange sight of the bush, which, even though it was burning, was not consumed, that caught Moses’ attention. He came near to see it. At that moment the Lord called out to him: “Moses Moses, … do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Let us focus now on several markers that indicate the presence of God. We categorize these markers as signs of the presence of God. Signs in this book have two functional characteristics. First there are the signs of the presence of God: burning bush, fire, cloud, and holy ground. These are present all throughout the book of Exodus. They accompany the presence of God. It does not mean that God is in the sign, or that God is confined to the sign. They function as pointers to God, they point in the direction of God’s presence. Just as there were signs of God’s absence (like the omission of the name or the crying and mourning), in the same way there are, throughout the story, signs of the presence of God.

There is also a second category of signs. These signs are what we call the proofs of the presence of God. The difference between the two is that signs of the presence are operative, regardless of human perception. They have to be explained as such, for example, God has to tell Moses that he is standing on holy ground, and that He is God. Only after Moses is told that he is in the presence of God does Moses actually know where he is. Thus these signs accompany the presence of God. Signs as proofs, on the other hand, are directly addressed to

129 Ex. 3:1 probably, this mountain has already been hallowed by theophanies, and consequently was called ‘the mountain of God’, but Moses was not aware of this. More likely, however, the mountain is so called proleptically: the mountain that was destined to become the God’s mountain. Cassuto, U., A commentary on the book of Exodus trans. (Jerusalem: Israel Abrahams, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 31.
130 Buber M., Moses (Zürich: Gregor Müller Verlag, 1948), 57.
131 Ex. 23: 21.
132 Ex. 32-33 vs. 15-16 “Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”
133 Ex. 3: 4-5.
human understanding. Whereas the signs of presence have to do with God Himself, ‘proof signs’ have to do with aiding human understanding. Moses asks God to give him a sign as a confirmation or as a proof that he has indeed met God. After this he receives two signs: the leprous hand which is healed and the rod that transforms into a snake and back into a rod.134

Scattered throughout the Exodus events and story are numerous other signs as proofs of God being with Moses and the Israelites. Here we differentiate between two categories again. First, there are the signs of judgment directed towards the Egyptians (the ten plagues, the crossing of the red sea) with the explicit purpose that they may know that that the LORD is God.135 Second, there are the signs of protection and provision for the Israelites (the absence of some plagues, the parting of the sea, the water at Meriba, the manna and the quails) for the same reason: that they may know that the LORD is with them. Ironically, these signs do not persuade, because of the hardened hearts of the people, both Egyptians and Israelites. The only one who believes seems to be Jethro, Moses’ father in law. After he had heard what the Lord had done, he responds “now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.”136 He believes the testimony of Moses. Ironically, he appears to be the only true believer, even though he has not seen the signs, but has only heard about them.

These various sorts of signs, with all their ambiguity, help us to better understand the circumstances and the story in which God met Moses on Mount Horeb.137 God appears to Moses in a mysterious way. His ways are mysterious in the sense of, out of the ordinary or unusual circumstances. Often the questions in relation to wonders and signs in the Old Testament refer to the acts of God in nature like the aforementioned signs. First the issue of the possibility of God’s act in nature has to be settled. The discussion goes two ways, it is either possible or not. This mostly has to do with one’s conception of God and his Revelation. Specifically who is God? and who He is in relation to the created reality? And also, what is revealed in the act of God’s revelation. The second important issue, which is frequently raised, is: does God act in natura or contra naturam. In other words: are the miracles, or signs, processes of nature or do they by-pass them for the sake of being classified as ‘supra natural’ events? Even though these are relevant questions, in the Old Testament this is not the case at all. These critical questions and issues have more to do with our own thinking than with the rationality of the Scriptures. In the Old Testament the issue is not whether one could believe that the sign or miracle really did happen. But the signs serve the purpose of pointing to the reality of God’s act in the lives of His people and beyond. The signs are meant to call attention to the call of God. The signs are meant to make people wonder not only about the signs themselves, but also to be in awe and wonder of God.138

God called out to Moses. This happened only three times in Moses’ life. Each time God called him for a specific purpose: at the burning bush (his initial call to be a prophet), on Mount Sinai (for the reception of the Decalogue)139 and in the Tent of Meeting.140 It is interesting to note the three different places of God’s revelation in the life of Moses: the burning bush, the Mountain and the Tent.141 These mark the Lord’s continual presence with

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134 Ex. 4:1-17.
135 Ex. 7:17, 8:10, 8:19, 8:22, 9:14-16, 10:2, 12:12, 14:4, 18.
136 Ex. 18:11.
137 Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are the same in the Scriptures.
139 Ex. 19:3.
140 Lev. 1:1.
141 Buber, Moses, 60.
Moses and Israel. Just as He promised, He would. Furthermore, we come to understand that the revelation of God, as such, is not a fixed, one time event; rather, it happens at various times and places. We make note here that revelation is a dynamic concept in the biblical narratives. One may be mistaken to think that revelation, because it happens at one certain point in time and space, is fixed. Revelation in the biblical narrative has to do with encounters with God. These meetings are dynamic, and build on each other. Every experience of God adds to the large sum of other experiences and together they are part of what we see in the Scripture as talk of God.

As the narrative continues Elohim identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not an unknown God, whom Moses just discovered on the mountain. He is not a ‘fire god’ or a ‘mountain god’, but He is the God of the Fathers. Moses does not name God, God names Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is essential to note that God reveals and identifies Himself; Moses does not discover Him. This is in contrast to Adam who named the animals in Genesis, thus exerting authority over them. In this story the exact opposite is the case. The identification of God rests solely on His authority, i.e. the authority of the presence of the other. The name, ‘God of the Fathers’, points towards the continuity with the preceding storyline. The lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not only related by blood but also by their covenant with God, for He has made a covenant with Abraham and with all his descendents. So this meeting is part of the larger history of Israel. The content of the calling of Moses will make this point even more clear. Moses’ response was to bend down in worship and hide his face. He did not dare to look at God. Interestingly, later in life, he asks God to show Himself to him. In what follows, we will focus on the content of the calling of Moses.

“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt, I have heard them crying out because of their salve drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.” This is a repetition of the key phrases of the last verses of chapter two. It is also a confirmation of God’s dealings with the Israelites. Even though He was apparently absent, events did not go by Him as if nothing had happened. He is concerned about His people. This is the first reason why God is meeting Moses; He is about to re-engage with Israel. He is about to do something about the suffering that Israel is going through. This is not a random event; rather, it is one that is part of the covenant made with Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.” God remembered the covenant. Remembering here is the reason for His present act. This covenantal aspect is further clarified by God’s initial introduction of Himself, i.e. by His

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142 Ex. 3:12.
143 Often, as we already mentioned, Elohim is translated as a general deity. More critical commentaries see this as an ancient near eastern deity, which at a certain point became worshipped by the Israelites. We agree with the fact that historically there are traces of general ancient religiosity intertwined with Israel’s talk of Elohim. However the word Elohim is a qualified word in the Old Testament. It derives its primary meaning, not from the context of ancient religiosity, but from the revelation of the Name and the consequent narratives. Already in Ex. 3 we see that the narrative leaves no room for any speculation, for Elohim identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
144 Buber argues that, because God identifies himself as the God of the fathers, by this He sets Himself apart from any speculation, whether Moses discovered a new and made into a Volksgott, as some modern critics would hold it.
146 This argument is often used to point out the internal coherence and unity of the books in the Pentateuch.
147 Ex. 3:4.
148 Ex. 3:7.
149 Gen 12:2.
150 Ex. 2:24.
identity. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is continuity in the covenant. Thus, this event on Mount Horeb is an extension of that covenant story.

God has seen the misery of his people, אמא. Moses had also seen the suffering of his own people, and did something about it. He killed the Egyptian who abused one of his brothers. However, his liberating act was not followed by a revolution of the slaves. Instead he was despised for what he had done. His act of liberation, without the divine calling, driven by emotions and some sense of justice, has failed. Humanism in Moses failed to liberate the Israelites from their Egyptian oppression. Here ammi, is different from that of Moses’. Moses belonged to these people; therefore he could have a distant empathy with them. This ammi is the designation of the special covenant relationship of God with Israel. Israel has a history going back much further than the life of Moses. It is a covenant relationship, in which God can call the people of Israel His people and they can call on Him as their God, their covenant God. It is also best understood in the negation lo-ammi (לֹא אָמִּי) from the book of Hosea. When the covenant is not kept, God calls Israel ‘not my people’. The affirmation is as strong as the rejection. God has turned His ears to His people’s cry and He is about to do something. Salvation is at hand. God has come to bring them out of the Egyptian slavery into the land He promised to Abraham, into the land wherein Jacob settled and moved away from. It is the land in which Israel’s history is rooted. Now Moses is to go to the Pharaoh and ask for the liberation of the people of Israel, by God’s command.

So far, we have noted the following elements of the narrative: God appeared to Moses. There were various signs that pointed our attention in the direction of God’s presence. First, the burning bush, second, the holy ground on which Moses was standing, and third the angel of the Lord who spoke. All these indicate the presence of God. He is not a new God. He is the God of the Fathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He has heard the cry of the Israelites and He is concerned about them. He has remembered the covenant, according to which he has come now to liberate them. God has called Moses to go and lead His people out of Egypt into the Promised Land. So far, it has been a monologue, but now the monologue turns into a dialogue, for Moses is about to answer the call.

3.2.2.2. Moses: What is His Name?

At this point one expects Moses to answer his call with the following words: “Here am I. Send me” or “Here I am; you called me”… “Speak, for your servant is listening,” like prophets do, but not so with Moses. Instead, a series of objections follows. The objections are mostly about his abilities: “who am I that I should go?” or “what shall I tell them?” or “what if they do not believe me?” or “I am slow of speech and tongue” and the crown of all objections “send someone else to do it”. Thus, the dialogue between God and Moses consists of the objections of one (Moses) and the responses of the other (God).

We will focus specifically on the second objection of Moses. When we understand the question Moses asks, we will be a step closer to understanding the answer given by God. In this second question, Moses is asking, in the name of Israel, for the identity of God. God’s answer is the focal point of our present study, namely the revelation of the Name.

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151 Ex. 2:11 In the Hebrew literally the word, ברא , (meaning brother) is used. There is a difference between the various English translations. Here we will keep with the NRS translation, where the rendition is his people.
152 Hosea 1:9.
153 Isa. 6:8.
154 1 Sam. 3:8-10.
155 Ex. 3:11-4:17.
God answers the various objections raised by Moses one by one. The first objection is related to Moses’ uncertainty as to whether he is the one who should go, or if somebody else should. God promises that He will go with him and that when the Israelites come out of Egypt they will worship Him at this mountain, as a confirmation of His presence with Moses. From the promise, it looks like the liberation of the nation is a ‘done deal’. The third objection (the second we omitted, for we will turn to it subsequently in more detail), concerns the credibility of Moses and his testimony. God’s solution is to give him signs that will prove that He indeed appeared to Moses, thus validating Moses’ testimony. The fourth objection is about Moses’ speech impediment. God promises in turn, that Aaron Moses’ brother will accompany him as his spokesman. So far, the objections of Moses have been ‘normal’ human responses in the face of a calling to a great task. God answered them all, and provided alternatives that refute the objections. It also has to be seen that “the insistent objection of Moses of his own inability and God’s reaction to that, leads to the fact that the whole mission is God initiated, and the salvation of Israel is not dependent on the human initiative, but solely on the intervention and persistence of God.”

However, we should also note here, that even though the mission is God-initiated, it does not mean that the human counterpart becomes unnecessary. On the contrary, Moses finds his true identity. In the words of Childs: “Moses the discoverer of God becomes the discovered by God in the call.”

Moses’ second objection, as we have noted before, is the most significant. “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” Then what shall I tell them?” It is a peculiar objection, because it is an indirect question. Whereas the other objections were direct, and directly related to Moses, this one is formulated indirectly. Although it is a question for him too, it seems that Moses is concerned about his theology, i.e. how to talk about God when he goes to the Israelites? How can he talk about the experience he had? How is he to identify God when they inquire about Him? God just said who He is: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The real question is: What is Moses actually asking of God? His question “has evoked such a long history of scholarly debate and has been approached with so many oblique questions that it is extremely difficult to hear the text any longer within its present context.” Childs has a point here. It might be interpreted in the modern context as a question of a doubter who wants to know more about God. We might point to the obscurity, or even to the impossibility of the question. But its oddity makes us inquire about it in its narrative context, namely, as it relates to the revelation of God, the call of Moses, the liberation of Israel and the covenant with Israel. Thus, we cannot separate Moses’ odd objection from the bigger picture.

We have established so far that this event is not the discovery of a new God. Here God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God has a history with the tribe of Abraham and subsequently with the nation of Israel. This event is the continuation of that history. God has appeared to Moses, as He is about to intervene in the life of the nation of Israel. Moses is the chosen vessel through whom the liberation of Israel will be accomplished. Moses is the one called to go and speak to Israel and to the Pharaoh in the name of God. This is not like Moses’ earlier self-made mission, which failed. This is God sending him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

From his question, it is evident that Moses is expecting objections from the Israelites, who will ask him about God. It seems that Moses does not want to talk about God as he likes from

156 Houtman, C., Exodus deel I (Ex 1:1-7:13), (Kampen: Kok, 1986) 309.
158 Ex. 3:13.
159 Childs, Exodus, 74.
his human perspective; he wants to talk about God as God would talk about Himself. Moses is dependent on what God says for his answer to the Israelites. We pointed out earlier, that Moses does not give God a name. God identifies Himself. This is an important notion to keep in mind for our further discussions on the identity of God. Buber rightly emphasizes that the question of Moses is primarily directed to God and to His name, and not to the hypothetical question of the Israelites. This is not a question for the sake of human knowledge of God, rather it is a question directed to God for the sake of talking about God.

What is it that Moses asks of God? What is and what is not implied in his question? “When in biblical Hebrew one wants to inquire about one’s name, it is not asked as here ‘what is his name?’ or ‘what is your name?’, but ‘who are you?’, ‘who is he?’, ‘which is your name?’, ‘tell me your name’. Where the word ‘what’ appears connected with the word ‘name’, it is actually asked, what is pronounced in the name or what is concealed in the name.” Moses is not asking for the name of God, in the Greek sense of ὄνομα, where a name functions as a label or designation. That would imply also a sense of power on the side of Moses. For if he names, defines God, it would mean that he owns God. Therefore his question is very important. He is asking for the נְבוֹ (name in Hebrew) of God.

Name in the Hebrew sense is more dynamic than in the Greek sense. It implies much more, it includes the actions, character and history of the one named. It is of importance here to keep in mind that Moses’ question implies much more than what we might see at the first glance. He is asking for the content of the name, he wants to know what is pronounced in the name. “Thus two things were clear to Moses: (a) that the God of the Patriarchs has a specific name, although his people had forgotten it after leaving the place where He had revealed Himself to their ancestors; and (b) that this name expresses the attributes of the God of the Patriarchs.”

They know about the God of the Fathers. But who is this God in relation to the m? This is the essence of Moses’ question. The Name, and the One who is being named, is imperative for the work that lies ahead of Moses. It is important, not only for the work, but also for the proclamation of God in Israel. Therefore, the answer of God, i.e. His name, has to be seen in the light of the question of Moses, with all the above mentioned implications.

3.2.2.3. **God: ‘I am who I am’**

We have examined the implications of Moses’ questions, namely, that there is both a direct and an indirect question. It is indirect in the sense that he is asking in the name of Israel. At the same time he is asking directly for the content of the name. We proceed now to look at the answer God gives to Moses. Just like the questions, the answer is also given in two parts. In the first answer, God reveals His Name, answering the direct question of Moses, concerning the content of the Name. The second answer is indirect, and it concerns the meaning of the Name for Israel, i.e. the remembrance of the Name.

“God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I am has sent me to you.” This is a sentence in the Old Testament Scriptures that has been read,
interpreted and commented on extensively by theologians throughout the ages. Most classic theology would see this as the crown text in formulating their doctrine of God. This means that it is difficult for theologians, or even impossible, to be original. One can only stand on the shoulders of theologians who came before. Not only can one hardly be original, but the verse can hardly be read without hearing the voices of numerous theologians as they interpret this specific text. The scope of this thesis does not allow us to survey the history of the interpretation in detail, but we will give a short overview of the history of interpretation of Exodus 3:14 at the end of this chapter.

God’s answer to Moses’ question is: יהוה יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה, ‘I am who I am’ (vs. 14). In English the Name is rendered as YHWH, following the Hebrew consonant rendering of יהוה (vs.15). In theology it also became known as the Tetragrammaton, meaning four letters. The precise pronunciation of the Name is not known even to this day. The reason for this is that in Jewish tradition, in view of the third commandment of the Decalogue, it is not pronounced. Instead, the alternative word, ‘אֲדֹנָי, meaning ‘my lord’, is used. Often ‘YHWH’ is pronounced referentially, as שֵם, meaning ‘the name’. There have been several attempts to reconstruct the Name in various forms. These resulted in misconstructions like ‘Jehovah,’ or in a more appropriate and popular English rendering YHWH. For the remainder of our study we will keep to the Tetragrammaton, YHWH or the English rendition LORD. The LXX translation of the Name is also important to be mentioned. The LXX translates the Name as: εὐγενεῖ, εἰμί· o` w;n. The only thing we want to point out here is that o` w;n often gave cause to a philosophical speculation and interpretation of the Name and God. Later we will come back to this point as we will consider the history of interpretation of this verse.

The meaning of the Name is also a matter we have to address at this point. The debates concerning the meaning of the Name are usually either grammatical or theological. In our work we will attempt to combine the two. First, let us see some of the grammatical-linguistic problems the passage presents the reader with. The Name is derived from the Hebrew verb, יְהֹוה, ‘to be’. Exegetes and interpreters call our attention to the fact that the tense of the verb in Hebrew, as found in this particular verse, is ambiguous. Various theories have been suggested throughout the history of interpretation. Considering the scope of our study, we can not deal with all of them in detail, because our focus is not to reconstruct the text linguistically, but trying to understand the text theologically. We are aware of the fact that there are other readings and interpretations of the passage. However, we have to prioritize the theological interpretation in order for us to be able to come to a conclusion.

With regard to the problematic nature of the tense of the verb, there is one question we need to answer: does this verb refer to a present or a future act? On the issue of the tense of the

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166 In verse 14 there is direct revelation of the Name towards Moses ‘I AM WHO I AM’ and an indirect for Israel ‘I AM’. There is no duality with verse 15 where the ‘I AM’ of verse 14 is presented in its nominal form (in English as LORD). The real problem is this: does one go for the verbal form of the name or for the nominal form? The implication of this becomes more evident from LXX translation of the Name. Our basic premis is that the Name I AM in vs. 14 is identical with vs. 15 with a different grammatical use. The LXX use of the name suggests labeling. In vs. 14 the I AM is indeed translated as o` w;n and in verse 15 the Name is translated as κύριος. This LXX translation is of the Hebrew אֲדֹנָי which is used to pronounce the Tetragrammaton. The difference in Hebrew between the I AM in vs. 14 and vs. 15 is grammatical in nature, an active verb versus an indicative noun. The difference in Greek is not merely in grammatical form, but it is a conceptual difference. This is the reason we argue against using the name as labeling. See.Fretheim, T, “Yahweh” in NIDOTTE vol. 4., 1295. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology vol. I, The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions, trans. by D. M. G. Stalker, (Louisville/London/Leiden: WJK Press), 179-187.
verb we follow Cassuto’s argument. “The meaning assigned to it in our passage corresponds to the present. The form of the verb that is called in Hebrew today ‘future’ [i.e. the imperfect] could signify, in Biblical language, any tense – past, present, and future – and approximated in some instances to the use of the ‘present’ in Modern Hebrew. The name YHWH, by which the God of Israel is designated, is in the future tense, third person, and it is interpreted in our text in the sense of yihšye [literally, ‘He will be’, understood as ‘He is’]. Hence, when the explanation is given by YHWH Himself, the verb appears in the first person: ’eḥšye [‘I am’]. The sense is: It is I who am with my creatures in their hour of trouble and need – as I have already declared to you: ‘But I will be (’eḥšye) with you’ (vs. 12) – to help them and to save them.”

Thus following Cassuto’s argument, we will continue to read the Tetragrammaton as ‘I am,’ signifying the actual presence of God in the act of revelation on Mount Horeb, and also (this same presence) with Israel in their liberation.

The next question is: what are some of the theological implications regarding the meaning of the Name? The questions we need to ask and answer are: does the Name have any meaning at all, or is it precisely the refusal to give a name? The basic argument for the refusal to give a name is this example: when we meet someone and ask ‘what is your name?’ the person would answer ‘I am who I am’, it would leave us puzzled and it would leave us with the impression that the person did not want to tell us his true name. So there is an uncertainty about the meaning of the name in this line of argument. The critical question then: is this the case here with the meeting between God and Moses? Does God refuse to name himself?

First, it has to be said that this is not a meeting between two human persons. We have said already that this is a meeting between the divine and the human. God meets humanity in the person of Moses. Thus this is a radically different circumstance. The ‘normal’ laws of encounter do not apply. Second, we have also argued that this is not a ‘new God’, whom Moses happened on, and discovered. This is the God of the Fathers, Who has appeared to him. There is a history implied already, and we can safely argue that Moses knew indirectly about this God. The difference is that Moses is now directly faced with Him. It is truly an “I and Thou” encounter. It is an encounter between two well-defined entities. Third, we have clarified already that the question of Moses is a question regarding the content of the Name. It is basically implied in the question: Is His Name identical with his being? In other words, is the one who has appeared to him really the one who talks or only a mirage? The question is Moses’ way of testing the reality of his experience.

Thus we can argue that the revelation of the Name of God, I AM who I AM, is not the refusal to give a name, but rather the confirmation of the Name. God confirms that His Name is identical with His being and also implies the presence of God. The two, the Name and His being present, are identical. As we mentioned before, ‘name’ in the Ancient Near East is an expression of the essence of the one who carries the name, which includes the persons acting as well. When Moses talks about God, it is implied that God is and He is also present.

3.2.3. Conclusions

So what can we conclude from the analytic reading of the revelation of the Name? The Name, as it is, should be translated in the present tense, I AM WHO I AM. The meaning of the Name

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168 This is a question we were confronted with in the work of K. Barth. We will give due attention to it in the following point of this chapter.
169 The fact that his ancestors are mentioned, who were Jews, and he could identify with his people, means that Moses had some kind of knowledge of the God of his forefathers. Also his worshipful reaction, kneeling down and hiding his face, is an indication that Moses knew that he is in the presence of God.
has to do with God’s revelation of his essence, His being. God is not a static, generic being as the god of the philosophers. God in His Name is God who is present in His acts. He is the subject of the act of revelation and the One who will liberate the nation of Israel from the Egyptian oppression. This is also in line with the immediate context of the passage and the questions Moses raises concerning the task that lies ahead of him. As a response to Moses’ first objection, God promises (vs.12) that He will be with them throughout the mission in Egypt. The second question (vs. 13) is connected to it, when Moses asks for the meaning of the Name, i.e. content. God’s answer is, again, the promise to Moses of his presence and His future presence with Israel. The third answer also has to do with the presence of God with Moses. The signs given are to point to the fact that God has indeed appeared to Moses and are a testimony of His continued presence. We notice from a broader perspective that there is a gradual change in the events of the book. There is a movement from the absence to the presence of God. The book starts with the absence of God from the main line of the action and the book ends with the presence of YHWH with Israel. The announcement of the Name sets the stage for what is to come.

“God’s answer began with Moses. It now draws the theological implications of the revelation far beyond the immediate concern of Moses’ original question. God has revealed himself to Moses in his eternal name. This is the name, which will be cultically remembered by his people throughout the generations. The revelation of the name in Israel is not to satisfy curiosity, but to be the medium of continuous worship.”\footnote{Childs, Exodus, 88-89.} In the end worship is the goal of the annunciation of the Name. It matters fundamentally to the way in which Israel is to worship God. They are to remember the Name from ‘generation to generation’. God says to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD,\footnote{In Hebrew YHWH.} the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”\footnote{Ex. 3:15.}

In the above passage, we highlight the importance of the verb יְנַחֵל, “to remember.” “On the human level, the words embrace reflection, especially on what is in the past. Such reflection may lead to regret or relief, or more actively to appreciation and commitment. God’s remembering has to do with his attention and intervention, whether in grace or judgment. Religious worship is the context where human and divine usages come together, in the fellowship of praise and blessing.”\footnote{Allen, L.C. יְנַחֵל in NIDOTTE vol. I, 1100-1106.} Worship is not only about human practice, but rather about God who is worshiped. To remember God in worship means to be aware of the presence of God. We can compare it with the sacraments of the Church. It is in the Holy Communion that we remember God, namely, Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on the cross. Remembrance during Holy Communion is not a mere recalling of events that occurred two thousand years ago. This remembrance is much more, it is in fact participation. Together in unity we participate in the broken body and shed blood of Christ. It is a participation, which ultimately brings about the transformation of our identity.

In the command to remember, the Name receives a dual Gestalt. “The LORD, the God of your fathers... this is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”\footnote{Ex. 3:15.} In this formula, two names are mentioned. One is God’s actual...
name, which he revealed to Moses, the LORD. The other name is the one by which He identified himself historically as the God of the Fathers. The two can be differentiated but not separated. They form the core of the identity of God. It is the identity of the historical with the actual. The historicity and actuality of the name at this point needs more attention. We start our clarification by elaborating on the historicity of God’s identity. What we mean by historicity is that God has made himself known in history.

He entered time and space and made himself known. Thus, He was identifiable in time and space. Specifically for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El – Shaddai, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.” So, God through His actions, made Himself known to the Fathers. God was identifiable in time and space. However the degree of revelation has increased in the encounter with Moses, therefore we are able to make the differentiation in the identity of God. Where previously God was identifiable through His acts, acts of provision and might, here He reveals His being, His essence, Himself. God, in the act of revelation, is fully present and that is what His name is referring to. God in his actuality means that the true God and not another God, or another form of God, or just a part of God, but God Himself is present. It is the true ‘I and Thou’ meeting of human and God. The mountain where the Name has been revealed has become sacred because at that time and in that space God revealed His Name. It is sacred, because, in remembering one can point to that as the place where God has manifested Himself. That is the reason why the Tent of Meeting is called as such. It is concrete place where YHWH was to meet with Israel. So when we talk about the identity of God, we mean to say that God in actuality is identical or present with His historical manifestations. This historical aspect of God’s identity makes Him also vulnerable, because participating in history makes Him subject to the convolutions of history. In the next two chapters we will be more elaborate on this very point. Thus, the existential experiences are confirmed by the historical, and vice versa. This means that true cognition of God is actually a re-cognition.

3. 3. **Exodus 3:14 through the ages, a short reception history**

At the outset of this chapter we said that we are interested in the impact that this passage had in various theological works through the ages. We wanted to move beyond our own interpretation in an attempt to understand the passage in the context of the works of other theologians. This short historical overview will also show how theology, God talk, has evolved through the ages. We will also gain significant insight in how theologians through the ages have understood and have talked about the identity of God. This as a whole will also be formative for our conclusions. We will focus on four theologians as representatives of the major periods of the history of theological thought: Athanasius from the early fathers, Thomas Aquino in the heart of medieval theology, Calvin as a theologian of the reformation and finally K. Barth in modernity. All these theologians are representative for the theological climate of their day. Their works are a culmination of theological thought of each period. We will specifically search to see how they have used, interpreted and theologized on the subject of Exodus 3:14.

For the church fathers, Ex. 3:14 was a text of Christological concern. The Nicene and post-Nicene debates mostly concentrated on Christology, specifically on the relationship of the Father to the Son. The main questions were related to the nature of the identification of God.

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175 Hebrew: El – Shaddai.
176 Ex. 6:2-3.
with Jesus. The issue was the identity of Jesus Christ. Therefore implicitly the identity of God was at stake. To establish the identity of Jesus one had to take into consideration the identity of God and its revelation. Ex. 3:14 often provided both the theological and philosophical arguments for the full identification of God as Jesus Christ. Further in this chapter we will see specifically how this is spelled out in the work of the Alexandrian church father Athanasius. We chose Athanasius because there is no other church father who has more stressed the identity of God in Christ. He spent all his life elaborating and defending the precise identification of Christ with the very being of the Father. Therefore it is fitting for us to single out his work out of that of the other church fathers as a characteristic sample from this early period.

In considering the next major period of the history of Christian theology we arrive at the medieval theologians. The one who stands out above the others is Thomas Aquinas. His *Summa Theologica* is one of the most important theological works of the period. In the *Summa* Thomas brings together most of the major topics of medieval systematic theology. As an introduction to theology it was meant to inspire young theologians in their work. We will focus our attention to Thomas’ theology of God and specifically his answer to the question concerning the existence of God. As Thomas proceeds to discuss the existence of God and the five ways in which one can talk about God, he posits Ex. 3:14 as the main text. This is not coincidental and we will see why.

Interestingly enough, it was the philosophical implications and not the theological that evoked the further interest in Ex. 3:14. Childs quotes Gilson on the *sine qua non* of the medieval discussion: “From this moment it is understood once and for all that the proper name of God is being and that …this name denotes His very essence.” The reformers wanted to liberate theology from the philosophical framework. This had implications for their interpretation of Exodus 3:14. Luther had a strong Christological interpretation of Exodus 3. Further, he interpreted it from the assumption that human reason cannot discover God. God alone can make Himself known. Calvin, on the other hand, in his interpretation of Exodus 3:14, understands its meaning in terms of God’s divine glory, which is self-existent and eternal. He quickly distances himself from Plato’s concept of divine being, because it fails to do justice to God’s power and governance of all things. We will have more to say about Calvin’s interpretation later this chapter. The reformation period presents us with the work of both Luther and Calvin, but considering that Calvin’s theology is more balanced we chose his work as our source of study.

During the modern period, the contrast between the Greek and the Hebrew rationality was called into question. The task of seeing the whole range of alternative interpretations throughout the history of exegesis took on a new significance. In medieval times the text proved to be fruitful for both theological and philosophical discourse, in modernity not so. The introduction of historical-critical method in exegesis and theology has made theological and, even more, philosophical discourse on the passage impossible. Mainly the linguistic and historical aspect of the text has been highlighted as a relevant feature. The work of K. Barth

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177 We have to note here that during the medieval period the main text that theologians worked from was the Greek LXX. This is what made the affinity with philosophy possible. The Greek translation carries a strong ontological interpretation of the text. It found though its peak in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, who not coincidentally introduces his *Summa* with a discussion on Exodus 3:14. In the modern period the main paradigm both for philosophy and theology is epistemology. As more and more Hebrew texts of the OT (translations) became available, the discussion focused more and more on the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek understanding of being.


was and is the most significant for the twentieth century theology. He critically engaged with the problems modernity presented for the interpretation of texts such as Exodus 3:14. So we will consider in more detail Barth’s treatment of the revelation of God. This is where we find his theological interpretation of Ex. 3:14. Barth gave a fresh impulse towards a strictly theological understanding of theology. Barth was theologizing about the identity of God in the midst of modernity. And it will be worth while to see how his interpretation and God talk lines up with the rest.

3.3.1. The church fathers: Athanasius (296-373)

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, spent most of his life defending the Nicene Creed and thus became the figure of orthodoxy of the post-Nicene fathers. He has been mostly appreciated for his ‘high’ Christology, i.e. his defense of the divinity of Jesus. His life work is marked by hostility by the competing ideologies of his time, the Arians. The debates mostly concentrated on the affirmation of the full divinity of Jesus, His identity in essence with the Father. The *nature* of the identification of the Father and the Son was what the debates concentrated on. In the fourth century these debates had not only theological but political implications as well. Theology had significant impact not only in the Church but also for public life. This is also apparent from the tumultuous biography of Athanasius. We do not want to enter on the field of Christology of the *early fathers* as such, or the field of historical studies to reconstruct the events regarding the life of Athanasius. We focus on one specific aspect of Athanasius’ Christology, namely its Scriptural justification and his specific use of the text of Exodus 3:14.

The two texts we will be looking at from the works of Athanasius are *De Decretis*¹⁸⁰ (Defence of the Nicene Definition) and *Ad Afros Epistola Synodica*¹⁸¹ (Synodal Letter to the Bishops of Africa). *De Decretis* was written some time in between 351-355 as a help to a friend who was caught up in a dispute with Arians on the matter of the identity of God. Athanasius in thirty two articles defends the Nicene synod’s affirmations. He starts out by showing the error of the Arians, and then goes on talking about the Sonship of Jesus and its implications for further titles of the Son. He then continues with the exposition of the misinterpretations of the Arians and gives the Scriptural foundations of the Nicene affirmations. This part has the most relevance for our research because it is here that Athanasius quotes Ex. 3:14. The letter ends with an exegetical discussion on the word ἄγενητος (not Created) as it is only related to the Father, by the Arians, and not to the Son. By virtue of this argument, the Arians deny the identity of the Father and the Son. Athanasius fights this very differentiation and says that the word ought to be attributed to the Son as well for He is the same being as the Father.

The occasion of the *Ad Afros* synodal letter in 369 was to defend the Nicene Creed against the efforts of some bishops in Africa and the Western Church’s tendency to accept the Ariminum as the final rule of faith. The letter is mostly about the content of the Nicene Creed, namely the establishment of the co-eternity of the Father with the Son. However “the most novel argument in the Letter is that of §4, where he refutes the repudiation of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in the creed of Nikē by an argument from Scripture, starting from Ex. 3: 14, and turning upon the equivalence of the two terms in question. This would appeal to Westerns, and expresses the usual view of Athanasius himself, but would not have much force with those who were accustomed to the Eastern terminology.”¹⁸²

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We will start by looking at the texts first. Therefore I give a full citation which is meant to give a better understanding of the issues at stake. Finally we will comment on the texts and show their relevance for our own interpretation of Exodus 3:14.

*De Decretis,* (V.,§22):

“If then any man conceives God to be compound, as accident is in essence, or to have any external envelopement, and to be encompassed, or as if there is anything about Him which completes the essence, so that when we say 'God,' or name 'Father,' we do not signify the invisible and incomprehensible essence, but something about it, then let them complain of the Council's stating that the Son was from the essence of God; but let them reflect, that in thus considering they utter two blasphemies; for they make God corporeal, and they falsely say that the Lord is not Son of the very Father, but of what is about Him. But if God be simple, as He is, it follows that in saying 'God' and naming 'Father,' we name nothing as if about Him, but signify his essence itself. For though to comprehend what the essence of God is be impossible, yet if we only understand that God is, and if Scripture indicates Him by means of these titles, we, with the intention of indicating Him and none else, call Him God and Father and Lord. When then He says, 'I am that I am,' and 'I am the Lord God in Exodus 3:14-15,' or when Scripture says, 'God,' we understand nothing else by it but the intimation of His incomprehensible essence Itself, and that He Is, who is spoken of. Therefore let no one be startled on hearing that the Son of God is from the essence of the Father; but rather let him accept the explanation of the Fathers, who in more explicit but equivalent language have for 'from God?' written 'of the essence.' For they considered it the same thing to say that the Word was 'of God?' and 'of the essence of God,' since the word 'God,' as I have already said, signifies nothing but the essence of Him Who Is. If then the Word is not in such sense from God, as a son, genuine and natural, from a father, but only as creatures because they are framed, and as 'all things are from God,' then neither is He from the essence of the Father, nor is the Son again Son according to essence, but in consequence of virtue, as we who are called sons by grace. But if He only is from God, as a genuine Son, as He is, then the Son may reasonably be called from the essence of God.”

*Ad Afros*

“They who assembled at Nicæa did so not after being deposed: and secondly, they confessed that the Son was of the Essence of the Father. But the others, after being deposed again and again, and once more at Ariminum itself, ventured to write that it ought not to be said that the Son had Essence or Subsistence. This enables us to see, brethren, that they of Nicæa breathe the spirit of Scripture, in that God says in Exodus (3:14), 'I am that I am,' and through Jeremiah, 'Who is in His substance and has seen His word;' and just below, 'if they had stood in My subsistence and heard My words:' now subsistence is essence, and means nothing else but very being, which Jeremiah calls existence, in the words, 'and they heard not the voice of existence .' For subsistence, and essence, is existence: for it is, or in other words exists.”

For Athanasius to keep to the Nicene formulation of the *homoousious* of the Son with the Father, was to be in the line of the Apostles’ teaching, and consequently in line with biblical theology. The issue at stake for Athanasius was the identity of God and the valid talk of God. He did not merely talk about the *character of God*, but about the very being of God in Jesus Christ. The character of God often refers to the attributes of God which in turn function as labels. A label is only attached to the ‘thing’ which it describes and it has no intrinsic value to

183 Athanasius, *De Decretis,* 164-165.
the thing itself. Jesus did not receive the label God, as something less than who He is. Jesus intrinsically is God. Jesus is identical in being with the Father. The Arian objection went exactly to the heart of this confession by denying this very identity. The main discussion between Athanasius together with those who kept with the Nicene Creed, versus the Arians came down to the being of God and its relation to Jesus. Even though the discussions were highly conceptual and philosophical, biblical theology and specifically the right understanding of the Scriptures were decisive on most of the matters.

These are some ways that Athanasius’ use of Exodus 3:14 ties into our own study. First it is clear that the word ‘God’ is not a referential concept, but rather the expression of the essence of God, of who God is. Often the word ‘God’ is used as a concept, as a compound word, for the abstract divine. Or to put it in another way: the word ‘God’ is used as a label apart from the essence of who He is. This is the reason that the research has been about the identity of God and the revelation of the Name. The revelation of the Name of God is not the revelation of a label but the presence of God in his Being and His dwelling with his people. This is what is at stake in Exodus and for Athanasius as well. Revelation of God is about the revelation of the presence of God. Christologically put: Jesus is the presence of God. Athanasius, like no other church father, contributed the most to this creed of the Church.

Second, we also see continuity in the theological methodology of Athanasius. There is a direct identification of who God is with Jesus Christ. This identification is seen not only as an act of labeling but identification in terms of revelation of the essence of God in the life of Jesus. Methodologically this is a continuity, which moves from Scripture to Credo to Apologia, and finally into Theologia, i.e. talk about God. Theology in the work of Athanasius is the fruit of biblical theology plus the Apostles teaching and its verification through contestation. The Christological emphasis ties in with what we will be looking at in the fifth chapter: the identification of the Jesus Christ with the Name of God from Phil. 2:6-11. It will be interesting to see how the dilemma of the identification is resolved in Paul’s theology.

3.3.2. Thomas Aquinas and pre-modernity

As we have seen above, the fathers of the church were mostly engaged in Christological debates. These debates evolved mostly around the identity of Jesus Christ and the precise identification of God and man in his person. The Nicene Creed, has been the pinnacle of these debates and its proceedings paved the way for an orthodox understanding of Christology, i.e. the full identification of Jesus as God.

By the time Thomas Aquinas emerged on the scene the Church has established herself as a significant power in the West. Thomas Aquinas had received the best education a man could get in those days. He was able to study at the best universities Europe had to offer. Aside from his studies, biographers also note that he was piously motivated as well. He saw his theological endeavors as both an intellectual and a spiritual journey. The culmination of this journey was his Summa Theologica.\(^\text{185}\) It was meant as an introductory work for young theologians, who ventured on the field of theology. In the prologue to the Summa, Aquinas shows his motivation for writing: “We have considered that students in this Science have not seldom been hampered by what they have found written by other authors, partly on account of the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments; partly also because those things that are needful for them to know are not taught according to the order of the subject matter, but according as the plan of the book might require, or the occasion of the argument

offer; partly, too, because frequent repetition brought weariness and confusion to the minds of
readers.”

The *Summa* is a solid introduction to the doctrines of the Christian religion amidst of many
unsatisfactory works available. The *Summa* consists of three parts: I. The Doctrine of God,
II/1. General Principles of Morality, II/2. Morality in Particular, Individual Virtues and Vices,
III. The Doctrine of Christ and His Accomplishments, The Sacraments and Eschatology.
Relevant for our research is the first part of the *Summa*. It is here that Aquino with his
distinctive style in theological method treats the issues related to rationality and the being of
God. The part on the Doctrine of God is broken down into six parts: 1. on the existence and
the nature and the person of God (I qu. 1-43), 2. Creation (I qu. 44-49), 3. Angels (I qu. 50-
qu. 103-119). Aquinas answers the question of the existence of God (I qu. 2) in three articles.
The first article pertains to the self-evidence of Gods existence (I qu. 2 art. 1). The second
article pertains to the demonstrability of God’s existence (I qu. 2 art. 2). The final article
concerns the existence of God (I qu. 2 art. 3). It is the final article that is important for our
research.

“Article 3. Whether God exists?

**Objection 1.** It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be
infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word "God" means that He is
infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but
there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.

**Objection 2.** Further, it is superfluous to suppose that what can be accounted for by a
few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the
world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all
natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things
can be reduced to one principle, which is human reason, or will. Therefore there is no
need to suppose God's existence.

**On the contrary, It is said in the person of God: "I am Who I am." (Exodus 3:14)**

**I answer that, The existence of God can be proved in five ways.**

1. The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and
evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in
motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in
potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as
it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from
potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality,
except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire,
makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and
changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and
potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot
cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is
therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be
both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion
must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in

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186 Thomas, *ST1*, xix.
motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

2. The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

3. The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence — which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

4. The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in Metaph. ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

5. The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their
acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says (Enchiridion xi): "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil." This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

Reply to Objection 2. Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must be traced back to God, as to its first cause. So also whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these can change or fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle, as was shown in the body of the Article."187

Let us start by pointing to some of the features of Aquinas’ method. First he names several objections to the initial question. Then he counters those objections with a response and finally in short answers to the objections presented. In this case there are two objections raised against the existence of God: first is the problem of evil and second the problem of rationality and nature. Some conclude from the apparent presence of evil in the human existence that there is no God. God is good, therefore there ought to be no evil. Good and evil are mutually exclusive. Further, there is no need for God in explaining empirical reality. Because everything can be reduced to natural causes and effects, to rationality or to the volition of human beings. These criticisms sound a lot like modern objections against God. There is not much that has changed. These objections make the work of Aquinas even more relevant for our research.

Further, it is interesting to note that Aquinas’ first response is to quote Ex. 3:14. It is a fundamental passage for what is he about to elaborate on. The five ways of talking about God, or proofs, as it has become known, are not based on reason. Thus they cannot stand on themselves. They function as interpretations of Exodus 3:14. This is the reason why his work cannot be evaluated only on its philosophical merits. It is theologically motivated, namely biblical theologically. It is that specific passage that is at the foundation of his five ways of speaking about God. The five ways are highly conceptual and show Aquinas’ ability to argue philosophically by making use of a biblical passage. The first way is: the first mover who is at the beginning of all that is in motion. The second way is the first efficient cause of all causes and effects. The third way is the first cause of necessity. The fourth way is the cause of being of that there is. Finally the fifth way is the intelligent governance of all things. With the five ways Aquinas does not prove that there is God. What he does is: on the hand of the Ex. 3:14 finds five philosophical ways of thinking and speaking about God. This is none other than the anselmian kind of faith seeking understanding.

After considering the five ways Aquinas moves to answer the two objections posted: the existence of evil and the impossibility of the existence of God, and the reduction of natural processes to human rationality and volition. His theodicy is a simple conclusion of his philosophical discourse. God is indeed almighty and good and holds all things under his

187 Thomas, ST I, qu. 2, art. 3.
governance. This means that evil is not free but always under his dominion. Evil is not a separate, capricious entity without boundaries. Evil is ultimately qualified by the goodness of God. By quoting Augustine, and alluding to Paul, Aquinas comes to the following theological perspective: God does bring good out evil since all is under His governance. Since one can talk about God as the first mover therefore everything has to be traced back to Him. Nature and humanity cannot be reduced to their own self-sufficient existence. They both depend on the One who is the cause of their existence. Theologically Aquinas elaborates on the implications of a creational theology. In creational theology there is the creator and the sustainer of all. God is the creator who governs His creation by redeeming it in its totality. The Creator is the centre around which all reality evolves. In our view Aquinas’ philosophically tinted discourse is in actuality an elaboration on the biblical theology of God the Creator.

His work has lately been more appreciated by philosophers than by theologians, at least in Protestantism. Why? The answer to this question will say more about the shape of theology in modernity than about the theology of Aquinas. We suspect that the decreased appreciation for the theology of Thomas Aquinas, in certain theological circles, is because of the Kantian critique of religion, theology and metaphysics. This is the point precisely where the work of Aquinas becomes even more relevant for our own research. The kind of theology that Aquinas was doing is impossible in a post-Kantian era, since every religious or theological assertion has to answer to the faculty of pure reason. Evil is not something that concerns God, but the human being in his moral judgments and will. The higher Being who resides over nature is in no way accessible for the human reason. There is nothing beyond the senses. The human being is ultimately responsible for his own life and determines its purpose. These two Kantian counter arguments to Aquinas’ objections make our assertion even stronger about the neglect of Aquinas in theological discourse.

3.3.3. Calvin and the Reformation period

We continue our overview of the reception history of this passage by considering one of the reformers, Calvin. We have chosen his commentary on the Harmony of the Law in which he comments on the Book of Exodus. We have chosen this exegetical work while some of the other authors we have considered were more systematic. But it is our opinion that in reality there is not much difference in the exegetical, homiletical or systematic/dogmatic of the reformers, just like for medieval theologians and early church fathers as well, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquino and Anselm. The major differentiation of the disciplines is a much later development in the history of theology. So this exegetical work by Calvin is relevant to our research because it has significant points to make about the reception of the passage.

Calvin comments on Exodus 3:14: “I am that I am. The verb in the Hebrew is in the future tense, “I will be what I will be;” but it is of the same force as the present, except that it

188 Rom. 8:28
189 The faculty of theology and philosophy are housed on the same floor of the VU University Amsterdam’s main building. However the Summa is catalogued as a philosophical reference book and not as a theological handbook. It could be this way because of the faculties strong Protestant orientation, but we suspects our first reason, namely that in a post Kantian climate in theology there is no space for the kind of theology that Thomas put forward in the Summa Theologica.
designates the perpetual duration of time. This is very plain, that God attributes to himself alone divine glory, because He is self-existent and therefore eternal; and thus gives being and existence to every creature. Nor does he predicate of himself anything common, or shared by others; but he claims for himself eternity as peculiar to God alone, in order that he may be honored according to his dignity. Therefore, immediately afterwards, contrary to grammatical usage, he used the same verb in the first person as a substantive, annexing it to a verb in the third person; that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as his incomprehensible essence is mentioned. But although philosophers discourse in grand terms of this eternity, and Plato constantly affirms that God is peculiarly τὸ ὄν (the Being); yet they do not wisely and properly apply this title, viz., that this one and only Being of God absorbs all imaginable essences; and that, thence, at the same time, the chief power and government of all things belong to him. For from whence come the multitudes of false gods, but from impiously tearing the divided Deity into pieces by foolish imaginations? Wherefore, in order rightly to apprehend the one God, we must first know, that all things in heaven and earth derive.‖

Calvin, as a good exegete, starts with some grammatical and theological notes. He talks about the age-old question of the tense of the verb ‘to be’. It is interesting that two thousand years of scholarship still did not arrive at a definite understanding of the tense of the verb. Often, when new Bible editions and translations are made, the discussions around the tense of this very specific verb surface anew. Maybe the real issue is that it is seen as a verb and not as a subject, as Calvin points that out. For him the understanding of the Name of God does not merely rests on the clarification of the tense of the verb, as would be case with modern commentators, but it is rooted in the use of the Name in the Book of Exodus and consequently the entire Bible. We will see how this informs his talk of God, i.e. theology.

Calvin does not fall for a mere philosophical interpretation of the Name either. He recognizes the fact that the Name cannot be purely translated in general philosophical conceptions of ontology. God in His Name is qualified by the covenant history with his people. Later in his explanation of the Name in chapter 6 of Exodus Calvin says that it is a “stupidity” to say that Moses invented the name of God. This is not a God in general philosophical terms, or a ‘being’ as such. This is the God who entered into a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this is the God from whom Moses felt estranged in the land of Midian. “Nor does God by “His name” in this passage mean syllables or letters, but the knowledge of His glory and majesty, which shone out more fully and more brightly in the redemption of His Church, than in the commencement of the covenant.” Reading the passage and interpreting it is ultimately a meeting not only with the text itself, but also with the presence of God.

This is exactly what we were trying to show in our research of the passage. The meaning of the Name is ultimately rooted in biblical theology and not in general grammatical-philological statements. Even though grammatical and philosophical considerations are relevant for the understanding of the Name, they do not have the final word. Actually what we see, is that Calvin is very close to Aquino, the Bible is decisive in his God talk and the arguments for it

come subsequently. We have to highlight this aspect of Calvin’s and the preceding theologians’ method. The direction the arguments take is often misunderstood. The misunderstanding is that they go from human rationality to theologizing and the biblical texts are there to support their rationality. The contrary is true. The biblical texts are the decisive factor for their theological rationality and consequently these theologians attempt to talk in terms of common rationality. It is for Calvin just as it is with Thomas and Anselm, faith seeking understanding. There is still talk about God in a very specific, theological way. Along with Calvin we concede that the revelation of the Name is an act of God and consequently an event of worship for human beings.

For Calvin the Exodus passage is not a hindrance to talk about God but the basis on which he does that. He faithfully works through the grammatical issues of the passage and also considers the philosophical objections and pitfalls. He ends up with a carefully considered biblical theology. It is not a biblical theology that ignores the various difficulties of a given passage, but rather works through them and considers their theological relevance and value. This is exactly what we were aiming for in our own research. In Calvin’s interpretation we find also what we found with Athanasius, namely the Christological implications of the Name. In the commentary on the sixth chapter of Exodus, Calvin addresses the issue of the God who is not known by His Name to the Israelites. Calvin concludes that the revelation of the Name is a deeper or fuller revelation of God. This is an indication to talk about God’s fullest revelation, His revelation in Jesus Christ. “There may be an apparent incongruity in saying, “this is my memorial unto all generations,” because a much more excellent memorial succeeded in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ; but my reply is, that since, in the coming of Christ, the truth of the covenant made with Abraham was shown forth, and was thus demonstrated to be firm and infallible, its memory was rather renewed than destroyed; and that thus it still survives and flourishes in the Gospel, since Abraham even now ceases not to be the father of the faithful, under the one Head. We conclude that God would not be spoken of on earth, without the effects of his gratuitous adoption appearing, by which he may be proved to be faithful and true.”¹⁹⁵ The subject of the revelation of God in Jesus, and the identification of the Name with Him, will be precisely what we will talk about in our chapter on Philippians 2.

3.3.4. Modernity and Barth

Before we continue with Barth, we have to talk about the shape of theology in the post-Reformation period. We have elaborated on this subject in the first chapter, as we have looked at the impact of the Enlightenment on theology. It was the age of reason. Man freed himself from all ‘authorities’ (God and Nature) and swore allegiance to the one common good: reason. The test of all theological talk of God was pure reason, within the limits of time and space. In short it became obvious that ‘God talk’, as in the works of Athanasius, Aquinas or Calvin, was indeed impossible. There was a sense of optimism about the human condition and her newly found strength, i.e. the capability to think and reason for themselves free of any outside compulsion. However, the two Wars brought an end to this optimism. The age of reason became the age of atrocities. It is during this period that Barth appeared on the scene of European theology.

The work of Karl Barth is one of the most significant theological works of the twentieth century. His main contribution to theology is his magnum opus the Church Dogmatics,¹⁹⁶ a comprehensive revision of reformed theology. The Dogmatics addresses the main theological

issues raised by the Enlightenment. Its most significant merit is that it put God back into the centre of European theology. It is interesting for our study to note that Barth himself asks the question *Who is God?* This question, for Barth, is directive for reflecting on the being of God and revelation. As Barth considers the *subject* of the act of revelation, i.e. God, he gives a short interpretation of Ex. 3:14. We will focus on Barth’s interpretation of this passage.

The foundation of Barth’s theology is the Word of God (*Deus dixit*), the actual event in which God Himself speaks. In order to better understand what Barth means here, we need to think of layers that are arranged one upon the other. At the top of all the layers is the *actual* event of the speaking of God, revelation. The second layer is made up by the attestation to the act of revelation, since revelation does not happen in an empty space, and for no reason, but is directed towards the human. Therefore revelation can be attested to. The prophets and the apostles were the ones to whom the direct revelation of God has been made manifest. Through them the Word of God becomes *derivate*, and as testimonies, they are recorded in the Scriptures. Another layer is the preached Word of God in the church. This is the third *Gestalt* that the actual Word of God receives, the *proclaimed* Word of God. Thus Barth makes a helpful differentiation, of three various modes of the Word of God in relation to the human agent: actual, derivate and proclaimed. This is one of Barth’s radical turns against the nineteenth century immanentalism. Characteristic of that age is that the distance between God and the human agent is reduced to a complete correspondence. The best of human thoughts were considered God’s own thoughts. Barth radically turned against this trend by affirming that the truly transcendent Word of God comes from the ‘outside’ to the human.

By posing God over against the human, Barth has radically rejected *any* human potency in achieving the knowledge of God. “God is the presupposition of our knowledge of him, that we cannot posit with our own knowledge and presuppose ourselves in it.”197 God says, *Deus dixit*, is an important term to reflect on in Barth’s theology. First, “God is a free subject, not the object of human speculation, He is his own *I*, an active and speaking eternal *I*.”198 Second, God has spoken in the concrete history of Israel, and in the concrete history of Jesus Christ. The OT and the NT are witnesses to that. Third, God is not a general concept, He is the “God who sets himself in relationship with us”199 (i.e. through the covenant). This very basic understanding of *Deus dixit* is fundamental to the *Dogmatics*.

After introducing these basic premises of his theology in volume I, Barth asks the question: *who is God in his revelation?* It is interesting to see this question here. It would have been more fitting when he asked this in volume II of the *Dogmatics*, where he talks specifically about God. This reversal has to do with Barth’s upside-down thinking. For him ontology comes before epistemology. The knowledge of God is dependent on the being of God. Or to be more specific, God Himself is the ground of the knowledge of Him. According to Barth, in the act of revelation one is confronted with the God who reveals himself as the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“God’s word is God Himself in His revelation. For God reveals Himself as the Lord and according to scripture this signifies, for the concept of revelation, that God Himself in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired distinction is Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness.”200 Webster notes a key aspect of Barth’s doctrine of Revelation. “Revelation

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furnishes the basic conceptuality through which Barth expounds the being of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this first treatment of the topic.”

First Barth discusses the Place of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Dogmatics and argues for the primacy of it. Often, systematic theologians prefer to talk about the Trinity much later in their dogmatics. But for Barth, it has primacy over other dogmatic themes. Scripture is the witness of revelation, in it God reveals Himself through Himself. God in revelation is identical with the Subject, with the Act and with the Goal. Thus, the being of God, i.e. Trinity, is at the beginning of the doctrine of revelation. Barth rightly asks the question then: who is God in His revelation? Namely, who is the Subject of the revelation? “Revelation is indeed God’s predicate, but in such a way that this predicate is in every way identical with God Himself.” It is interesting to note the step Barth takes here. He starts his systematic theology with the doctrine of the Trinity and not with a theory of knowledge as one would expect in a prolegomena. This proves that his theology is ultimately defined by the actuality of God and not by the possibility of the knowledge of God.

“What we are trying to bring to practical recognition by putting it first (i.e. the Trinity) is something which has not been concealed in the history of dogmatics and which has often enough been stated very strongly, namely, that this is the point where the basic decision is made whether what is in every respect the very important term “God” used in Church proclamation in a manner appropriate to the object which is also its norm.” Thus Barth makes the being of God a normative factor for the doctrine of revelation, starting theology with the doctrine of revelation. One has to start with God, for God is the one who reveals Himself.

Second he discusses the Root of the Doctrine of Trinity. Barth lays the fundament for his theology of the Trinity in the being of God, as He reveals Himself. “When we say, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is an interpretation of revelation, or that revelation is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, we find revelation itself attested to in Holy Scripture in such a way that, in relation to this witness, our understanding of revelation, or of the God who reveals Himself, must be the doctrine of Trinity.” Barth also warns that the doctrine of the Trinity is not found explicitly in the Scriptures. Rather, as shown before, it is deduced from the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of God. In what follows Barth makes a statement, and on the basis of that statement he goes to work to show how the Subject, the Predicate and the Object relate to each other.

“Revelation in the Bible means the self-unveiling, imparted to men, of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men.” Barth first talks about the Predicate of revelation, i.e. the self-unveiling of God, who graciously comes to man. Thus the act of revelation is historical and experiential. Revelation happens in history and the Scriptures attest to that. Immanuel, God with us, is the primary way He is known. It is a kind of knowledge that humans cannot produce themselves; it is something God offers. Revelation is also revelation of the hiddenness of God. He, in His freedom, can distinguish Himself. “The very fact of revelation tells us that it is proper to Him to distinguish Himself, i.e., to be God, in Himself and in concealment and yet at the same time to be God a second time in a very different way, namely, in his manifestation, i.e. in the form of something He Himself is not.” Barth makes

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202 CD I/1, 299.
203 CD I/1, 301.
204 CD I/1, 312.
205 CD I/1, 315.
206 CD I/1, 316.
here a differentiation between the primary objectivity and secondary objectivity of God. In His primary objectivity God is Himself, and He does not reveal Himself. God in His primary objectivity remains hidden. This hiddenness of God is part of His essential being. God in His secondary objectivity makes use of what is not-God to make Himself known. God gives Himself in what is not-God to the human recipient of the act of revelation. Out of these differentiations come other differentiations forth: revelation vs. means of revelation, God vs. Jesus’ humanity and enhypostatic vs. anhypostatic.

The primary objectivity is always more important than the secondary. For Barth there is a qualitative difference between the primary and the secondary objectivity of God. This is one of the areas of ambiguity in Barth; on the one hand he argues for a unity between the subject of revelation and the act of revelation, maintaining that God is truly there in the act of revelation. On the other hand, he makes a qualitative distinction between the act of revelation and the content of revelation. This is a critical point, because what Barth says in essence is that God in His primary objectivity is not identical to His secondary objectivity.

To explain how God can be God a second time, in a very different way, in the secondary objectivity of God, Barth treats the revelation of the Name of God, and specifically focuses on the Exodus 3 passage. This is where the question of God’s realities, which are both distinguishable and also indistinguishable from Him, i.e. hypostases, are discussed. The Name of God, according to Barth, is a hypostasis of God. Thus the Name is closely related to the being of God. So YHWH in His Name comes to Israel and has dealings with them. “Therefore the decisive act of revelation by which Israel is chosen as Israel and becomes the people of this God, is the revelation of the name of God.” However, in content, Barth affirms that the revelation of the Name is actually a refusal to give any name, intended to express the hiddenness of God. Further, he connects the revelation of the Name with the covenant, “to have knowledge of the name of YHWH, and to that degree, knowledge of YHWH Himself, and to participate in his revelation, is to be a partner in the covenant made by Him.” By connecting the two, revelation and the covenant, his point receives also an ethical Gestalt. This ethical concern is the subject of a later part in Volume I of the Dogmatics, where in more details, Barth works out the implications of revelation in the human life.

According to Barth the concern in the NT is the same, God a second time, i.e. where He is even more direct in Jesus Christ. “This is the whole point with Jesus. His concern is not with something new, but with that which is first and primal with the God who wills to be God and to be known as God a second time in a different way, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who wills to be revered in His name and hallowed in His name.” The conclusion here is that God, in his freedom in the act of revelation, differentiates Himself from Himself.

At this point the focus shifts from the Predicate (self - revealing) to the Subject of revelation, God. Barth makes another differentiation about God, namely, that He is absolutely free to reveal or not to reveal Himself. And, secondly that in His revelation God still remains hidden, “God is always a mystery.” For Barth this is evident from Exodus 3, where he understands that God refused to give a name. The accent was on the act of revelation and the subject of revelation. God comes to man and reveals Himself. God gives Himself to be known, although he does not reveal all about Himself. There remains, always, a certain mystery about God,
which man cannot know. This hiddenness of God, for Barth, is of a positive character, for it ‘protects’ God, so to say, from the knowing man. This is another critical point, because it is here that it becomes more than obvious that, ultimately, the identity of God for Barth is informed by enlightenment rationality. What one cannot know about is not a matter of bewilderment, prayer or a cry but a matter of attributing it to the essence of God. This is not a matter of the believer struggling to understand the apparent absence of God but a matter of theological knowledge. Nor is the existential struggle of the believer to understand God and the way He is present in the act of revelation.

Revelation is a historical event aimed at the human in a specific, historical place and time. Not everything that is historical is also revelation. That revelation is historical means that the Bible always understands what it calls revelation as a concrete relation to a concrete person in a certain place and time. Biblical revelation is best understood as saga, and not as a myth. A saga tells history un-historically; on the other hand myth does not intend to be history but only pretends to be as such. “The fact that in revelation, as in history, the reference is to a definite event which is different from every other event and which is thus incomparable and cannot be repeated. …[R]evelation comes vertically from heaven.”

Revelation is not universal, or a general manifestation, but it is directed and specific. It is directed towards the human, and, for Barth, it is most specific in the sacraments and most fully in Christology. Thus, God’s specific revelation is at the heart of Barth’s doctrine of revelation. However the immediacy of revelation gains priority over the historical revelation. It has been noted by other theologians that Barth does not do much, for example, with the historical Jesus. We do not refer here at the Leben Jesu Forschung, but rather at the fact that in Barth’s theology, the immediacy of the experience of revelation, has priority over its historicity. Van der Kooi rightly notes, then, “it is clear what Barth is trying to say. The knowledge of God is not possible through a historical knowledge of Jesus. The ‘worldly’ Jesus becomes a sacrament of God’s presence through God’s mercy. Historical and literary research will never lead to faith.”

Many Barth specialists are of the conviction that the work of Barth cannot be categorized as purely exegetical or systematic. The two disciplines converge seamlessly and form a dialectic theology par excellence. In our opinion Barth’s work does not harbor any nostalgia back to the Church Fathers or the Middle Ages. It shows rather a rigorous engagement with the times of his day. In Barth’s work, the problem of modern theology becomes even clearer. Barth, in many ways, managed to cut himself loose from the liberal school of his day, thus becoming the father of the neo-orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. But, as we have noted above, there are two critical instances where his work shows the same kind of problems we were describing in our opening chapter. The problem simply put is this: Barth defines who God is both in His revealed hypostasis and His hiddenness. His theology of God is driven on a fundamental level from (modern) epistemology and not ontology. Even though Barth argues for the primacy of God in theology, it is ultimately an epistemological judgment and not an ontological meeting with the presence of God. God is not free but bound to the logic of modern rationality.

211 CD I/1, 325.
212 CD I/1, 329.
214 Van der Kooi, C., Als in een spiegel, God Kennen volgens Calvijn en Barth: een Tweeluik, tweede druk, (Kampen: Kok, 2004), 252.
3.3.5. **Conclusions**

We briefly point out the following: there are two major tendencies in which Exodus 3:14 has been interpreted through the ages. First, the ontological perspective has been pertinent, especially among early church fathers and medieval theologians. The question of being, existence and essence have been important due to the widespread use of the Septuagint, or rather, the Greek language and all its philosophical implications. Language as such is the product of a certain way of thinking and of a certain worldview. Therefore, we see a strong correlation between: a. the Greek translation of Ex. 3:14 and its ontological overtone and b. the subsequent theological and philosophical discussions on it. However this does not mean that the early Christian theologians and the medieval theologians talked about God in terms of Greek philosophy. The contrary is true, in their work they highlighted that the interpretation of Ex. 3:14 is best understood in terms of the biblical theology. Consequently the identity of God also became clear as the One who, not only is, but also God who acts in the lives of His people. It is in His acts that YHWH reveals His identity as the identity of this God that they made clear in contrast to philosophically constructed human ideas about God. In the interpretation of Calvin it becomes even clearer how the identity of God is not merely found in the right exegesis and understanding of the passage. For him God’s being is not contingent on a grammatical construct but on the covenant history of YHWH with Israel. In the covenant relationship is His identity revealed.

Second, in modernity, epistemological interpretations eclipsed the ontological interpretations. Questions of meaning, significance and rationality were emphasized. Kant has brought an end to the age of ontological arguments for the existence of God. The enlightenment and modern theology started with epistemology, i.e. seeking to know God through the human capacity and reason. Therefore, our initial question might seem odd, for we are asking the question: *who is God?* About whom are we talking when we talk about God? What presuppositions underlie our talk about God? These are ontological questions in nature. The identity question should give an answer to our questions. This does not mean that we are seeking to reconstruct the medieval conception of the passage. Rather, we take both the medieval and the modern interpretations seriously and ask *again* the question *who is God?* even though it sounds odd.

The short reception history of Ex. 3:14 has brought several things to light. As we suspected the reception history has uncovered not only the tendencies in the field of interpretation but also how theology and talking about God has changed through the ages. From the Fathers to the Reformers theology served the intellectual basis of the Church’s talk of God. Theology was a discipline, which encompassed many other disciplines on the field of divinity. The various disciples had a certain confluence about them. Another aspect is that Biblical theology was foundational to theology in general. It also offered critical material in engaging with those who thought otherwise. This interpretation history also presents us with further material for what we mean by *talk of God* and the *identity of God*. The first two chapters of our work offered a contemporary theological discussion on the issues of modern theology. This chapter in turn is a biblical theological and historical discussion on the same issues. It helps us further develop our own talk of God considering the identity of God. We are not alone in this endeavor but join theologians through the ages in exploring what it means to talk about the identity of God.

**Summary**

First, we have looked at the context in which the revelation of the Name of God took place in Exodus 3. We have argued that one of the main themes of the introductory chapters of the book of Exodus is the *absence of God*. We have dealt with this theme from two perspectives:
from a textual perspective and from an existential perspective. We noted that God has been left out of the main thrust of the narrative. This was not coincidental, but rather an essential narrative feature in the book of Exodus. Theologically, we referred to this as the hiddenness of God. The conclusion was that the nature of God’s hiddenness does not refer to non-existence, but rather to hidden presence. This means that God is indirectly present as the One to Whom the Israelites pray and cry out to.

From the other perspective, we dealt with the theme of the absence of God as a human experience. We focused on two key words that provided us a gateway into the human experience of the hiddenness of God. The two words were cry and groan. The human experience of the hiddenness of God, in the biblical literature, is a negative experience, often expressed through songs of lament, prayers of bewilderment. We also noted that the Scriptures do not provide any explanation for the phenomenon of the absence or the hiddenness of God. We saw this as a contradiction to the modern optimism and post-modern preference for the mystery of God.

The theme of the identity of God was the second point from the Exodus narrative that we handled. We have identified the Exodus 3:1-16 passage as an encounter between God and Moses. The encounter was a crucial turning point, for this was where God revealed His identity and purposes for Moses and Israel. We argued that God was indeed present to Moses. In their encounter was the Name of God revealed. Consequently we focused on the dialog between Moses and YHWH. During the dialogue, two identities became clear. The identity of Moses became clear as the one who was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Following this, the identity of God was revealed. He revealed Himself as the One who has the name “I AM who I AM”. The Name signifies the continual presence of YHWH with Israel. God, who historically was the God of the Fathers, is their God at that present moment and will be their God in the future. Furthermore we have shown the distinction between the historicity and the actuality of the presence of God, and argued that the two though distinct from each other are nevertheless essentially identical. So, when we talk about the identity of God, we are talking about the identity of the actual (here and now, experiential) presence, and about the historic presence of God.

The third point concerns the goal of revelation and the knowledge of the Name. Here we agreed with Childs that the ultimate end of the revelation of the Name and the knowledge of God is not to satisfy our hunger for knowledge or our curiosity, but to raise our awareness of the presence of God as we worship Him. We worship the God who is present, whom we know from the testimony of the Scriptures and who is still a mystery to us even as He is present among us. It is not the mystery of something or someone unknown, but the mystery of the One we know, because he has revealed Himself.

We closed the chapter with a short reception history where we have discussed some of the main lines of interpretations of Exodus 3:14 as it relates to the theology of God. The scope of the reception history spans from the early Christian writers through the middle ages up to modernity. We have seen how in the various ages the passage has been interpreted through the concerns of that specific time. The reception history also shows that up to modernity the passage has been interpreted as telling about the being of God, which is contrary to the modern interpretative difficulties.

There are three significant points we made in the above treatment of Ex. 3:14 and its reception history. First, the revelation of God and His Name is an answer to the cries, groaning and bewilderment of Israel. YHWH revealed Himself in the midst of suffering and pain as God. Second, the revelation of God is also His presence both actually and historically. Revelation is
not merely an epistemic exercise, but an encounter with the presence of God. Athanasius, Thomas and Calvin in their interpretations have also argued for a biblical theological understanding of God against a philosophical construing of God. For them the dramatic of God’s absence and bewilderment is less spelled out because they know God as Jesus Christ. The third point we made was God’s fundamental hiddenness as a positive theological statement and nuanced our statement as contrary to Barth’s affirmation of God’s hiddenness in His primary objectivity. God’s hiddenness is not part of His being, as Barth would affirm it, but it has to do with the human experience of the absence of God. Even though we know God in His revelation, we do not have Him in our grip. This is precisely what will become more evident in the next chapter.
Chapter 4 - The identity of God in the Book of Ezekiel

4.1. Introduction
In the previous chapter we have argued that the identity of God has to do with the actual presence of God with His people. God’s presence with His people is not a static presence but rather an active presence throughout their history. The presence of God also has to do with locality. God has concretely acted in time and space. Therefore it is possible to historically reflect and talk about the presence of God. The Book of Ezekiel deals with this very historicity of the identity of God. In the prophecies YHWH’s involvement with the people of Israel becomes even more evident. Their history is a reflection on the Name, on God Himself, because precisely in their history is YHWH God. The whole of the book is a testimony to the events, which are in essence the validation of YHWH as God, not only in Israel, but also in and among all the nations. This is the reason why it is crucial for us to look at Ezekiel’s prophecies for they further establish important aspects of the identity of God.

At the outset of this chapter, we need to make a few methodological notes as we engage with the prophetic texts. In the previous chapter, we dealt with narrative. In this chapter, we are working with a genre, which has its own characteristics. In our approach to these prophetic texts, considering the aims of our research, we have to note that the merits of the prophetic texts are not based on whether or not what has been prophesied came to pass, as it would be in a historical-critical approach. This does not mean that in our exegetical reading of the text we do not deal with the historical aspects of the text. We certainly do because the theology, i.e. talk of God, is formulated in terms of historical events. But for our research this means that the historical and the phenomenological are not the aims in themselves. Rather they are subservient for the systematic theological reading of the text. This is only to make clear that we are interested in the evocative aspects of the texts.

The guiding question of our study in this chapter is: what are these prophetic texts reminiscent of? Or, to put it more specifically: what is it that they evoke, theologically, regarding the identity of God? Prophetic language and texts are not strictly descriptive, but evocative in nature. Methodologically, this means that we do not move from history to the text, but from the text towards history. The texts open up windows into historical events from a theological perspective. Just as in the previous chapter, we want to make clear that our aims are neither strictly exegetical nor historical, but theological, so we read the texts as a systematic theologian, and make use of exegesis for better understanding of the various nuances of the text. Basically, we will read through the text and make theological observations along the way. These observations, in turn, will serve as the main material for our discourse.

These methodological considerations allow us to continue with our focus on the Name as the key locus for talking about the identity of God. Having established that our main focus is theological, we still need to refine our point of view. We are specifically interested in how the ‘talk’ about God comes to expression in the prophecies of Ezekiel. In the book we can identify two specific theological concepts which function as identifiers for God: kābōd and šēm.215 The first refers to the Glory of God related to the presence of God in the worship of Israel. The second refers to the Name also as an indicator of the presence of God. There is

some discussion on the extent and the nature of the presence of God. Mettinger in his study of the kābōd and šēm theologies of the book of Ezekiel makes a certain distinction between the two.216 The kābōd theology in his opinion refers to an immanent theology of the presence of God, whereas the šēm theology, in turn, refers to the transcendence of God. Even though the differentiation is possible, in our work we will not want to follow Mettinger’s dichotomy.

In this chapter, we see the Name and the Glory as complementary theological terms which indicate the presence of God. Within this there is indeed a differentiation possible. The Glory stands for the cultic presence of YHWH. Glory is often associated with the Temple and the accompanying rituals, thus indicating the cultic presence of YHWH. The Name, on the other hand, is an indicator of the historic presence of YHWH. He is present in the events of the history of His people Israel. While ‘Glory’ is the cultic manifestation of YHWH’s presence and so bound by cultic rituals, the Name is the public manifestation of YHWH’s presence, not only to those who are participating in the cult, but also for those who are outside of it. Because the Name has this strong historical aspect, we will focus our attention on it in this chapter. We cannot, however, talk about the Name, without having to talk about the Glory, because both are indicative of the same, namely the presence of God. Both are tied to the identity of God.

Our preference for these theological concepts is not an arbitrary choice. They are not only important as theological terms in general, but also form the core building blocks of the theology of God in the Book of Ezekiel. The three visions of the kābōd constitute the main thread of the book. The first vision (ch.1-3) of the kābōd is also the calling of the prophet. Ezekiel receives the vision at the river Chebar, this places him in exile. The location of the vision is important and we will give more attention to that later. The second vision (ch. 8-11) of the kābōd is when the prophet sees the departure of God from the Temple and Jerusalem. The third and final vision (ch. 40-48) of the kābōd is the return of God to the restored Temple in Jerusalem. In between these three visions of the kābōd come the two prophecies of the restoration of Israel (ch. 20 and 36), which will happen in the ‘name’, (šēm) of God. Further, in between these five ‘pillars’ are the pronouncements of judgment on the nation of Israel and the neighboring nations. The five loci mentioned above form the main theology of God in the book of Ezekiel. It is this theology that we are specifically interested in.

One of the most significant sentences in the book is the reoccurring “recognition formula” 217 : ־הוּא אֱלֹהִי וְעַם יִשְׂרָאֵל (They shall know that I am the LORD). Every act of judgment and restoration in the book is a pointer towards the fact that YHWH is God both in Israel and among the nations. The constant repetition218 of the recognition formula seems to suggest that something has been lost and it has to be reaffirmed, namely, that YHWH is God despite of all the other gods that the nations and Israel are worshiping in idolatry. This recognition formula gives the book an even stronger theological impetus. The matter of YHWH proving Himself God in Israel is a theological, an epistemological and a historical matter. The place where ultimately YHWH proves Himself God, and where His Name is cleared, is in the history of Israel, and the history of the nations. YHWH is not a dislocated God or an abstract thought

216 Mettinger, The Dethronement of Sabaoth “The differences between these theologies may not be neglected. The Kabod theology follows the theology of immanence promulgated by the Zion-Sabaoth theology, while the Name theology emphasizes instead God’s transcendence. However, our discussion of the connotations implicit in šēm and kābōd which made these terms useful for theological restatement has shown that a historical connection once existed between the concepts of the ‘Name’ and the ‘Glory.’” 133.


who only acts outside or beyond the history of His people. YHWH proves Himself God through His acts in the lives of His people and the nations. Thus the knowledge of God is connected to the acts of God in history. According to Ezekiel, His acts in history are theologically qualified acts: judgment and restoration. In the judgment and restoration, it will become evident that YHWH is indeed God, and they will serve as the criteria for the knowledge of God. YHWH will be known as God, not only among His people, but also among the nations surrounding Israel. In what follows, we will explore this thought in more detail. Here it will suffice to say that the recognition formula is a significant feature of the text and that is has profound implications for the understanding of the text.

The basic structure of the book features God, who talks to and through the prophet (Ezekiel) to the nation of Israel and to the neighboring peoples, the nations. The (The word of the LORD came to me) formula introduces most of the visions and prophecies in the book. This is indicative of the dependence of the prophet on God. The prophet, from a functional perspective, is the mouthpiece of God. The prophets were the ones through whom God was speaking to the people. The message of the prophets was indirectly God’s message. False prophets were singled out on this very issue, for not having received their message but for having fabricated it. Prophets had a unique position with regard to the political and cultic leaders of their day. They were somehow independent, by the nature of their calling, to be spokesmen for God. This independency put them in a position from which they were able to be critical of the status quo of the nation, addressing cultic impurity and social degradation. Prophets, during and after the heyday of the monarchy, were often met with opposition because they were heralds of doom and judgment. Their critical visions were unsettling for the status quo of their day, thus making them unpopular. In essence, the marginalization of the prophet meant the marginalization of the Word of God and the absence of God, which ultimately lead to secularization and apostasy.

This is a very specific kind of secularization and we have to differentiate between two kinds. The first is the more modern understanding of secularization, namely, the loss of any religious inclination on the part of the participants. In our second chapter we have described this in more detail when we have looked at the profile of Miskotte’s ‘fourth man’. This kind of secularization is the abandonment of religiosity and participation in anything religious. God talking to humanity or talk about God is irrelevant and impossible. The second kind of secularization, the kind the prophet was addressing is the secularization of the religious human being. This has nothing to with a full abandonment of religion; it is rather the understanding that religion is a matter of cultural and national good. This kind of religious secularization happens when the religious institution becomes an end in itself by loosing its sacramental value. It does not point anymore in the direction of the reality of God, but it points only to itself. In Israel, this meant the abandonment of the exclusive worship of YHWH and the de-sacramentalization of the temple. It is in this secular context that Ezekiel preached judgment and restoration.

In what follows, we will approach the theology in the Book of Ezekiel from two perspectives: first, from the perspective of judgment of God, and second, from the perspective of restoration. Judgment is the theological concept, which enables us to talk about the absence of God, specifically, in terms of the negative history of Israel, the departure of the kābōd from

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219 We are aware that the word ‘religion’ is not self-evident. In a barthian understanding, anything religious is a matter of natural theology, thus it must be rejected. When we talk about religion in this context, we talk about a definition of what religion is. It does not have to do with natural theology, but rather with a broad understanding of what it means to participate and be part of a certain religious group. We choose this broad approach because we want to indicate as clearly as possible our understanding of what secularism is.
the Temple and the vulnerability of God. The theological concept of restoration allows us to talk about the presence of God in terms of the kābōd being in exile, and the vindication of the Name of God through Israel’s restoration and testimony. This approach allows us to continue where we left off in the previous chapter. It also allows us to continue in the same direction as we started at the beginning, namely to talk about the identity of God. It leads onto the next chapter, where we will explore in more detail the identification of the Name of God with Jesus Christ.

4.2. Judgment and the absence of God
From the outset, it is important to point out that judgment ought to be understood in terms of the special bond between YHWH and His people Israel. This special bond is rooted in the events of the Exodus. On Mount Sinai, YHWH, through Moses, carved the terms of the covenant to which the people of Israel subsequently agreed. In its essence, a covenant stipulates the terms of relationship of the participants. It is not a relationship of equals, nor is it a mere partnership; it is in its historical Middle Eastern understanding, a vassal relationship. But even more so in the fabric of the entire biblical narrative it is best understood as a love relationship, a romance, a marriage covenant between a woman and a man. The terms faithfulness, jealousy, infidelity are best understood in the context of the relationship in which God pursues Israel as His beloved. The identities of the participants in the covenantal agreement are very important. This is the reason why the Exodus narrative starts with the self-identification of YHWH as the God of Israel and the initiator of the covenant. In the acts of the Exodus, Israel’s identity also becomes clear; they are the people who are tied to YHWH. In the covenant, the identities become intertwined and interrelated. What YHWH does with His people reflects on Him as God and on them as the people of God. The opposite is also true. How Israel lives reflects on who YHWH is. Thus the relationship between YHWH and Israel is a matter of identity and this is precisely what is at stake in Ezekiel’s understanding of the judgment. It’s not merely the reputation of YHWH’s Name that is at stake; it is also the understanding of who God is and the well-being of his people.

There is also an inner and an outer dynamic of YHWH’s commitment to Israel. The inner dynamic concerns the direct relationship of YHWH with His people. The relationship is stipulated by the decalogue and the rest of the cultic and social laws. This was not merely a cultic relationship, meaning a vertical relationship. It was also a social, horizontal, relationship among the people of God. It regulated both the horizontal and the vertical relationships. This bond was also a mediated relationship, through the temple and the law as visible signs of the relationship.

The outer dynamic of the relationship of YHWH with Israel is mainly focused on the position of Israel among the other nations. This is where we need to highlight the sacramental aspect of Israel’s identity. The relationship was not merely an inner matter between YHWH and Israel. It also had outer implications. Israel, as a nation, with their worship of YHWH as God, were to testify to the nations that YHWH is indeed God not only for and in Israel, but over all

220 Ex. 20.
221 We realize that the use of the word covenant subsequently might seem technical. But the marriage metaphor is what gives it its depth and fullness of meaning. The way we use the word covenant is not meant to indicate the classic reformed discussions on election and predestination. The term ‘covenant relationship’ is meant to protect us from the danger of trivializing the relationship with God as a casual friendship.
222 Ex. 32:7-14. After the Golden Calf incident in the wilderness YHWH was ready to abandon Israel and move on in a new direction. But Moses said to YHWH that by abandoning Israel will cause the nations to wonder about His identity as God of Israel.
the nations of the earth. Just as sacraments point towards the reality of God, in the same way Israel was to point towards YHWH. The worship of YHWH was not only self-serving but was also the way YHWH ruled over all the earth. Judgment is imminent, in the book of Ezekiel, because of Israel’s sins. They have failed, in terms of failing a ‘marital relationship,’ they have become unfaithful to YHWH. By this unfaithfulness they have also compromised their ‘sacramental identity.’

Apart from the dynamic love relationship between YHWH and Israel, the issue of judgment does not make sense in biblical theology and in the prophecies of Ezekiel. As pointed out earlier, this bond is also a matter of identities, both for YHWH and for Israel. Since ‘judgment’ is a theologically laden word in Ezekiel, we want to explore here the matter of ‘the absence of God.’ We will do this by first looking at the perceived absence of God. The main question is: what are some of the human experiences of the absence of God? It is similar to what we have done in the previous chapter; however, here we will limit ourselves to the book of Ezekiel and leave out the reception history because it is in this case not about a single pericope. Second, we will look at the negative history of Israel, the Exodus pattern. The prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 20, reviews the history of Israel’s failing to come to terms with their God. The Exodus narrative serves as the backdrop for Ezekiel’s historical revision. Third, we will look at the significance of the departure of the kābōd from the Temple. The absence of God is not only a matter of experience but also a question of where God is. Where is he to be found? These three focal points will provide a more accurate picture of what we mean by the absence of God.

4.2.1. The perceived absence of God

“They defiled their ways and their deeds.” Ez. 36:17 This is an indication of the state that the people of God are in. There is cultic unfaithfulness (the defiling of the Temple by idol worship, there is religious syncretism and the neglecting of Sabbath) and social collapse (no care for the poor, twisted political alliances with foreign nations) in the nation of Israel. We can also talk about this in terms of the secularization of Israel. The cultic and the social are interrelated. The covenant was not strictly a cultic tool, but also had its social directives and implications. The collapse of Israel as a nation resulted in exile. The exile is often characterized as a moment of the absence of God from the lives of His people. Further in this chapter, we will elaborate more on the connection between exile and the absence of God.

The absence of God led to a cultic decadence. In chapter 3, we talked about the absence of God in terms of human experience, which meant, not that God was absent, but that the experience of His presence was absent, which left the believer in bewilderment. “We have heard with our ears, O God, our ancestors have told us, what deeds you performed in their days,” Psalms 44:1. says the psalmist, but where is the LORD now? The experience of the absence of God leads the believer to a cry, to a prayer of wondering about the deeds and the ways of God. In the book of Ezekiel, we are dealing with a different kind of experience of the ‘hiddleness’ of God. At a certain point the prophet, in a vision, is asked to go into the innermost sanctuary of the Temple, and see what the priests are doing in the dark. The text seems to suggest that they are hiding. The priests and the Temple officials, who are hidden, say the following: “The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.” Ez. 8:12. Out of their own hiding, they project on God’s absence and hiddleness. The LORD receives the

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223 Ez. 36:17
224 Psalm 44:1.
225 Ez. 8:12.
blame for being an absent God, when in actuality what they are doing is the exact opposite; it is their hiddenness that is the problem, and not God’s absence.

The experience of the hiddenness of God in the book of Ezekiel does not lead to a cry of desperation; it leads to secularization. Since God does not see, since He is uninvolved, the people say ‘we will follow our own ways,’ ‘we will make idols and gods in our image.’ God from this perspective is not an entity as such; He is an intrinsic part of the human intellect. This means that the word ‘god’ has its origin, not in experience, but in reflection and projection of the human ability to think. In modern discussions, as we have already seen in the previous chapters, it is Kant’s Critique that summarized this issue best. Secularization, as we have mentioned before, from a theological perspective, is the loss of the otherness of God. Some might argue that concluding this from this text is taking it too far, since ancient texts do not necessarily address modern problems. To a certain degree this criticism is true. However, we see the same kind of patterns emerging as we read these texts. There is a certain secularization taking place in Israel, and the prophets are reacting to that. It is a secularization hallmarked by the projection of the elders of Israel.

This issue is taken up further by the prophet. Among the most interesting features of the book are YHWH’s quotations of Israel. YHWH addresses the resentments of Israel by quoting them; as if the words were taken from the mouths of the people. “Yet your people say: ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just.” It seems that the people of Israel came to the conclusion that the ways of the Lord were not fair, probably due to its sacrificial demands. Maybe the ways of the LORD were not just because they did not support the status quo. Maybe because the ways of the LORD led into a different direction then they thought. In the face of Israel’s objection came the judgment of God. It was their own injustice that they projected on the ways of the LORD. The absence of God does manifest itself, but it is the result of the denial of YHWH and his covenant.

The consequence was a reaction from YHWH, which established the charges directly against Jerusalem, and indirectly against the people of Israel. Jerusalem is often the focus of the judgment prophecies, since it is the cultic and political centre of the nation. What happened in Jerusalem had an affect on the whole of the nation. Note that the charges went out first to those in charge of the political affairs, second, to those responsible for the religious affairs, and third, to the people. “Its princes within it are like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows within it. Its priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Its officials within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, and destroying lives to get dishonest gain. Its prophets have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD’, when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress.”

The princes and the political leaders were charged with neglecting their duties on a social and political level. They have made themselves rich and oppressed the poor. The priests and the false prophets have defiled the Temple with their immoral practices. The neglecting of the Sabbath was highlighted as a specific. “Singling out the Sabbath from all the laws attests to its

226 Ez. 33:17.
significance as a distinguishing feature of YHWH’s people.” This is again a matter of being identified as the people of YHWH and not acting as such. Ultimately, the Name of God was damaged. And the people followed after their leaders in their abominable deeds. What is at stake here is that Israel, as a nation, lives as if there is no God. In the secularization of the nation the absence of God became even more evident. The absence of God here had to do with the projections of a secularizing nation. This is what ultimately brought damage to the identity and the Name of God. His people testified to His absence rather than to His presence. This happened on a cultic and on a political level. The perceived absence of God and the consequent acts of Israel brought the damage to the Name of God. Considering this, a reaction of God and thus judgment is inevitable.

4.2.2. The negative history of Israel or ‘the Exodus pattern’

In the prophecies of Ezekiel, it becomes clear that the unfaithfulness of Israel to YHWH is not something incidental but symptomatic. “The intervening historical review plays an important part in establishing that present sins were symptomatic of radical willfulness and the climax of a trend that made the exile inevitable.” Before we move on to describe the symptomatic nature of Israel’s unfaithfulness, we first have to make some preliminary comments about the way Ezekiel makes use of the Exodus narratives to describe the ‘present’ state of his contemporaries.

History, in the book of Ezekiel is very much related to the earlier narratives which have been formative for the identity of the people of Israel. “Ezekiel searched out and amplified negative traditions available to him.” History has a very specific function, namely actualization. History is not merely a phenomenological description of past events, but rather an occasion for critical analysis. This means that history is utilized to explain and to evaluate the prophet’s situational present. Greenberg says: “…Exodus and the wilderness wanderings …have been adapted to serve this message. Early Israel has been made over to mirror the prophet’s conception of the present apostatizing generation. So the theme of rebellion during the wandering has been radically schematized and modernized.” In other words, looking back is a way of looking into the present and, consequently, into the future. The past gives meaning to the prophet’s present realities of his time. Furthermore, history, in the book, also serves the theological critique of Israel’s covenant relationship with YHWH. By looking back into the past, a certain pattern emerges: namely a pattern of Israel’s symptomatic unfaithfulness to YHWH. “History was repeating itself, it is implied, and spores of doom sown long ago were now spawning their terrible harvest.” The pattern of the past indicates that the unfaithfulness of Israel will lead to the inevitable judgment of God, the exile. Thus history serves both as a factor of actualization and as a theological critique.

We will focus more detailed on the negative history of Israel and the theological patterns emerging out of it. The first part of Chapter 20 in the book of Ezekiel is our main text. The chapter starts with some of the elders, leaders of Israel, who come to the prophet and inquire about the will of the LORD. The twist in the text is that the LORD refuses to answer them. The reason for refusing to answer to the elder’s inquiry is their unfaithfulness to YHWH. Their unfaithfulness is in line with the negative history of Israel, from the desert wanderings

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228 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 366.
231 Allen, Ezekiel 20-48, 15.
232 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 383.
of the Exodus up to their own days. The perspective of the review is also important, for it is YHWH who asks the prophet to analyze the history of Israel.

A careful reading of the text shows a certain structure in Ezekiel’s revision of Israel’s history. First, Israel’s rebellion goes all the way back to Egypt (vs. 5-9), where YHWH revealed Himself as their God and promised the exodus and a new land. Then He asked the Israelites for exclusive worship. This meant the abandonment of the Egyptian idols. But the Israelites rebelled and did not abandon their false gods. YHWH acted for the sake of His Name, and instead of wiping them out, again for the sake of His Name, He led them into the wilderness. Second, in the wilderness (10-17) YHWH give His covenant to the people as a sign of their relationship. This meant that they had to keep to the statutes and the ordinances of the covenant. But the house of Israel rebelled against YHWH in the wilderness as well. For the sake of His name, YHWH held back on His anger. He took the promise of a new land away from the Exodus generation and entered into a new covenant with their children. Third in the wilderness part II (18-26) the following generation did no do better than the previous generation. YHWH’s reaction was the same; He intervened but did not destroy them because that would have given reason for profanity and cynicism in the eyes of the nations. Ezekiel’s critical conclusion of Israel’s history is that they from generation to generation did not keep to the covenant — Thus says the Lord GOD: In this again your ancestors blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. Fourth, in the land (27-29) those who were settled in the land, through to the present generation, did the same as their ancestors. They found reasons, places and sacrifices to offer to idols. This was ultimately the reason why God was silent in the midst of those who came to the prophet to inquire about His will.

The structure of Israel’s negative history is evocative of the theological themes of the ‘marital’ loyalty and the vulnerability of God. On an elementary level, the bond between YHWH and Israel functions according to the logic of cause and effect. With being associated with YHWH, publicly, came also responsibility on the side of the people of God. As long as they kept themselves within the bounds of loyalty (cause) blessings followed (effect). The opposite is also true. Unfaithfulness resulted in judgment, which ultimately ensued in exile. But remorse and conversion also led to the rehabilitation of the bond between YHWH and the people of Israel. Beyond the basic logic of the covenant relationship, we see an unexpected dynamic, namely, the vulnerability of YHWH. Since He attached His Name to his people, from the Exodus, through the wilderness and in the land the unfaithfulness of His people reflected badly on His Name. Each section of the negative historical survey has a certain pattern to it. First, YHWH presents Himself as the covenant partner. Second, the sins of the people of Israel are highlighted. Third (this is the most important), YHWH intervenes, for the sake of His Name, in order to keep the sanctity of His identity. By entering into and intervening in the lives of His people, YHWH becomes vulnerable, not only in Israel, but also in the sight of the nations. “YHWH’s commitment to Israel could not be broken without a slur being cast on his reputation. Sensitive to the prospect of misrepresentation, YHWH continued the relationship, remaining constant to his self-revelation and promises.”

YHWH, by entering, keeping, and acting according to the covenant, limits Himself to the history of His people. The history of Israel is the history of YHWH. Through the negative history of Israel, damage has been done to the identity of God. However, there is also another aspect of the covenant. Since it is in history that the damage has been done, it is also in history that the restoration of the people will take place. The restoration of Israel forms the focus of

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234 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 377.
235 Ezekiel 20:27.
236 Allen, Ezekiel 20-48, 10.
the second section of this chapter. Restoration and not judgment has the last word in the lives of God’s people. Restoration happens because the Name of God has to be restored both in Israel and among the nations. The absence of God in the negative history of Israel has to be understood in terms of the covenant relationship. The judgment is a sign of the absence of God; however, it is justified by the warnings in the covenant stipulations. In spite of the negative history of Israel, YHWH is still prepared to attach Himself to His people. This is a testimony to the vulnerability of God, who again risks damage to His identity as YHWH.

4.2.3. The departure of the kābōd from the temple

Earlier, following Mettinger’s argument, we have said that there is a certain sequence to the visions of the divine kābōd. In the first vision, the prophet sees the kābōd at the river Chebar. He not only sees a vision of the glory of YHWH but also encounters it. This vision and encounter are part of the calling of the prophet and the validation of his prophecy as truly from YHWH. The second vision of the prophet is the vision of the kābōd leaving the temple of Jerusalem, as the culmination of God’s judgment over the cultic sins of Israel. This second vision is what we want focus on in this part of the present chapter. The third vision is the return of the kābōd to Jerusalem, for the renewal of the temple and of the people of Israel. By returning to Jerusalem, YHWH is again worshipped as God among his people in a restored relationship. On a basic level, the sequence of the visions move, as Mettinger outlined it, from the judgment of Israel to the restoration of Israel. This sequence is also what is characteristic to the whole of the book.

In a dramatic vision, Ezekiel sees the Glory of God leave the temple from Jerusalem. The preamble to this dramatic vision is the revelation of the cultic offences of Israel which took place in the temple, namely the idol worship of the ‘Elders,’ the leaders of Israel, and the worship of Tammuz by the women in Jerusalem. The rationale behind the cultic decadence is the projected absence of God: “The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.” The irony is that YHWH had not yet left Jerusalem, and all the idol worship was happening in His presence. He was absent from the perception of those who were responsible for the right worship in temple. The cultic decadence and perversion led to the miscorrelation between YHWH and His people. The worship of Israel was not reminiscent of YHWH anymore but of the gods of the nations. The only way out of this religious impasse was judgment in the form of exile and the consequent departure of YHWH.

The departure of the kābōd also signifies, theologically, the absence of God from His place, namely the cultic centre of Israel. The centralization of Israel’s worship is one of the major claims of the Book of Kings. By the centralization of the political power in Jerusalem the cultic centralization also has been envisioned as a guarantee against idolatry. The vision of a centered cult is polemic in nature. It has been envisioned but not realized. The negative history and the consequent exile is a testimony against this move. From the Book of Ezekiel it seems that, by the time of the prophet, Jerusalem and the temple have become the mediators.

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237 Ez. 11:23
238 Ezekiel 8:12
239 Talstra, E., “The Name in Kings and Chronicles,” in G.H. van Kooten (ed.) The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity (Themes in Biblical Narrative), (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2006), 55-70. Talstra also argues that whereas the Name is closely connected to the Temple in Kings, not so in Chronicles. A certain shift takes place, in light of the exile and the decentralization of the cult. The Name is called upon the people of Israel. They as people become thus the mediators of YHWH’s presence. In our study of the Book of Ezekiel, we have also seen the post-exilic vision of the people of Israel being renewed by the Spirit of God as also as a sign of YHWH’s presence with them.
of the presence of YHWH, specifically the cultic presence is expressed by the kābōd.\(^\text{240}\) The Temple was the set place where Israel was to worship their God. So Ezekiel’s vision of the departure of the kābōd from the temple was all the more significant, because it was a sign of the decentralization of Israel’s worship. The departure of YHWH and the exile of the people also presented one of the major theological crises in the history of Israel. It is a crisis of the absence of God from a cultic perspective. Since the people of Israel were in exile, where and how were they to worship God? In the absence of the religious symbols, such as the temple, the priests and the festivals how were they to worship YHWH? The prophet saw YHWH leave the temple. Where was He to be found? The departure of the kābōd from the temple addressed precisely these critical questions.

On the crisis of faith of Israel during the exile, Albertz notes “they felt that they had been struck by an inexplicable blow of fate which put in question everything that had been handed down to them, by priests, temple prophets and court theologians as the foundation of official belief in YHWH.”\(^\text{241}\) The basis of that theology was that YHWH, from His throne in the Temple, ruled the world through His anointed people.\(^\text{242}\) But with His absence from the Temple and the people being in exile, how could YHWH be God over all creation? Considering the historical and theological background, Ezekiel’s vision of the kābōd leaving the Temple and Jerusalem adds even more to the drama and the sense of crisis. And what happens, theologically, in the prophecies of Ezekiel?

Whereas, before the exile, the Glory and the Presence of God was fixed in a specific place, in the visions of Ezekiel a certain change takes place, which we have to address, theologically. Tuell notes the following, “in Ezekiel, however, the kābōd does not appear in the confines of sacred space. Here, the kābōd comes to the prophet in exile, in an unclean land.”\(^\text{243}\) This indicates precisely what is at stake here. The emphasis is not that YHWH is absent, but that He comes to His prophet in a foreign land. The departure of God from the temple can be explained theologically in terms of the sins of the people of Israel and the judgment. But His presence in a foreign land is a significant theological twist. This is a move away from the traditional view of the domestication of YHWH. “Ezekiel’s vision of the Glory of YHWH, therefore, was not a new reformulation of the royal theology of the Jerusalem temple. Rather, what Ezekiel saw was the presence of God as it was always manifested itself, even outside the temple mount, especially in the unclean regions outside of the land of Israel.”\(^\text{244}\)

YHWH followed His people into the exile. This move of YHWH also indicates one significant aspects of the covenant, namely that judgment is not the last word of the covenant. Judgment does not last forever, but it is aimed at preparing the way for the restoration of the people of God and the restoration of the Name of God. The absence of God from the temple meant crisis, His presence among the exiles meant salvation. YHWH is not to be fixed to a place; He is a God who moves to where His people are. He moves to where His Name is called upon.

\(^{240}\) Jer. 7.
Before we move on and talk about the restoration of the Name of God, we want to highlight the main points we have discussed on the absence of God. First, we have talked about the absence of God in terms of human perception. We have seen how that led, in Israel, to the denial of the presence of God among them. Second, we talked about the absence of God by following Ezekiel’s negative review of Israel’s history. Through the negative history, the consequences of unfaithfulness to God in history became apparent, namely, judgment. Finally, we have talked about the cultic absence of God, which led in Israel to idol worship. The departure of God from the cultic centre meant a theological reorientation for Israel. One step further was the realization that YHWH was movable. This meant that His presence, Glory, was not confined to the temple, but moved to wherever His people were. The Name is connected to the historical presence of God. In exile Israel realized that YHWH was not bound by the cultic mediation, but was present where His Name was called upon. It is a shift from a cultic kābōd theology towards a historical šēm theology. However it was not a linear development. At the end of the Book (Ez. 40-48) we saw YHWH returning to the Temple to take residence in it. This further showed YHWH’s gracious and vulnerable presence amidst His people.

Theologically, these three notions point to the identity of God. God is present among His people, not only through their cult but also outside of it. YHWH, by being present with His people, becomes vulnerable. The people’s history is a reflection on His Name. A negative history sheds a negative light on His Name. God, in his Glory, is not distant, but present in their midst. He also acts among them in judgment and restoration. By acting in their history, His Name, His identity, is restored as a sign of His presence.

4. 3. Restoration and the presence of God

So far, we have talked about the presence of God in terms of the kābōd in Ezekiel’s visions. We also said earlier that we would not work with a strict discrimination between the two terms, kābōd and šēm. In our opinion, the two are indicative of the same thing, namely the presence of God with His people. It is true that in Ezekiel’s prophecies the Glory of God is associated more with the Temple, and the Name with the restorative presence and acts of God. In what follows, we will focus on the indicator of the presence of God as the Name or šēm. The šēm plays an important role in the restoration passages of chapter 20 and 36. The Name and restoration, as theological loci, are intrinsically related in these passages. It is for the sake of His Name that YHWH will not wipe out the people of Israel, but will act to restore them. The restoration of Israel is, in essence, the restoration of the Name of God. The phrase for the sake of my Name is not to be understood as fame in modern terms, as with a personality cult. But it is to be understood, more appropriately, as the revelation of God to Israel, and through them to the nations. God is known as YHWH and through the lives of His people He displays His identity. What is at stake here is the public knowledge of YHWH. Often revelation is considered from the perspective of an intrapersonal epistemic event. But in the theology of the Book of Ezekiel, YHWH’s concern for His Name is a historical, thus public matter. This is in line with the recognition formulas, as mentioned before. The redemption of His Name, i.e. the identity of God, is the primary cause of YHWH’s acts in the life and history of Israel. Israel did not sanctify the Name, they did not offer YHWH exclusive worship. Therefore, God will sanctify his own Name among them and among the nations by re-establishing the people to the land.

245 Ez. 20:9, 14, 22; 36:22.
We have seen how history, for Ezekiel, has become a way of interpreting his present situation. By looking back on the history of his people, from the Exodus on, he comes to certain conclusions with regards to the negative history of Israel. Considering the past, judgment in the present is an inevitable consequence; in the restoration passages, history gains a new purpose. It is in history that YHWH will restore His people, and thereby also restore His Name. History becomes a matter of concern for His Name. Greenberg highlights the following: "Here for the first time, the main motive of history is God’s concern for his name (only ch. 36:16ff is comparable). Adjunct to this fresh motive is the extent of direct divine intervention in Israel’s destiny: issuing bad laws, defiling Israel’s cult, and forcing the people out of exile into a new covenant with him." Here history gains theological significance by providing the completion of the judgment and the prospect of restoration. These are not merely historical events, but events in which YHWH is present, pointing towards His Name, i.e. the identity of God. "The lesson of the past, (...), is that God’s concern for his name determined Israel’s destiny. God willed Israel to be his people; their refusal to comply resulted in calamity, but it was never final, so that God’s name should not be desecrated."

We can conclude that the Name is central to a theological understanding of Israel’s history, as Ezekiel envisioned the restoration of Israel. To better see this, we first need talk about the kābōd in Exile in order to note some important aspects of the theology of exile, i.e. talking about God in a foreign land. Second, we will go into the theological aspects of the restoration by talking about the much repeated phrase for the sake of my name. Third, we will focus on the restored identity of Israel. Since their identity is intertwined with the identity of God, the sacramental aspect of their identity comes into a sharper focus. By taking these three steps we will further be able to highlight some of the theological motifs related to the presence of God in his Name.

4.3.1. The kābōd in Exile

Mettinger, by comparing the various kinds of theologies in his study of the book of Ezekiel, traces a certain theological change that takes place. There is a shift that takes place in understanding of the whereabouts of God. In the "Shabaoth theology" of the temple and the monarchy, YHWH is present in Jerusalem and, more precisely, in the temple. There, in the city and in the temple, was the place where He was enthroned. Ezekiel’s vision of seeing Him leave the temple was thus a significant moment. The vision was all the more important because it implied a shift in understanding the presence of YHWH. "Certainly, then, we are justified in viewing Ezekiel’s inaugural vision, like the Sinai theophany, as a gracious self-revelation of YHWH’s kābōd – a revelation all the more remarkable for taking place not on the mountain of God, but in the valley of the river Chebar, in the land of exile." YHWH moves in His glory to the place where the exiles are. It is in a foreign land that He appears to the prophet, far from Jerusalem and the temple.

Tuell points further to the difference that one might notice comparing the mobility of the kābōd in the Exodus narratives and in Ezekiel. "[T]he presence of YHWH is experienced by means of the kābōd. ...[T]he kābōd travels with the tabernacle as the tribes journey from place to place in their wilderness wanderings, while, in Ezekiel, the kābōd comes to the prophet in exile by the river Chebar (chs. 3-1), removes itself from the Jerusalem temple (chs.

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246 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 382.
247 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 383.
248 The Shabaoth theology refers to the theology associated with the name of YHWH Shabaoth, meaning Lord of Hosts. This name of God is overtly present in the historical books of the Canon, like Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and some of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zachariah and Malachi.
8-11), and finally enters the grand temple of Ezekiel’s last glorious vision (chs. 40-48). …the kābōd theology has been regarded (…) as a response to the situation of exile, a way of expressing divine presence that is not tied to any particular location.” Theologically this is very significant. It again points towards an understanding of the God who is not confined to a certain place but is free to act in the lives of His people. This ought not to be interpreted from a wishful modernistic perspective, in which God is so immanent and transcendent at the same time that He has no concrete presence or history. Biblical theologically the absence of God form the temple has to do with judgment (as an act of God), and His presence in exile has to do with affection for His people. The theological discourse often tends to talk about God by using the ontological term ‘being’. This often leads to an understating of a God who is static, distant and ultimately unidentified. The radical theological turn that takes place in Ezekiel is expressed by the presence of YHWH in exile. It is a turn away from a general ontological understanding of God as ‘being’, towards an understanding of God who is present by acting in the history of His people precisely in the negative events of the judgment and exile. God’s presence in His acts forms the kernel of His identity. Thus, our talk about the identity of God becomes even more relevant for the present day discussions on the theology of God.

It was in the exile that the presence of God had to be reconsidered. There was a move back to a tradition, which was pre-monarchic and much closer to the Exodus. This is the shift that is apparent in the prophecies of Ezekiel. During the Exodus, as we have seen in our previous chapter, the Name was the central feature of the presence of God. “Exodus 23:21 tells us how God warned Israel, during her wanderings in the desert, to respect his angel and obey his voice, “for my name is in him. The Lord is present via his representative.” The presence of God in the wilderness wanderings was signified by the presence of His Name. What is interesting is that, again in a barren and foreign place, the Name became important. In the exile, there was a move towards a theology of šēm. “…the prophecy of Ezekiel presented a dramatic rethinking of the divine presence. YHWH has abandoned the traditional trappings of cultic presence, linked to temple, cult, city, and king. …YHWH’s presence would be experienced among YHWH’s people in exile.” This led Israel to the realization that, by calling on the Name, YHWH was present with them. One step further in the closing chapters of the book (ch.39-48), YHWH returned, not only among His people but He also took His place again in the temple. Even though YHWH is not dependent on the cultic mediation, He gracefully returns to that place. This withholds us from thinking that there is a certain evolution or theological progression in the book of Ezekiel from cultic to a private religiosity. A progressive understanding would imply the abandonment of the one for the sake of the other. It rather testifies of the gracious and vulnerable presence of YHWH and the dynamic theological discourse about His presence.

“It is God’s sovereign proclamation of his Name that is the guarantee of his presence.” A mistake could be made, at this point, namely, to conclude that, in the face of the absence of God, the Israelites projected a ‘god’ for themselves by calling this ‘god’ a ‘name.’ But the opposite is true. It was the realization of the possibility of calling on YHWH, because He had shown Himself not to be bound by the walls of the Temple. It is His movement out of the Temple, which was dramatic and at the same time a sign of hope, which reveals that YHWH is not a static God but a God who acts and intervenes in the lives of His people. Mettinger rightly summarizes what calling on the Name meant for an Israelite: “The proclamation of

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251 Mettinger, The Dethronment of Sabaoth, 125.
253 Mettinger, The Dethronment of Sabaoth, 125.
254 Mettinger, The Dethronment of Sabaoth, 127.
the Name does not compel the presence of the Lord. (...) ‘Imploring and expectant prayers and requests that look for a free and gracious self-revelation by YHWH.’ The Israelite has to do with a God who was not to be manipulated by cultic techniques. The coming God of the theophany was the sovereign God, so that even if the proclamation of the Name was performed by a human agent, it would be unwise to see in this act a case of magical manipulation.\textsuperscript{255}

This realization helps us in making the following two observations. The first observation is of the independence of YHWH, in revealing his Name. He is not bound by cultic paraphernalia nor by human agents; rather, YHWH is the only measure of Himself. This does not mean that the symbols of the cult are emptied of any sacred significance. It merely points to the fact that the given symbols are instrumental to the revelation of His presence. Just as we have talked about signs in our previous chapter, so the revelation of His Name symbolizes His presence among His people. The second observation has to do with the dependence of the human agent on the revelation of God. The invocation of the Name is not mechanical, but rather, relational. It requires the freedom of the one who is called upon, to also not answer the call. Since YHWH is free, so to say, to answer the call of His people, He does so only with regard to Himself. This becomes even more apparent in the two restoration chapters where the restoration of Israel is solely justified by YHWH’s concern for His Name.

4.3.2. For the sake of the Name

To better understand the presence of God in His Name, we will look at the restoration passage from Ezekiel chapter 36. Just as judgment was reminiscent of the absence of God, in the same way restoration is also indicative of the presence of God. What we notice first is that, in Ezekiel’s vision, YHWH has an active role in the restoration of Israel. The first person singular is a dominant feature of these verses. It indicates, on the one hand, the active role that YHWH has in the restoration process and on the other the passive role that Israel has. The subject of restoration is YHWH and the object is Israel. “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.”\textsuperscript{256} This is also in line with YHWH’s concern for His Name. The restoration is YHWH’s self-initiated act in the life of Israel.

The vision of the restoration is layered in several steps. The first step is the liberation and the gathering of Israel from the nations among which they have been scattered (vs. 24). The reason that they are scattered is the judgment of YHWH. Judgment is not something permanent but something that lasts for three of four generations. The promise of taking and gathering Israel is a sign of the end of the judgment period. The time of the renewal of the covenant relationship with YHWH has come. Not only will YHWH gather them, He will also bring them back into the land. This will be a sign to the nations, just as the judgment has been a sign, that YHWH is indeed the God of Israel.

The second step is the cultic cleansing of Israel (vs. 25). The sprinkled water will wash away the ‘uncleanness’ and they will be freed from their idols. YHWH and idol worship are mutually exclusive. Idol worship, in the book, is described in terms of whoring or prostituting oneself. The harshness of the image indicated the level of intimacy in the actual relationship of YHWH and His people. The book of Hosea makes a poignant note on the same issue.

The third step is the restoration of the ‘inner’ life of the people of God (vs. 26). Not only will there be a political restoration by coming back to the land, or a cultic restoration by the right

\textsuperscript{255} Mettinger, \textit{The Dethronment of Sabaoth}, 129.
\textsuperscript{256} Ez. 36:22
worship of YHWH, but there will be spiritual renewal as well. The word ‘spiritual’ ought not to be misunderstood. We do not mean modern definitions of spirituality. Rather, we pick up in the text, the notion that God will give His Spirit to the people. At the core of their lives and in their hearts, the Spirit of God himself will renew them.

The conclusion of these three steps is what we consider the crux of the passage: “Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” The restoration of Israel is the restoration of their identity as the people of YHWH. The land, the worship and the Spirit are the markers of their identity. But what is more important is that the intervention of YHWH is actually for the sake of His Name. His own identity as YHWH is intrinsically bound up with His people. God is not a static undefined being who exists apart from the reality of His people. He is YHWH because He is the God of Israel. By making His identity dependent on His people, He makes Himself vulnerable. His Name is scorned because of His people. The nations do not know that He is God because of His people. But the restoration will bring about the testimony, which also is the leitmotif in the whole of the book: and they will know that I am the LORD. In the pronoun they, Israel and the nations, are implied. The restoration of Israel is a ‘proof of God’. We mean ‘proof’, not in the philosophical sense of a rational construct, but we understand it in its historical sense, concerning certain events, i.e. judgment and restoration. In the judgment of Israel and of the Nations, and by their, restoration it will become clear that YHWH is indeed God. The identity of the true God will be clear. God will prove Himself to be true to His Name.

A fourth step towards the restoration of Israel is the restoration of the land, specifically, the fruits of the land. The land is part of the covenant triangle of YHWH, Israel and the land. Thus, it plays an essential role in the whole restoration process. YHWH will not only restore the land and the people, but He will also sustain them. He is not only a liberator God, or the God of revolutions, but He is the one who also cares and sustains His people as a sign of His presence with them. This fourth step also leads to further covenantal obligations, on the side of Israel, namely repentance and conversion. In their restoration, Israel will understand their place and will also understand their history as a history, which goes from liberation (Exodus), to obedience, to disobedience (Exile), to restoration and conversion. This history and the presence of YHWH with them are the markers of their identity as people of God. A step beyond the political, cultic and geographical restoration is the spiritual renewal of Israel.

4.3.3. The restoration of Israel’s heart

Ezekiel’s vision of the spiritual restoration is a vision of God’s radical intervention in the lives of His people. The political and the cultic are public matters, but the restoration of the heart is a personal matter. By personal, we do not mean a merely private sphere, but rather, the extent to which YHWH intervenes in the lives of His people. The spiritual transformation that Ezekiel envisions is not in terms of modern spirituality, where spirituality is a matter of the self-constructed identity. In modernity, spirituality is just another building block of one’s identity, and often comes to expression in self-centeredness. But in the book of Ezekiel, we are confronted with something far more radical. First, spirituality in the prophecies of Ezekiel is an act of God, where He is present in one’s life by and through His Spirit. Thus, it is not a self-generated spirituality, but a relational spirituality. Second, the transformative act of YHWH, by changing His people’s hearts and giving them the promise of a new Spirit, is determinative. The transformation will revitalize not only their lives but also their worship of

257 Ez 36:28
YHWH. The prophet Jeremiah envisioned the same kind of transformation in the life of Israel.  

In view of the negative history of Israel, this step becomes necessary, as radical as it may sound. “YHWH’s remaking of a worshiping people would effect a spiritual work in their hearts. From their new vantage point, they would be able to survey both the depths to which they had earlier sunk and the heights to which YHWH’s redeeming grace had lifted them.” This transformation becomes a critical instance which enables them to critically engage with their past and move into a restored future with YHWH. Considering what we have seen so far on the history of Israel, this vision seems utopian. However, this gives us a glimpse into the radical act of God in the lives of His people and the degree to which He is willing to indentify Himself with them. “The future change will consist of a total identification of the human will with the divine teaching ‘knowledge of (=devotion to) God’ will be internalized, so that a perfect harmony will exist between God and man. It is a bliss unmarred by coercion or remorse.” Utopian or not, it is an image which is evocative of the extent to which YHWH’s transformation takes place. This spiritual renewal brings into focus even more, the sacramental value of Israel’s identity.

Israel’s sacramental identity is determined by the presence of YHWH among them. He is present among them because He has invested His Name on and in them. He has become identified with His people, risking again the damage that this identification implies. Israel’s sacramental identity means that they become the sign of YHWH’s presence not only in the land of Israel but also all over the world. In Ezekiel’s vision, YHWH will prove Himself God through the restored lives of His people. They, in turn, will be heralds of YHWH’s Name. At the start of this chapter, we talked about how the identity of YHWH is intertwined with the identity of His people. The sacramentality of it is the fullest expression of the intertwined identities.

Ezekiel is adamant in reminding his audience that the ultimate goal of YHWH’s intervention is the proclamation of His Name. “All this would come about not out of any regard for or merit of Israel but for the glorification of God’s name. Ezekiel’s doctrine of a new heart combines a radical despair of Israel’s repenting with a radical certainty that God’s holiness (majesty, authority) would be vindicated and acknowledged by all nations, through the agency of Israel.” YHWH, through the lives of His people, makes Himself known. Theologically put, YHWH, by attaching His Name to the people of Israel, reveals Himself as the true God. ‘True’ here means over against the idols that the nations and Israel worshipped. The understanding of the identity of God cannot be separated from the history of His people. The history of His people is the showcase of His identity.

4.4. The Name and the identity of God in the prophecies of Ezekiel

Our aim, in this chapter, was to come to an understanding of how the Book of Ezekiel talks about God, specifically concerning His Name and identity. Our question is a theological question pertaining to the theology of God in the book. We narrowed our Blick to two specific chapters, 20 and 36. We have concentrated on two theological terms, judgment and restoration. They functioned as theological loci for talking about the absence and the presence

259 Allen, Ezekiel 20-48, 15.
260 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 737.
261 Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, 735.
of God as it relates to human consciousness and to Israel’s identity and history. Two other theological terms have been highlighted as indicators of the identity of God: kāḇōd and šēm. The first term, Glory, is connected to the calling of the prophet and the worship of Israel at the Temple. The second, the Name, is connected to the presence of God with Israel in exile and to YHWH’s acts of restoration. As markers of YHWH’s identity, they further point to the duality that we have also noted in our previous chapter, namely, the absence and the presence of God with His people.

YHWH is fiercely involved in the history of his people, both in judgment and in restoration. The theme of the historical review of chapter 20 is the relationship of Israel with YHWH. Ezekiel’s conclusion is severe: it is a history hallmarked by Israel’s symptomatic disobedience to YHWH. The price of Israel’s disobedience is dislocation, exile. YHWH is involved in the lives of His people not only in Jerusalem and in the temple, but He also moves into exile with them and gives them hope through the prophet, hope that their lives will be restored, not because of their merit but because YHWH has attached His identity to them. Their restored lives will testify of His Name to the nations among whom they live. YHWH saves His Name by saving His people from their own sins. In identifying Himself with the history of Israel, YHWH becomes vulnerable. He makes His Name dependent on the history of His people. The negative history is a testimony to the unfaithfulness of Israel towards God. The unfaithfulness is telling, not only about Israel and their sin, but also about YHWH and His love for them. He does not abandon them in spite of their unfaithfulness, but He intervenes to save them. For the sake of His Name, for sake of His identity as God, He restores His people. The restoration is the sign of His presence in Israel, a sign for all nations that YHWH is indeed God.

The image of God in Ezekiel brings us closer to our next chapter. Allen gives hints, in his interpretation of the theology of in the book of Ezekiel, that point toward the New Testament. “The divine image that is presented is eventually to be reflected in New Testament teaching. A model is provided for a descent into weakness as the precursor of a demonstration of power and glory.” In the next chapter we will discuss the Apostle Paul’s use of the kenotic Hymn from the Letter to the Philippians. The Hymn picks up the theme of YHWH’s intervention in the lives of His people in the person of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who receives ‘the Name above all names,’ as the suffering servant. In this identification, YHWH Himself becomes the victim of the history of His people. Ezekiel introduced us to the theology of God’s involvement in the history of Israel; Paul develops this even further by identifying Jesus as the recipient of the Name.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the Name and Glory theologies of the book of Ezekiel. Both theologies are indicators of the presence of God, one of the historic presence and the other of the cultic presence. We have focused on the Name theology because of its strong historical indication of the presence of God with His people. It is a presence, which comes to expression in the relationship between YHWH and Israel. It is a covenantal relationship, which is exemplified as a marital love relationship. Within this bond that two major events take place: judgment and restoration.

In the section on judgment we addressed the theological issue of the absence of God from three perspectives. First, we talked about the absence of God in terms of human projection. As human projection this leads in a certain sense to secularization or as it is the case here to

idolatry. Second we talked about the symptomatic unfaithfulness of Israel towards YHWH, as Ezekiel’s critique of Israel’s history. From the wilderness up to the temple period Israel in every generation has proven unfaithful to YHWH. They lived as they were not the people of God and as if there was no God at all. The third and final perspective was Ezekiel’s vision of the presence of God, i.e. the glory leaving the temple. The consequence of Israel’s unfaithfulness (secularization) in the cultic sense led to the departure of God from the temple as an act of judgment. What is interesting is that judgment is not the last of the bond between YHWH and Israel, but restoration.

The leave of God from the Temple also meant that He went after those who have been exiled. He is not bound by the confines of the temple, but He is there where His Name is called upon. While in exile, Israel called upon the Name and the Name was there with them, graciously. YHWH was with them, Ezekiel argued, not because of their call but because of His concern for His Name. The presence of God in His Name also meant the restoration of Israel’s fortunes. The planes of history are the testimony to YHWH’s name, not only among His people, Israel, but among all the nations surrounding them. YHWH is present among His people in acts of restoration, which goes as far as the renewal of their heart. YHWH, by being with His people, shows an act of vulnerability. By attaching His Name to the history of His people, YHWH makes Himself subservient to the history of His people. His people in their identity become the symbol of His Name among all the nations. This ultimately foreshadows YHWH’s presence with His people in the person of Jesus Christ.
Chapter 5 - Jesus and the Name of God

5.1. Introduction

The premise of our study is that theology is essentially talk about God and, in a specific way, it is talk about the identity of God. In the first part we have discussed the shape of God talk, i.e. theology in the context of modernity. We have seen the demise of theology on the one hand (Adriaanse) and the critical exploitation of it on the other (Miskotte). The focus in the second part of our study is on the qualification of theology, namely, talk about the identity of God.

In the third chapter we analyzed the revelation of the Name of God. There are three important aspects of the revelation of the Name, YHWH. The first aspect is the Name in relation to the absence and the presence of God. Both are connected to human emotions and experiences. The Old Testament narratives and Psalms are testimonies to this kind of theologizing. We also considered the theme of revelation from the perspective of encounter, in relation to the knowledge of God. The second aspect is the content of the Name or the identity of God. We argued that talking about the identity of God is talking about both the actual and the historical presence of God. The identity of God and His presence, in His Name, amongst His people has a determinative affect on the identity of the people who are called His people, i.e. Israel. The third aspect of the revelation of the Name we explored is the goal of revelation. The ultimate goal of revelation is to remember and to worship God. To remember and to worship means to participate in the presence of God. This is in contrast with the view that revelation has only to do with the transfer of information.

In the fourth chapter we picked up the above themes and further explored the implications of the Name and the identity of God by looking at the prophet Ezekiel. The Name YHWH is not merely a theological concept but an indication of the historical presence of God among his people. Israel and YHWH are tied together with a bond of love expressed in the covenant between them. God is present amidst His people in their judgment and restoration. In the judgment Israel experienced Him as a hidden God, but in this case His hiddenness turned out to be Israel’s projection. YHWH proves himself God in the history of his people. The identities are mutually connected. The Name is shamed because of the sins of the people, but the Name is restored when the people are restored. Thus the identity of Israel is a sacramental identity, for they are the one’s who display the Name of YHWH for the nations as God.

The focus of this chapter is to further clarify the identity of God as it unfolds in Jesus Christ. We will do so by reading the Hymn in the Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11. Considering the content of the Hymn, we will first look at the three modes of being of Christ and its dynamics. The second point we will consider are the implications of being in Christ,²⁶³ i.e. being Christians. In Paul’s theology there is a strong correlation between the identity of the Christians and that of Christ. This is not strictly a moral correlation but existential. The third point in this chapter is about the Name and its identification as Jesus Christ. In his abasement he receives the Name above all names. It is a striking identification, which deserves our fullest attention. The fourth and final element in this chapter is a short survey of the reception history of the Hymn.

²⁶³ Rom. 6.
5.2. Paul and the Letter to the Philippians

The book of Acts chronicles Paul’s missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor and Europe. In chapter 16 we see Paul with his companions as they travel to the Roman district of Macedonia and to one of its largest cities Philippi. Along the river outside the city gate they started talking to some trading women, one of whom was “named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God.” She converted and her whole household was baptized. This was no small event for European Church history. Right at the outset of the Church on mainland Europe, there was a woman who believed in God and believed the message of the Apostles, which was the message of Christ’s salvation. It was probably her household that grew out to be a house church. It was a popular mode of congregating in the first centuries, as the Church did not have any official recognition or any political power. The contrary was true; persecution was on the loom. In the eyes of the Roman Empire, the Church, or more accurately the Christian movement, represented a subversive alternative to the Empire.

The subversive message Paul was carrying and proclaiming throughout the Roman Empire had two major affects. Churches were established, and the churches became a ‘problem’, at a later stage, in the eyes of the Roman authorities. Those who were in any way undermining the authority of the Empire had to be dealt with. This often meant military action. We also think here of the late Jewish revolts which have been harshly dealt with by the Romans. Consequently, Christians, Paul too, often ended up in prison. The letter to the Philippian church is a letter, which Paul wrote from prison. It is a letter of thanks-giving for their friendship and constant support of his missionary journeys. Receiving gifts or sending a letter in the first century was much more complicated than today. Thus, the occasion and the significance of the letter are all the more important.

The letter is a standard Pauline letter. It has an introductory greeting, some theological teaching with pastoral guidance, some practical matters regarding the church’s life, and a final greeting and prayer. Most of the letters Paul wrote are structured in this way, although some are longer and theologically more elaborate and some are less so. When a community received a letter from an apostle it was regarded with the highest honor. It was as if God had spoken to them. This kind of attitude was the intrinsic consequence attached to the office of the apostle. He was a messenger, speaking in the name of the one who sent him, in Paul’s case: Jesus Christ, who had been revealed to him. We consider this because we want to understand the status of the letter and the kind of authority it enjoyed among its first listeners. This also helps us better understand the mood, the shape and the message of the letter.

265 Acts 12:1-5. P. Oakes suggests in his commentary on Philippians that the main mood of the letter is defined by a threefold scheme of suffering: the sufferings of Paul, the suffering of the church in Philippi and the suffering of Christ. (see Oakes, Philippians, From People to Letter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.)
266 According to New Testament scholars there is a wide range of opinions on the origin and the authorship of the letter. See more on this: Martin (Carmen Christi, 1967), Hawthorne (WBC, 1983), O’Brien (NIGTC, 1991), Fee (NICNT, 1995). Only one part of the letter is usually not credited to Pauline origin. The Hymn, chapter 2: 6-11, is considered by many New Testament scholars as pre-Pauline. This aspect makes the Hymn even more interesting for understanding the ‘basic beliefs’ of the first century Christians. We also realize that there is no end to the arguments back and forth on the issue that we mentioned here. We only mean to establish our own view of the position of the Hymn in the letter and the life of the first century church.
The letter starts with a personal greeting and a prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippian community. Paul is thankful for their lives and the character they have shown, and he expresses his longing to see them again. He continues with a theological discourse and as part of that we find the Christological Hymn. One thing we have to note here is that theology for Paul, most of the time, is situational and practical in its aims. It is not theology for the sake of theology but theology for the sake of the community. It is contention that this theological discourse constitutes the center and the foundation on which the rest of the message is built.\textsuperscript{268} The point Paul makes is this: being a Christian community means being Christ-like and to be Christ-like means identifying with His life, death and resurrection. The details of his theological message will be the focal point of the remainder of this chapter. Paul continues, and calls the community to be bold in their new identity as Christians. He is fully aware of the fact that being a Christian is not easy life and commitment. It is a life long journey and the community has to realize this. They have to keep to their new ‘citizenship’ and live according to that. It is something that is already a reality in their life and at the same time something that still needs to be worked out. From here Paul brings the letter to a close by exhorting some of the members of the community, thanking for their gifts and closes with a final benediction. It is a heartfelt, intimate letter from an apostle to a community of believers that he passionately cared about.

From the letter of Paul, we understand that one of the major problems that the early churches faced was the problem of identity. There were many hard and deep implications for the people who had received and believed the message of Jesus Christ, both on a personal and social level. For a devout Jew, it had many personal implications. His identity had been anchored in the traditions, the faith and the hope of his people. Believing, not in a new God, but in YHWH as He revealed Himself in Jesus, was a step that implied the revision of the whole of Jewish heritage and identity. The letter to the Hebrews is an explicit example of this kind of revision. The author of that letter reviews the whole of Jewish theology and Old Testament through the perspective of Jesus, who has been found to be none other than YHWH. It was not an easy step to take, to say the least. What constituted the biggest problem was the loss of one’s identity.

On the other hand, for a Gentile, it meant belief in a new God. For the Gentile, it also meant the reconfiguration not only of his religious life but of life as a whole. It did not mean the replacement of one god with another, but a fundamental change of one’s thinking about God and life with all its traditions and heritage, now in the perspective of the truth of Jesus Christ. The first Christians had to struggle with the deepest issues of identity. Because it was such a fundamental change, Christians were considered a threat to the status quo of the Empire. It is these very issues that Paul addressed in the letter to the Philippians. It was Paul’s definition of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ.

If it is about identification the question is then: \textit{identification with whom}? This is the underlying analytical question we encounter in the Hymn\textsuperscript{269} in the second chapter of the letter. Some of the deepest theological concepts are best formulated in songs, poetry or art. These forms carry something that accurate logical formulations do not. There is an added dimension when one formulates truths using art. The Hymn was all the more important because it lies at the heart of the community’s confession. It was probably first sung before it was written.

\textsuperscript{268} Gorman argues that the language of the Hymn constitutes the main glossary for the rest of the letter. Gorman, M.J., \textit{Apostle of the Crucified Lord, A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters}, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 419-422.

\textsuperscript{269} Phil. 2:5-11, for the remainder of this chapter, this is the passage we refer to when we talk about the Hymn.
down. It was the credo of the heart and the life which had been touched by the Spirit of God. It carried such a weight and depth that it was worth passing on.

5.3. **The Hymn in Philippians 2:5-11**

Most scholars agree that the Hymn did not originate from Paul. A simple search on Bible software confirms this view. There are words, terminologies and phrases that only occur in this Hymn and nowhere else in the New Testament writings. It is generally accepted to see the Hymn as an expression emerging out of the milieu of the first Christians who confessed their faith through poetry and song. Confessions often precede official church credos. The Hymn today enjoys the privilege of a prime locus in many Christologies. But for the first Christians, it was the expression of the reality of their God who had touched their lives. This was the foundation of their identity and the basis on which they talked about God, i.e. theology. The Hymn captures significant theological formulations, which in turn lend themselves for further theological discussions of the Hymn. Martin, concluding from his stylistic analysis, says of the message of the Hymn that it “represents a Christological hymn set in rhythmical form and composed as a confession of faith in the Church’s Lord in three ‘states’ of His pre-existence, incarnation, and exaltation.”

This corresponds to our own theological paradigm, in which the analysis of the Hymn, focuses on the three ‘modes’ of being of Christ: equality with God, equality with humanity in form of a slave, and the identification with YHWH by receiving the Name above all names. This further connects our analysis to the main question of our research regarding the identity of God.

The Hymn:

*Let the same mind be in you as in Christ Jesus,*

Who, *being* in the form of God,

Did not regard equality with God

As something to be exploited,

But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,

Being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death

Even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name that is above every name,

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,

In heaven and on earth and under the earth,

And every tongue should confess

That Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.  

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271 This translation is from the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989) italics are ours. In vs. 6 the verb ἐνάρξεται is in the indicative present tense and is better translated as ‘being’ rather than ‘was’. This also conditions vs. 5, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”, which then reads “…as in Christ Jesus. Theologically this is significant because Paul does not talk about Jesus Christ as someone who was and thus making a moral example of Jesus. He talks about Jesus Christ as the reality the Philippians are in. They are participants in the body of Christ and that is the reason why their mind ought to be like Christ’s.
We begin with some preliminary notes on the dynamics and some peculiar features of the Hymn. First, we note that the Hymn is preceded by a call of Paul: *Let the same mind be in you as in Jesus Christ* (vs.5). The call does not merely mean, “to think like Jesus thought”; rather, it fits in the general Pauline theology of being “in Christ”. So having the mind of Christ is essentially an explanation of what it means to be in Christ not only as individuals but as a Church. *In Christ* is the true home of the community that bares His name. This is the reason we understand this passage to be, essentially, about Christian identity. Paul calls the Philiippan church to let their lives be transformed by the way of Jesus Christ. The Hymn is not a call for epistemology, but a call to transformation. Paul understands transformation to be an act of identification. It is surrendering, losing one's identity and putting on another. It is not only thinking like Jesus Christ, but living like Christ, even to the point of being identified as Christian, i.e. Christ-like. So the Hymn is not only about ethics or imitation but it goes much further. Being “in Christ” has to do with participation in Christ and being transformed by Him. Transformation like this is what constitutes the ground for the ethics of Paul’s theology. So the Hymn has a far-reaching scope.

Second, we note that there is a dynamic movement in the Hymn. First there is a move from up high towards down low and second, there is move from down low towards up high. Jesus Christ, although God, did not consider that a chance to grab power. He rather chose to take the lowest place of human existence, the role of a slave. Theologically, this is a very significant statement. Where most of the quests to find the historical Jesus focused on finding the possibility of the divinization of a human being the Hymn affirms exactly the opposite. The life of Jesus is not about the divinization of man but about the humanization of God. It is God who became a human being and not vice versa. This is an essential point to consider for any theological or Christological work.

The other dynamic in the text is the movement up. When Jesus humbled Himself, He showed truly who God is. His resurrection and exaltation were nothing less than the confirmation of the fact that it was indeed God who was identified as Jesus. These two dynamic movements capture the main theological point of the Hymn.273

5.3.1. Equality with God - μορφή θεοῦ

We are aware that this passage has been analyzed and interpreted many times. Fee says that the tendency of the last few decades has been to write solely on the Hymn and not on the letter as a whole.274 Our systematic theological reading of the Hymn is part of this movement. However, we do not disregard the letter, for the Hymn’s meaning is ultimately embedded in the whole of it. Most of the commentaries and interpretations focus on the pre-existence of Christ. But that is a discussion that we will not address in our analysis of the Hymn. There are several reasons why we are not venturing on that path. First, a discussion like that has no end. There is always something more to be said about the subject than one ever can do. Second, we might fall into the danger of talking about pre-existence as something we can conceive or understand at all. Our philosophical and scientific competence keeps us from entering a field which seems far more speculative than is helpful. Other sorts of interpretations are important and informative in nature, but we have to weigh their relevancy for the overall quest of the thesis.

272 Rom. 6:11, 8:1, 15:17; 1Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:1, 2:6, 13, Col 1:28; 1Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 3:12.
Because the New Testament Scriptures are a product of antiquity, influenced by Hellenism and the Greek language, it has certain consequences for the way we interpret them. We could hastily attach all sorts of Hellenistic concepts to the word ‘God’, and through those conceptions, interpret the Hymn. But this approach does not do justice to the context of the Hymn. It is true that language carries a certain way of thinking, thus it defines the content of what is being said. We understand some of the implications of language and interpretation, through the example of someone who speaks more than one language. The first language is rooted in a certain world, and has its own conceptions. In the act of communication the second language becomes the vehicle through which the original conceptions must be carried. By this remark we do not pretend to have an elaborate philosophy of language. We simply think that the image of someone who speaks many languages best describes the way to interpret the Hymn. It is written in Greek, which to a certain degree has an effect on the meaning of the Hymn. However, Greek is the second language describing a series of concepts rooted ultimately in the Hebrew language and the biblical world.275 It is in the biblical world that we find the true home and meaning of the Hymn. “Materially, if not linguistically, the apostle’s paradoxical phrase μορφή θεου is wholly in the sphere of the biblical view of God.”276 It is here that our theological interpretation must begin.

Following what we have just established, we have to affirm the following: the Hymn is not about a new God, or a god ripped out of the Greek Pantheon. Rather, it is about the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. But who is this God? To answer this question, we have to begin with the basic Jewish confession, the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.”277 Confessions are summary formulations of the basic beliefs of the people of God. They are referential in nature and also are transmitted as dogma through liturgy, prayer and traditions. The Shema “was not a philosophical or metaphysical analysis of the inner being of God, or the god. It was the unshakable belief that the one god who made the world was Israel’s god…..”278 The Shema is the central confession for a Jewish believer. It is not a scientific statement, rather one that is existential, encompassing the whole of life. It is the statement of one who has tasted and known God. It is not only a personal confession but also a collective confession; the whole of the nation is addressed in it. The Shema is not a numeric statement to prove monotheism, but a statement of quality, that it is the LORD, who was their God and not the idols of the surrounding nations. It is this God who has entered their history and made history together with them. The Name, YHWH, was to be remembered from generation to generation (Ex. 3:15). The Shema is an act of remembering that the LORD is indeed God. Forgetting that the LORD is God is basis of Israel’s judgment and exile, as we


276 Behm, μορφή, The μορφή of Christ in the New Testament, TDNT IV, 750-752. Some might suggest that the μορφή θεου is best interpreted through the LXX’s Gen. 1:26. This would suggest an Adam-Christ comparison, which is not strange to Paul’s theology (Rom. 5). In this paradigm Christ would be seen as God’s image bearer, but more perfect than Adam since he did not sin. For this reasoning to work μορφή ought to be replaced by εικὼν. The argument in the Hymn is that Christ who is truly God (μορφή θεου) did become truly a human being (μορφή δούλου). Christ was not merely an image of God, He was God. See also A. van de Beek, De menselijke persoon van Christus, Een onderzoek aangaande de gedachte van de anhypostasie van de menselijke natuur van Christus, Proefschrift verdedigd op 17 Juni 1980 te Leiden, 156-175.

277 Deut. 6:4. It is also known as the Shema. In the text we will often refer to this passage as such.

have seen in the prophecies of Ezekiel. We have highlighted in the previous chapter how history connects the identity of God and the identity of His people. The two identities are mutually reliant on each other. So the confession of the LORD being God alone hinges on the historicity of the identity of God, which is embedded in the lives of His people.

Further, first century Jewish monotheism is a qualified monotheism and not the monotheism of religious philosophy. Here we follow N.T. Wright in describing the faith of Israel as a creational, providential and covenantal monotheism. It is the belief in a God that created all that there is, but He is still differentiated from His creation. This God is not distant but He is involved in the natural and human events, which display again something of His identity. This kind of monotheism is also an answer to the problem of evil in the world. “The creator calls a people through whom, somehow, he will act decisively within his creation, to eliminate evil from it and to restore order, justice and peace.”

What emerges from the biblical narratives is that God and His identity are strongly related to the lives of His people. This is not a God who is the product of thinking, but rather one who is active in the lives of the people He calls His own and the Scriptures are the stories telling about Him. Israel’s history was also God’s history, which ultimately found its consummation not only in their lives but in whole of creation. “First century Jews looked forward to a public event a great act of liberation for Israel, in and through which their god would reveal to all the world that he was not just a local, tribal deity, but the creator and sovereign of all. (…) The early Christians, … looked back on an event in and through which, they claimed, Israel’s god had done exactly that. On this basis, the NT, emerging from within this strange would-be ‘people of god’, told the story of that people as a story rooted in Israel’s past, and designed to continue into the world’s future. It repeated the Jewish claim: this story concerns not just god but God. It revisited the Jewish evidence: the claim is made good, not in national liberation, but in the events concerning Jesus.”

For someone like Paul, who was fully immersed in the world of his time the events concerning Jesus and Jesus himself caused a fundamental change. According to his own confession: “if anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” He was not only a good Jew; he was also an outstanding theologian. But the revelation of Christ on the road to Damascus brought a fundamental crisis and later a change in his life and theology. He was as convinced of God as any other first century Jew. But in the light of the revelation of Christ, he had to reconfigure his entire theology. The most basic element of that theology involved the question of God and His identity. Everything he knew about YHWH, he had to translate through the experience of the revelation of Christ. This is the basis of the identification of the creational and covenantal God as Jesus Christ. Many of Paul’s letters reflect this commitment to reformulating the basic assumptions of his theology.

“In 1 Corinthians 8:6, within a specifically Jewish-style monotheistic argument, he adapts the Shema itself, placing Jesus within it: ‘For us there is one God—the Father, from whom are all things and we to him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him.’ This is possibly the single most revolutionary christological formulation in the

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281 Phil.3:4-6.
whole of early Christianity, staking out a high christology founded within the very citadel of Jewish monotheism."\(^{283}\) Colossians 1:15-20 and Galatians 4:1-11, are further examples of the way Paul grapples with and retells the story of the Creator and Covenantal God, identifying Jesus as YHWH. It was YHWH who created the world, and it was YHWH the one who liberated the slaves from the Egyptian captivity.

We note that for Paul two things condition the word ‘God’: first, by the biblical narratives, and second, by Jesus Christ. Both are equally important in our discourse on God, i.e. theology. The ‘crisis’ of the revelation and meeting with Christ that set in motion the reconfiguration of Paul’s theology and talk of God. Placing the Hymn in the context of biblical theology makes it even more compelling, not only for the listeners of the first century, but for us as well as twenty-first century readers. The next question we have to address is: who is the Jesus Paul was talking about?

5.3.2. Equality with humanity - μορφή δούλου

The deliberate juxtaposition of *form of God* and *form of slave* is a significant comparison-contrast feature of the Hymn. Even though it is paradoxical, in the act of *kenosis* the two forms become one and the same. Their movement converges in one Name, the Name above all names: Jesus Christ.

The downward movement in the Hymn is uniquely captured in the verb *kenoo*. This word does not appear anywhere else in the biblical literature, so it is important to highlight its range of meaning. In this act, the one who was in the form of God took upon Himself the lowest form of human existence, slave. He took on the fullness of human existence from birth to death. He was not only the subject of His own history, but also the victim of it. The death He died was not a glorious, hero-like death, but a shameful death. The Hymn is not about the deification of a human being but, about the humanization of the deity. It is God who came and shared the life of marginalized humanity, not at the centre of first century history, the Roman Empire, but at the margins of one of its colonies, Judea. He shared in the human condition and therein lies humanity’s true salvation. Nowadays, slavery is conceived as dehumanization. In an ironic way at the same it is the dehumanization of God. He is so not because He is higher than human beings, thus not worthy of the human condition, but because God does not fit the standards of human projections about God wherein God becomes a matter of the highest ideals of humanity. The abasement of God in Jesus Christ’s shameful death is the ultimate criticism of any form of a non-historical and idealized image of God.

This was the ultimate act of identification. God was not ashamed of the human condition; He shared in it. He took upon Himself the very thing that humanity despises about itself, its vulnerability and brokenness. It is in the brokenness of the human condition that God is to be found and not in its glories. Theologically, this is what is at stake in Paul’s argument. His call for a Christ-like life would have no basis without the human-like life of God. From the human side of this equation, in response, this is where our one major act of identification comes into play: in identifying ourselves with the sign given to us, the sacramental body of Christ, the Church. It is in Baptism that the Church identifies herself as seeking to be Christlike. Therefore, considering the kenotic act of God in Jesus, Paul calls the Philippian community to do the same, to empty themselves for the benefit of others as a testimony to the God with whom they are identifying themselves.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul writes “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Baptism is a radical break with one’s identity and a ‘putting on’ of a new identity. This is what it means for Paul to be a Christian: to be like Christ, to participate in Christ, imitating and identifying with Christ fully, to be able to confess “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This is the confession of someone whose life has been deeply touched by the presence of Christ. He has come to understand that what Jesus is and what he has done has intrinsic affects on him. One is so united with Christ that Christ becomes one’s primary identity. Since Christ has shared our humanity, by baptism we share also in his suffering. Losing one’s identity and putting on a new identity does come with a cost, a death to one’s old life.

Baptism and being identified with Christ had not only private, but also public ramifications. It was in Antioch that the believers and disciples were first called Christians. It was a mock name by the standards of the first century. The people who had assumed this new identity did not fit in. How was it possible for a group of people to be identified with a God who was nothing more than a human being, a God who assumed a human form, the worst possible form, a slave? This God did not stand a chance in the pantheon erected to all the Roman and Greek gods. He only fitted the category ‘other.’ It is among this people that the Hymn has its true origin, and this is the context Paul quotes it in.

This is a Hymn composed by those who have no other way of expressing themselves about what has happened to them, but to talk and sing. In Christ, they have seen and tasted YHWH, the God of the Fathers, the God of the Exodus, the God of the exile and the God who promised to come and dwell among His people. It is this God that the Hymn is about and to Him it is sung. This is the closest that YHWH got to His people; He shared their humanity in order for them to be able to participate in His life in return. But what makes this identification further possible? So far we have considered the kenotic act. There is yet another way of the identification of YHWH with Jesus. It is in the act of giving a name.

5.3.3. Jesus Christ is LORD

So far, we have seen how the μορφή θεοῦ and μορφή δούλου are connected by the verb κενόω. However there is another way of identification of the two and this is expressed by the phrase ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑψέρ πάν ὄνομα. God is the subject of the sentence and He does the giving of the Name to Jesus. In other words, it is God who identifies Himself as Jesus, in the act of giving the Name. In this context, giving the Name does not mean labeling an object or, in our case, a person. It is not a matter of receiving a decorative title. Rather, it is the disclosure of who He really is, i.e. His identity. “Because the essence of the Most High is in it, because the name of the Lord belongs to both God and Jesus Christ, it is the name above

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286 Rom. 6:1-11, 2 Cor 5:14-15, Col. 2: 11-12.
288 [He] gave him the name above all names.
289 As you note we have capitalized the Name. The Name here is identical to what we have said in chapter 3 of this thesis. By allocating a the preposition ‘the’ it becomes referential to the Name, in the Old Testament, which in turn is the name of God, YHWH.
all other names, i.e. beings.‖

Therefore the Hymn closes with doxology; the revelation of the Name begs worship.

It is God who gives the Name above all names, and this seems in stark contrast with Isaiah, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images." But as we have seen it is precisely in these paradoxical contrasts that the deepest truths lie. This verse from Isaiah is probably the most monotheistic verse of the Old Testament. It is a clear formulation of the Shema, only in the form of first person singular, and with God as the speaking subject. The Name is not to be given to idols nor false gods; it only belongs to God, YHWH. This excludes any other identification of God other than to Himself. Therefore, the Hymn has to be understood as the self-identification of God as Jesus Christ. In chapter three, we have talked in more detail about the words kurios or adonai in their relation to the divine name YHWH. The Hymn is the Christological reinterpretation of the Name. This is where we note another way in which Paul theologizes and works out how YHWH has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

We have used the definition of the self-identification of God in Jesus Christ. It has to do with the revelation of God. Revelation is the human-bound aspect of God. Two major revelatory pictures emerge from the Hymn: first, humiliation to death, and second, the giving of the name or in the words of the Hymn, the glorification of the one who has humiliated Himself, namely YHWH. We have also established that revelation is not merely an intellectual exercise for the satisfaction of epistemological needs. It is more than that. Revelation is a meeting, an encounter with the God who not only appeared in this world but shared in our humanity, i.e. life and death. Revelation also demands a response and is always directed to the human agent. The ultimate response, when faced with His presence, is worship. It is the acknowledgment of the need for a right relationship between God and humanity.

Identifying Jesus as Lord had major theological and political implications in the first century. For Paul and his contemporaries, specifically those who were Jews, to call Jesus the Messiah, not only that, but to call him by the Name, was outright blasphemy. The very thing that the Sanhedrin could not accept from Jesus, they did not accept from first century converts either: the identification of YHWH as Jesus. Yet the Hymn was sung even though it was not acceptable. It spread and became the credo of the Church in the first century, so much that it was available for Paul to quote and include it in his theological discourse as the basic credo about the identity of God and the identity of His followers.

The political issues had to do with the title ‘Lord.’ Even though, for Jews, that meant their God, YHWH, for the Roman Empire it signified a competition to the lord of the Empire, i.e. the Emperor. The first century’s religious landscape of the Mediterranean was dominated by the cult of the emperor. Even though the emperor was not physically present in the city, he was still there through other means. Statues were erected with the image of the emperor; coins were printed with depictions of the portrait of the emperor. The emperor, the Caesar, was fully present not only in the daily lives of the people but also in their consciousness. He was the one person who kept them united in the empire and in the world. The emperor was the god, the lord, and the savior of the known world, i.e. the empire. “It was a form of religious and nationalistic, or theo-political, allegiance, both to deified humans (the emperors) and to a cultural entity (the Roman Empire).” All Roman cities were required to pay their dues to

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290 Quell, κύριος, “C. The Old Testament Name for God,” TDNT III, 1058.
291 Isa. 42:8.
293 Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord, 15-18.
the one to whom they belonged. “[D]evotion to the emperor and to the empire were inseparable.” The emperor had his own evangel (good news) of prosperity, power and peace.²⁹⁴

Religiosity of this period was also mostly syncretistic. There were numerous gods on offer for the first century Roman citizen, gods that helped with any practical need one might have had. Here is a short list of the deities that were present in many of the first century Roman cities: “Aphrodite/Venus the goddess of sex and beauty; Apollo god of music and youthfulness; Artemis/Diana the goddess of the hunt and fertility; Asclepius god of healing; Demeter goddess of vegetation; Dionysius/Bacchus god of wine, fertility, and ecstasy; Tyche/Fortuna fate or chance; Zeus or Jupiter the chief god of the pantheon.”²⁹⁵ All these gods had to be appeased with various offerings, were celebrated in different seasons and in various cultic celebrations. For the people, the more deities there were, the better their basic needs were looked after. So it was a ‘tolerant syncretism’, which “created obvious problems for those who acknowledged only one God.”²⁹⁶ It was unfathomable for a Roman citizen that one would believe only in one deity and nothing rivaled the cult of the Emperor.²⁹⁷

We want to note one critical point here. First century people had no problem with seeing a human being as a deity. Even the deities that we listed above often had human depictions. Seeing the emperor as divine was the order of the day, and that he believed himself to be divine was not even considered lunacy. Only in modern times would we consider someone who claimed to be a god as having serious problems with their psyche. This is important to be said here because it elucidates the context of Paul’s message and the confessions of the Early Church about Jesus.

The language of the claims of Paul and the early communities were rooted in the religious and political milieu of the Roman Empire. However, the primary meaning of the message of the Hymn presented a different challenge for a Jew than for a Greek gentile. For the Jewish listeners the challenge lies in an overall reinterpretation of the Old Testament theology in view of the person of Jesus Christ. The focus of this interpretation was the identification of YHWH as Jesus Christ. YHWH the God of the fathers has come to be with His people and He came as Jesus of Nazareth. For the gentiles the challenge lies in that there was no other Name by which they were to know God, but by the name of Jesus Christ. It was foolishness to believe in only one God, after all the pantheon was much bigger than one God. And to make matters even more challenging, this God was also the one who was crucified. It was absurd to worship a God who hung on a roman cross. What use is there for a God who is vulnerable in the hands of humans?

In the world of the first century, this Hymn had a compelling power. Those who sang this song probably identified themselves as followers of this God, and saw themselves as Christ-like human beings. They understood that what was said in the Hymn had to do with their everyday reality. This set them apart. It was the worship of Jesus Christ, of YHWH, and not the worship of Caesar. This is where the confession reached its political implication. The first Christians, having no political or military power whatsoever, displayed in their lives the God they believed in, the God who has shared their destiny. In return, they did the same; they shared the sufferings of this God. Such suffering is the deepest expression of the doxa. This is

²⁹⁵ Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord, 15-18.
²⁹⁶ Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord, 27-33.
²⁹⁷ For further information on the parallelism and polemical relationship between Christ and the Emperor see Oakes, P. Philippians, From People to letter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
the ground that Paul stands on, from which he is able to call the Philippian community to imitation and even more, to identification with this God.

5.4. The interpretation of the Hymn through the ages
In this final section of the chapter we will give a view into the interpretative tradition of the letter to the Philippians, and specifically, of the Hymn. The scope of this work does not allow us to fully reconstruct the interpretation tradition of the Hymn, but it is intended to see and understand the interpretative tendencies as they have unfolded throughout the ages. We limit our Blick to the comments of early Christian writers like Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius and Chrysostom, to the reformers, Calvin and Luther, and finally, to N.T. Wright as a representative of modern interpreters. As we have said before, we are curious, and hope to gain perspective from the main theological tendencies of the Hymn’s interpreters. We realize that we do not enter a free field of interpretation, but we do so in a community of interpreters. This frees us from having to be ‘original’. It is not that we refuse to contribute to the field; rather we want to position ourselves, not as free agents, but as theologians in community with a host of other interpreters. This short historical view will aid the discussions and conclusions in the last chapter of our work.

5.4.1. The early patristic period
The fathers of the Church saw their task of theologizing mainly in terms of defending the faith and the traditions, which had been handed down to them. Their theologies were mainly apologetic and often carried the prefix Contra. These theological works emerged in a period when all sorts of philosophies and theologies were fashionable. From the second through to the fifth century, the identity of God in Jesus was one of the main issues the Church was facing. Who was this God that Christians talk about? How was it possible for them to talk about a human being as God? The identity question did not stand alone, but it was imbedded in the soteriological disputes. Christian theologians sought to settle that only God could save humanity. Regarding the identity of God the nature of the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and God the Father was the main issue. Explanations and interpretations of the Scriptures ranged from full identification, through partial, to full discord between the two. Often elaborate speculative theologies and philosophies have been designed to ‘explain’ the scandalous message that Christians were proclaiming. The crux of the scandalous message was the affirmation that Jesus Christ was both man and God at the same time, that the God proclaimed and worshipped by the Jews had become a human being.

These early debates on the identity of God were not only theological discussions. They often turned out to be exegetical and hermeneutical debates. The right interpretation of the Scriptures led to the right God talk. The early Christian writers often criticized their antagonists and accused them of misreading or misinterpreting the Scriptures. The right understanding of the Scriptures was their way to the right understanding of the doctrine of Christ. In what follows we will look at four early Christian theologians: Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius and Chrysostom. We specifically look at their use of Philippians 2 and how they incorporated that into their talk about God.

Tertullian (160-200), faced with the Marcionite heresies, explains the Hymn in terms of the mystery of Christ. The main critique of the Marcionites was that they could not accept the fact that God had truly become a human being. They attributed to God in Jesus only a body as an

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appearance, a ‘phantasm’. Tertullian, on the other hand, affirms the truth of Christian theology, namely, that God has indeed become a human being. For that sake he uses the Hymn to make his argument:

“Evidently here too the Marcionites suppose that in respect of Christ’s substance the apostle expresses agreement with them, (suggesting) that there was in Christ a phantasm of flesh, when he says that *being established in the form of God he thought it not a robbery to be made equal with God, but emptied himself by taking up the form of a servant* – not ‘the truth’ – and *(was) in the likeness of man* – not ‘in a man’ – and *was found in fashion as a man* – not ‘in substance’, that is, not in flesh: as though fashion and likeness and form were not attributes of substance as well. But it is well that in another place also he calls Christ the *image of the invisible God*. So than here too where he says he is in the form of God, Christ will have to be not really and truly God, if he was not really man when established in the form of man. For that ‘really and truly’ must of necessity be ruled out on both sides if form and likeness and fashion are to be claimed as meaning phantasm. But if in the form and image of the Father, being his Son, he is truly God, this is proof beforehand that when found also in the form and image of man, being the Son of man, he is truly man. And when he wrote ‘found’, he meant it – ‘most indubitably man’. For that which a thing ‘is found’ to be, it certainly is. So also he was found to be God through his act of power, as he is found to be man by reason of his flesh: for the apostle could not have declared him obedient unto death. More even than that, he adds the words, *Even the death of the cross*. For he would not have piled the horror, lifting on high the virtue of subjection, if he had known this to be imaginary and phantasmal, if Christ had cheated death instead of suffering it, and in his passion had performed an act not of power but of illusion.”

Tertullian stresses that God really became flesh. He does this as an answer to the critique that it was not possible for a divine being to indwell a human body. The Hymn is an elaboration on this very identification and it is in line with Paul’s theology. Tertullian points also to his adversaries’ misreading of the text, and the miss-associations they make regarding the person on Jesus Christ. In Tertullian’s understanding of the person of Jesus there is a real presence of God. The body is a real body, and is human in every way. It is in the suffering of Jesus that his humanity becomes obvious and not phantasmal. It is in this suffering that the identification of God as a true human becomes possible. So there is a real revelation and thus a real knowledge of God: God is known in the flesh of Jesus Christ. The difficult part of understanding this is that Jesus Christ in becoming a human being, did not strive for the highest possible human ideal. His death, even death on the cross, defies all logical and philosophical thinking about God. It is to this God that the Philippian Hymn bears witness and Tertullian only affirms it.

In the work of Origen we see further theological development on the identification of God and Jesus Christ. Origen (185-254) developed the most elaborate Christology in his time. As one of the more significant figures of the Greek Church, he wrote against the Greek philosopher Celsus. Norris notes, “many of the questions raised during the European Enlightenment are already there in Celsus.” This observation will be important for our conclusions later. In the following quote, Origen addresses the issue of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Did something happen to the divinity of God while being in a human body?

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300 Norris, “Christ, Christology,” 245.

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This is what Origen writes: “And with respect to His having descended among men, He was previously in the form of God; and through benevolence, divested Himself (of His glory), that He might be capable of being received by men. But He did not, I imagine, undergo any change from good to evil, for He did no sin; nor from virtue to vice, for He knew no sin. Nor did He pass from happiness to misery, but He humbled Himself, and nevertheless was blessed, even when His humiliation was undergone in order to benefit our race. Nor was there any change in Him from best to worst, for how can goodness and benevolence be of the worst? … But if the immortal God— the Word — by assuming a mortal body and a human soul, appears to Celsus to undergo a change and transformation, let him learn that the Word, still remaining essentially the Word, suffers none of those things which are suffered by the body or the soul; but, condescending occasionally to (the weakness of) him who is unable to look upon the splendors and brilliancy of Deity, He becomes as it were flesh, speaking with a literal voice, until he who has received Him in such a form is able, through being elevated in some slight degree by the teaching of the Word, to gaze upon what is, so to speak, His real and pre-eminent appearance.”

Origen stresses that the incarnation of God is not an alteration of God. God does not change His nature when He becomes a human being. The difficulty again was the understanding that God in His fullness dwelt in the human existence of Jesus Christ. Not only that God took on the human condition, but that He humbled Himself. ‘Where is the glory in that?’ one might ask. God shared human life not only for the sake of sharing human life but for the ‘benefit’ of humanity. The kenotic move of God, has soteriological implications. Thus it is not a different God, but the eternal God Himself who is present in Christ. Origen’s arguments were later more fully elaborated later by Luther. What we will see with the reformers is the emphasis on the soteriological aspect of the identification of God in Jesus Christ.

Athanasius (296-373) needs no introduction since we have already introduced him in the third chapter. While commenting on the significance of the conjunctive διὸ in verse 9 of the Hymn he notes the following:

“For after saying, ‘He has humbled Himself even unto death,’ He immediately added, ‘Wherefore He hath highly exalted Him;’ wishing to show, that, although as man He is said to have died, yet, as being Life, He was exalted on the resurrection; for ‘He who descended, is the same also who rose again’ He descended in body, and He rose again because He was God Himself in the body. And this again is the reason why according to this meaning he brought in the conjunction ‘Wherefore;’ not as a reward of virtue nor of advancement, but to signify the cause why the resurrection took place; and why, while all other men from Adam down to this time have died and remained dead, He only rose in integrity from the dead. The cause is this, which He Himself has already taught us, that, being God, He has become man.”

Theologically this point is very significant because, in short, what Athanasius says is this: because He, Jesus is God therefore He was also exalted. It might seem an obvious statement, but that He is God became most obvious when He took upon Himself the form of a slave and died on the cross. The ‘wherefore’ (or ‘therefore’) of verse 9 is in essence an explanation of the previous verses (6-8). God’s identity is visible in the incarnation and the crucifixion of Jesus. The resurrection is the testimony that He, in the form of a slave, is God indeed.

302 Athanasius, CA I, 44. (NPNF), 332.
303 See Van de Beek, Jezus Kurios, 122.
Athanasius sees the identity of God in the concrete history of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So God is not a matter of principle or philosophical adequacy but rather the active participant in historical events. This kind of theology is critical of any attempt to construct God as such.

Chrysostom (347-407) was a great Greek theologian, priest and later the bishop of Constantinople. He is considered one of the most significant theologians of his time, especially in the East. He was known more for his sermons and eloquence, hence the meaning of his name ‘golden mouthed’. His homily on the Letter to the Philippians is particularly interesting in our research into the reception of the Hymn. A homily in those days carried a lot of dogmatic and theological weight. It was a manner not only of proclaiming the right doctrine, but also of entering into polemic discussions with those who preached conflicting messages. The message is a direct engagement with the heresies of his day. This next quote is longer, although it is a small part of the whole, and is selected just to show the dynamics of Chrysostom’s argument:

“And if it seems good to you, we will first arrange the heresies themselves in order. Would you have them in the order of their impiety, or of their dates? In the order of time, for it is difficult to judge of the order of their impiety. First then let Sabellius the Libyan come forward. What does he assert? that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are mere names given to one Person. Marcion of Pontus says, that God the Creator of all things is not good, nor the Father of the good Christ, but another righteous one, and that he did not take flesh for us. Marcellus, and Photinus, and Sophronius assert, that the Word is an energy, and that it was this energy that dwelt in Him who was of the seed of David, and not a personal substance. Arius confesses indeed the Son, but only in word; he says that He is a creature, and much inferior to the Father. And others say that He has not a soul. Seest thou the chariots standing? See then their fall, how he overthrows them all together, and with a single stroke. How? “Have the same mind in you,” he says, “which was in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God.” And Paul of Samosata has fallen, and Marcellus, and Sabellius. For he says, “Being in the form of God.” If “in the form” how sayest thou, O wicked one, that He took His origin from Mary, and was not before? and how dost thou say that He was an energy? For it is written, “The form of God took the form of a servant.” “The form of a servant,” is it the energy of a servant, or the nature of a servant? By all means, I fancy, the nature of a servant. Thus too the form of God, is the nature of God, and therefore not an energy. Behold also Marcellus of Galatia, Sophronius and Photinus have fallen.

Behold Sabellius too. It is written, “He counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God.” Now equality is not predicated, where there is but one person, for that which is equal hath somewhat to which it is equal. Seest thou not the substance of two Persons, and not empty names without things? Hearest thou not the eternal pre-existence of the Only-begotten? Lastly, What shall we say against Arius, who asserts the Son is of a different substance? Tell me now, what means, “He took the form of a servant”? It means, He became man. Wherefore “being in the form of God,” He was God. For one “form” and another “form” is named; if the one be true, the other is also. “The form of a servant” means, Man by nature, wherefore “the form of God” means, God by nature. And he not only bears record of this, but of His equality too, as John also doth, that he is no way inferior to the Father, for he saith, “He thought it not a thing to seize, to be equal with God.” Now what is their wise reasoning? Nay, say they, he proves the very contrary; for he says, that, “being in the form of God, He
seized not equality with God.” How if He were God, how was He able “to seize upon it”? and is not this without meaning? Who would say that one, being a man, seized not on being a man? for how would any one seize on that which he is? No, say they, but he means that being a little God, He seized not upon being equal to the great God, Who was greater than He. Is there a great and a little God? And do ye bring in the doctrines of the Greeks upon those of the Church? With them there is a great and a little God. If it be so with you, I know not. For you will find it nowhere in the Scriptures: there you will find a great God throughout, a little one nowhere.

If he were little, how would he also be God? If man is not little and great, but one nature, and if that which is not of this one nature is not man, how can there be a little God and a great one? He who is not of that nature is not God. For He is everywhere called great in Scripture; “Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised.” (Ps. xlviii. 1.) This is said of the Son also, for it always calls Him Lord. “Thou art great, and doest wondrous things. Thou art God alone.” (Ps. lxxxvi. 10.) And again, “Great is our Lord, and great is His power, and of His greatness there is no end.” (Ps. cxliv. 3.) But the Son, he says, is little. But it is thou that sayest this, for the Scripture says the contrary: as of the Father, so it speaks of the Son; for listen to Paul, saying, “Looking for the blessed hope, and appearing of the glory of our great God.” (Tit. ii. 13.) But can he have said “appearing” of the Father? Nay, that he may the more convince you, he has added with reference to the appearing “of the great God.” Is it then not said of the Father? By no means. For the sequel suffers it not which says, “The appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” See, the Son is great also. How then speakest thou of small and great?”

These are several of the theological issues that Chrysostom is addressing in his sermon. As a post Nicene father he was very aware of the kind of theologizing that did not do justice to what has been agreed on at the Great Councils. It seems that the adversaries of the ‘classic theology’ had problems with understanding the precise relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, or they could not understand the identity of God in its Trinitarian formulation. It is, to this very issue that Chrysostom gives attention in his sermon on the Hymn. These are some of the objections against the Nicene formulation of the identity of Jesus Christ. First, that ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ are merely labels attached to God. The names are merely names and essential not God. Second, it is not a good God who took flesh in Christ, but another much lower God. Third, the Word is merely an energy that indwelt the Christ and not a personal substance. Fourth, the Son since he is created is lower than the Father, and therefore cannot be consubstantial.

Against these objections Chrysostom stresses the difference of the Father and the Son: heaven is not empty when Jesus is on earth. The two can be differentiated but ought not to be thought of as different in essence. They can be differentiated in the act of revelation, but they are essentially the same. Chrysostom goes on to stress that the Son in the flesh is no lower God than the Father: He is of the very being of the Father. For Chrysostom the Hymn is a telling of the identity of Jesus Christ. The theology of the Hymn goes against Greek philosophy’s conception of a great and a small God. Paul in the Hymn does not make such a differentiation rather the opposite, he identifies YHWH as Jesus Christ.

Ludlow summarizes the way in which the early church has struggled to talk about God, regarding Christ: “but the important point is that the early church wanted to move away from

304 Saint Chrysostom, *Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessaloni
cans, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* in *NPNF*, vol. 13, 207.
any impression that Christ became more divine after his resurrection and ascension to heaven. This determination to stress the identity of Christ in the two advents can perhaps be compared to the later determination in the fifth century to stress the identity of the one Christ, whether it is expressed as one Christ in two natures (as the Antiochene school put it), or one Logos dwelling as man (as Cyril put it) or as one person in two natures (as Chalcedon eventually concluded). Both debates revolve around essentially the same question: how can the man who died on the cross be said to be God?” 305 This question is a relevant question for us too. It is a question, we believe, theologians have to answer whenever they engage in theological work. It is precisely here that our research question, who is this God we talk about?, becomes relevant for theology today.

What we have seen so far is that for these early Christian theologians God is present and is known as Savior precisely in His historical presence in the flesh of Christ. God is not an abstract philosophical notion, but the God of the Scriptures. The Scriptures testify of this God who is present amidst of His people. He is present specifically in the life of Jesus Christ as the Savior. The presence of God is not the presence of a being as such; His presence is soteriologically qualified. He is not just present for the sake of being present but present in acts of salvation, love, judgment etc. We have talked about the Hymn’s place in early Christian tradition as a Credo, which identifies God as Jesus Christ. These early Christian theologians kept to this Scriptural tradition by more sharply defining this identification regarding all its theological and philosophical implications.

We see a direct relation between what the early Christian writers were struggling with and what today’s theologians are facing up to, i.e. to talk about God in a challenging context. First we note that the ‘talk of God’ is a problematic task on the whole, as we saw in our first chapter. What was foolishness or a stumbling block two thousand years ago is unscientific and theologically irrelevant today. The idea that God became a human being is hard to talk about. However the theologian of today has to face this very challenge. Second, the early theologians had a high esteem for the Scriptures handed down to them. Their interpretation was part of the theological tradition, which dated back to the Apostles. They were standing in solidarity to this very specific apostolic tradition. The ‘right’ interpretation of the Scriptures in light of this tradition was essential for their ‘God talk’. This contributes to our own understanding of the interpretation of the Scriptures in the light of the tradition that we find ourselves in. Third we highlight the fact that the interpretation of the Hymn was not so much about the precise understanding of the Hymn, but rather the correct understanding of the Apostle and what he was affirming in this specific instance. The Hymn is also interpreted in the context of the philosophical questions raised that pertain to the identity of Jesus Christ. Its interpretation contributes to the right talk about Jesus and ultimately about God. For these theologians talking about God was to talk about Jesus Christ, as His historical presence. If they were to talk about the identity of God they were talking about Jesus Christ. God has indeed become a human being and lived with his people with all the implications related to that.

5.4.2. Reformation and Christology

Luther and Calvin have written homilies on this passage. We will do our analysis of these sermons in the context of the Christologies of both reformers. After the time of the Great Councils (Nicaea 325; Constantinople 381; Chalcedon 451), and up to the reformation, the question of the relationship of God and man in Jesus remained. It is not an easy problem to

solve. Augustine, Anselm and Thomas have, in one way or another, maintained the main Patristic line and thus the basic apostolic confession of Christ being God and human in one person.  Much could be said about the antagonists of the classic formulations, but they fall under the same kind of argumentation as we found with the antagonists of the early Christian theologians. The point is that “in the Reformation the christological debate readdressed these [classic] considerations concerning the precise relationship of the unity of Christ’s divinity and humanity.”

Many studies on the Christology of Luther agree that at the center of it is the incarnate God crucified for the salvation of humanity. In his argument against Erasmus, Luther further elaborates his Christology with two other aspects of the incarnation: Deus absconditus (God as hidden) and Deus revelatus (God as revealed). For Luther the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, is the ultimate revelation of God and where all knowledge of God, from a human perspective, starts. This also is strongly connected not only to knowledge as such but also directly connected to one’s own knowledge (and assurance) of his salvation. Christology, epistemology and soteriology are so closely related that they are almost inseparable. The paradox of the knowledge of God is that, at the moment one comes to know God, at the same time God is hidden in the human flesh on the cross. God’s act of revelation is an act of concealment at the same time. Luther’s Sermon for Palm Sunday is an exegesis and homily on Philippians 2:5-11, and handles these very issues of the unity of God and humanity in the person of Christ.

Luther’s sermon is a thorough analysis of the Hymn with a specific focus on explaining the God-human relationship in the person of Christ and its implications for the Christian life and identity. The homily starts with an exhortation for Christians to be more like Christ, followed with a theological and philosophical discussion on the two natures of Christ and the sermon concludes with some notes on the benefits of Christ’s work for the believers. This sermon is about Christian identity and for Luther the person and the salvific work of Christ fundamentally determine Christian identity. We will concentrate our attention on the section where Luther discusses the being of Christ: ‘form of God’ and ‘form of servant’.

Luther starts discussing the two forms by first making an interesting distinction between essence (nature / being) and expression (Gestalt). “The word he uses, ‘morphe’ or ‘forma’ he employs again where he tells of Christ taking upon himself the form of a servant. ‘Form of a servant’ certainly cannot signify ‘essence of a real servant’ possessing by nature the qualities of a servant. For Christ is not our servant by nature; he has become our servant from good will and favor toward us. For the same reason ‘divine form’ cannot properly mean ‘divine essence’; for divine essence is not visible, while the divine form was truly seen. […] For, as previously stated, the essence is concealed, but its manifestation is public. The essence implies a condition, while its expression implies action”.

Luther differentiates between what is revealed and what actually is. On the one hand God’s essence is categorically different therefore it is hidden and not revealed, but on the other hand His appearance or revelation is public and perceivable.

Luther builds his argument on a threefold understanding of the relationship between essence and Gestalt. “As regards these forms, or manifestations, a threefold aspect is suggested by the

308 LW 17/II, 237-245.
309 LW 17/II, 238-239.
words of Paul. The essence may exist without the manifestation; there may be a manifestation without the corresponding essence; and finally, we may find the essence together with its proper manifestation. For instance, when God conceals himself and gives no indication of his presence, there is divinity, albeit not manifest. This is the case when he is grieved and withdraws his grace. On the other hand, when he discloses his grace, there is both the essence and its manifestation. But the third aspect is inconceivable for God, namely, a manifestation of divinity without the essence.”

Even though Luther differentiates between what is revealed about God and God’s essence the two are bound together in the kenotic act of Christ, which is ultimately directed towards the salvation of humanity.

In interpreting the Hymn Luther addressed some popular criticisms against the doctrine of the two natures of Christ in one person. The objections often had to do with attempts to de-emphasize the divinity of Christ or to consider the body of Christ only a phantasm and not real. The point Luther makes in the sermon is that what was visible, i.e. the Gestalt, was indeed the presence of God. The primary logic of the interpretation of the Hymn is that since Christ was indeed God by nature and not by robbery, He manifested Himself as a human being. His manifestation as a human being was by His will and not by nature, thus in Christ Jesus, God Himself was manifest.

Zur Mühlen says about the Christology of Luther concerning the Hymn: “against the hubris of human reason, which continually strives to uncover the hidden God with its powers, Luther repeatedly and emphatically referred to Deus incarnatus (‘the incarnate God’) and thereby to God’s self-definition in the gospel. In accordance with this significance of the incarnate God, Luther emphasized the hypostatic union of the two natures of the divine person of Christ. ‘Although the two nature are distinct, yet there is one person; all that Christ does or suffers, God has certainly done and suffered, even though only one of Christ’s natures is affected.’ Through the hypostatic union, the earthly Christ partakes in the attributes of divine nature, but in accord with Philippians 2:5-11, he renounces their use. Christ served us as a servant, which he freely accepted, and in this form he bears witness to God’s love for us. Luther described Christ’s work that is grounded in this love as the reconciliation of humans with God; as liberation and redemption from sin, death and the devil and from the law as an instrument of God’s wrath directed against sin, or, as satisfaction for our sins.”

From the perspective of systematic theology, we note an interesting struggle with the various precise definitions and formulations of Luther’s sermon. Words like: nature, form, essence, presence, attitude, manifestation are part of the rich theological language with which he formulates his Christology in this sermon. It is noteworthy because, in the present theological landscape, it is hard, or, we dare to say, impossible, to have such a discussion about the person and being of Jesus Christ. This has to do primarily with modernity’s abandonment of the metaphysical use of language and its frame of reference. We will deal with this issue in our closing chapter; here, just a short critical note is sufficient. It is also apparent that the Hymn, for Luther, is also an aid in talking about the identity of God, namely the identification of God as Jesus Christ. Just as in our own analysis, it is apparent from that verses 6-8 are the preamble for 9-11 and determine one another. The kenosis of Christ on the cross, and the exaltation of Jesus in receiving the Name, is one and the same act of God, and the true self-identification of God. Theology always has soteriological and ethical implications, and for Luther that is the ultimately the end or the goal of theology and talk about Christ.

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310 LW 17/II, 239.
We have already alluded to the fact that the main Christological interest of the reformers was not so much the person of Christ as his salvific work. This is not to say that the person of Christ was not important, but that the focal point was on soteriology. Calvin was no exception to this. The same can be said about the basic logic of Calvin’s Christology as of Luther’s: if Christ was not fully man then he could not have shared our humanity, and thus our brokenness, and if he was not fully God, then he could not have forgiven us and his atoning work on the cross would have been futile. We will look at the main systematic work of Calvin, *The Institutes*, specifically to see what he does with the Hymn. We will focus on the 2nd Book of the *Institutes*, which is Calvin’s systematic treatment of the person of Christ.

Calvin, in the *Institutes* 2:13-15, works out the dogma of the two natures of Christ. It is here that he quotes the Hymn from Philippians. Calvin refutes two ancient heresies: “the Marcionites fancied Christ’s body by mere appearance, while the Manichees dreamed that he was endowed with heavenly flesh.” By pointing to ancient heresies Calvin answers Menno Simons, who, in his opinion is a ‘marcionite’. It is not the dispute itself that interests us, but arguments Calvin uses in the dispute. The issue ultimately was: *how could God assume human flesh?* This question had all sorts of implications. As we saw before, first is the question of the true corporality of Christ. If he had a body, what kind of body was it? Was it a real human body or a phantasm? For Calvin, the answer is clear: “Marcion imagines that Christ put on a phantasm instead of a body because Paul elsewhere says that Christ was ‘made in the likeness of man,… being found in fashion as a man’ [Phil. 2:7-8]. But he wholly overlooks Paul’s intention there: Paul does not mean to teach what sort of body Christ assumes. Rather, although Christ could justly have shown forth his divinity, he manifested himself as but a lowly and despised man. For, to exhort us to submission by his example, he showed that although he was God and could have set forth his glory directly to the world he gave up his right and voluntarily “emptied himself”. He took the image of a servant, and content with such lowliness, allowed his divinity to be hidden by a “veil of flesh”. If not the physical body, then the divinity of Christ was challenged. Referring to the Philippian Hymn, the question was often posed: if Christ was in the same form with God, then did he abandon his divinity? Did he become something less than God?

For the reformers it was clear that the unity of the two in Christ had to be affirmed and at the same time it had to be explained to the skeptics. The reformers’ theologies were often framed

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312 Bavinck puts it into a broader perspective: “Reformed theologians were, from the very beginning, in a much more favorable position. They had fundamentally overcome the Greek-Roman and Lutheran commingling of the divine and the human, also in Christology. While rigorously maintaining the unity of the person, they applied the rule ‘the finite is not capable of [containing] the infinite’ also the human nature of Christ and maintained this rule not only in the state of humiliation but even in that of Christ’s exaltation. In that way Reformed theology secured space for a purely human development of Christ, for a successive communication of gifts, and for a real distinction between humiliation and exaltation. Still, in the process, it seriously avoided the Nestorianism of which it was always accused. The reason for this is that the Greek, Roman and Lutheran theology the emphasis always fell on the incarnation of the divine being, the divine nature. In that nature does not become flesh, the work of salvation, communion with God, seems to be at risk. But reformed theology stressed that it was the *person* of the Son who became flesh – not the *substance* [the underlying reality] but the *subsistence* [the particular being] of the Son assumed our nature. The unity of the two natures, despite the sharp distinction between them, is unalterably anchored in the person. As it does in the doctrine of the Trinity, of humanity in the image of God, and of the covenants, so here in the doctrine of Christ as well, the Reformed idea of conscious personal life as the fullest and highest life comes dramatically to the fore.” (Bavinck, H., *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol.III, J. Bolt ed., trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, 258-259).
314 Calvin, *Institutes*, 475.
315 Calvin, *Institutes*, 476.
in the language of philosophy, and in metaphysical terms. The question of essence, form, nature, and person were part of this framework. Thus, their answers for the challenges of the day were just as much rooted in the Scriptures as they are rooted in philosophical discourse. But the philosophical was secondary to the Scriptures. As we have seen with Aquino, philosophy serves theology and not the other way around. The problem was mostly that the critiques of Christology could not affirm, in one way or another, the full humanity and the full divinity in the same person. It had to be cut either on the human side or on the divine side. This was unacceptable and un-traditional. Here, traditional means: in keeping with the conclusions of the councils of the early church, and ultimately, with the Apostolic faith and the Scriptures. Both Luther and Calvin realized that abandoning one or another aspect of what the Philippian Hymn affirms, has far reaching implications for the theology of reconciliation of God and man.

For the reformers the identity of God was just as an important topic as it was for the Church Fathers. This meant that they key issues were related to person of Christ and the work of Christ, specifically salvation. This is where the reformers contribute to our understanding of the identity of God. For the reformers it was essential to establish that God indeed has become a human being and that He as incarnate God had died on the cross, otherwise there is no real salvation for humanity. To establish this they had to appeal to the identity of God. The identity of God had become apparent in the revelation of the person of Jesus as the savior of humanity. So the identity question has been approached from the perspective of the work of Jesus Christ. This in turn shows how the identity of God relates to the rest of one’s systematic theology. Basically what one affirms about the identity of God has effects on the whole of the system. As it were the identity of God is at the center of one’s theology and all other themes converge in and diverge out of it. So the theology of God becomes the organizing factor of ones theological system.

5.4.3. The Modern Period

In the field of theology the rise of the historical-critical method introduced a new way of reading and interpreting Scripture and of doing theology. The metaphysical framework, which enabled many of the theological affirmations of pre-modernity, had evaporated. The epistemological framework took its place, and historical, phenomenological research has dominated the field of theology ever since. One of the most visible evidences of this change is the fragmentation of the various theological disciplines. In the case of the Church Fathers or the Medieval theologians we were able to quote from their sermons, from their systematic works or from their exegetical works. Even though the various disciplines in their works can be separately identified, they still form one harmonious theological discourse. Not so with modern theologians. Biblical studies as a discipline stands on its own, so do church history and systematic theology. The disciplines are not only differentiated; but they are also de-harmonized. Exegetes often see no systematic theological relevance of their work, just as systematic theologians often do not see the relevance of historical research to their work.

N.T. Wright’s work in New Testament studies and second temple Judaism is in a certain sense a break from the above-mentioned paradigm. Wright, as a contemporary theologian, managed to bring about a certain integration to the field of theology by combining historical, textual and theological work into one theological discourse. This makes his position among modern interpreters interesting and challenging at the same time. During the modern period theologians produced a series of interpretations of the Hymn, each with his own peculiarities. These interpretations are reminiscent of the modern problems and criticisms. The most apparent is the turn against dogmatic interpretations. Modern interpreters of the Hymn tended to interpret the Hymn in terms of morality or dismiss the Hymn on the whole because of its
questionable origins. Considering these modern interpretative tendencies Wright’s position is all the more challenging. This is why we have to start by sketching the main modern interpretations, then continue with Wright’s interpretation and finally show how Wright’s interpretation ties into our own argumentation regarding the identity of God.

One of the outstanding works that summarizes the main interpretations of the Hymn in modernity is R.P. Martin’s classic Carmen Christi. Martin starts his analysis of the interpretation history with the legacy of the Nineteenth century that can be characterized by three perspectives. First, The Dogmatic View has been the most dominant not only in the nineteenth century, but also during the preceding centuries. The main interpretive dilemma from this perspective regarded the historical Jesus. The following critical question was formulated: did Christ renounce His divinity before He became a human being? Or did He do that after He became a human being? The question was aimed to clarify the preexistence of Christ. The preference of the Lutheran interpreters fell on the second choice. In the Gospels they also saw evidence for this: an example would be in the temptations of Jesus in Matthew and Luke where Christ was given the chance to be God, so to say, but refused. The second perspective, during this period was The Kenotic Theory, also preferred by Lutheran theologians. In this theory there was a narrow concentration on the kenosis of Christ. Through the kenotic act of Christ, the interpreters tried to understand the person of Christ. This unique approach did not enjoy a wide reception though. The reason was that a serious historical-grammatical exegesis exposed this theory as an idealistic interpretation and as dogmatic optimism. The attempt to understand the Person of Christ through verse 7 of the Hymn does not do justice to the complexities of Christology and the wider biblical theological understanding of Christ, was the main criticism against this position. The third interpretive perspective of the nineteenth century was the Ethical Example. The Hymn, in this perspective, was regarded as a pastoral and practical text, with its emphasis on morals rather than on Christology. The Hymn was interpreted in terms of ethical ideals and noble goals such as neighborliness and selflessness. This last perspective was probably the most influential interpretive perspective of the period.

Moving from the nineteenth to the twentieth century interpretive tendencies, Martin highlights Lohmeyer’s work on Philippians as the one that introduced a turn in continental theology. The move was from a purely ethical interpretation towards a theological interpretation. “Since the publication of Lohnmeyer’s lecture in 1928 (one of its novel conclusions is stated in the author’s commentary published in 1928 - the Christological psalm ‘has to do with the portrayal of divine-human event, not the representation of an ethical concept’) the trend of German criticism has been turned in a new direction.” It was Lohmenyer’s impetus towards another interpretive method that lays at the basis of the twentieth century interpretations.

Martin’s overview of the twentieth century interpretative tendencies starts with the work of the German critical school, which has established that the Hymn’s significance is not primarily dogmatic, but rather liturgical. In other words, the Hymn was seen as insignificant for Christology. Martin’s own argument is close to this liturgical interpretation. Then Martin highlights Käsemann’s critical approach to the ‘ethical example’ interpretation of the nineteenth century. Käsemann’s point was that the Hymn is ultimately soteriological and addresses issues related to the salvation history, but not Christological, addressing issues related to the person of Christ. Martin quotes Käsemann, “Philippians 2 tells us what Christ

317 Martin, Carmen Christi, 73.
did, not what He was.” The final interpretive tendency of the twentieth century concerned the context of the Hymn. It has been customary for interpreters during this period to search either in the Judaic or the Hellenistic world for the true origin of the Hymn. The context of the Hymn was considered definitive for the interpretation of the Hymn.

What Martin’s overview makes clear is that by the twentieth century the Hymn had lost its dogmatic appeal. The larger shifts in the theological field had already determined this shift. There is an essential move away from dogmatic theology to a more historical reconstructive approach, ultimately leading to a phenomenological approach. This means that the value of the Biblical narrative is not only evaluated on its descriptive merits. The question following Martin’s work then remains: is there any dogmatic or systematic theological relevance of the Hymn? After having done the hard work of exegesis of the Hymn the question remains: is it possible that the Hymn with all its historical and linguistic characteristics still addresses systematic theological issues? Or is its value solely determined by its phenomenological contribution?

To answer these questions we turn to N.T. Wright and his interpretation of the Hymn. Christology, roughly since the Enlightenment, is determined by the various quests for the reconstruction of the person of the historical Jesus. These quests are also known as the Leben-Jesu-Forschung and more recently The Third Quest or The Jesus Seminar. One of the accomplishments of the Seminar was a vague picture of Jesus as a Jewish peasant who became a cynic philosopher. This kind of Jesus caricatures also made their way into serious New Testament scholarship. On a more critical note, one may also say that images of Jesus that emerged from these quests were the ones that best fitted in the critical framework of the researchers and not necessarily in the realities of the first century. N.T. Wright is associated with the Seminar, but as one of the critical voices. Wright’s contention is that, in order to more accurately understand who Jesus is, one must understand the historical context of the first century with its theological dynamics. The resurrection for example for Wright is a historical event contrary to the Seminar’s J.D. Crossan who holds the view that the resurrection is merely a theological reflection of the first century church. This makes Wright’s work even more interesting to look at.

N.T. Wright’s position is challenging, not only for biblical scholars, him being a New Testament specialist, but for church historians and systematic theologians as well. What Wright does well, is combining historical, textual and theological research into one theological discourse. He states “We must try to combine the pre-modern emphasis on the text as in some sense authoritative, the modern emphasis on the text (and Christianity itself) as irreducibly integrated into history, and irreducibly involved with theology, and the post modern emphasis on the reading of the text.” The task is a theological synthesis of the various theological disciplines. One of the major points within this task is the elucidation of

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318 Martin, Carmen Christi, 83.
319 The original quest originated with M. Wrede’s Leben-Jesu-Forschung and its aim was to find a Jesus apart from the high dogmatic formulations. The more current discussions on the search for the historical Jesus start with the work of E.P. Sanders in the late eighties and more currently the movement is led by J.D. Crossan. For an overview of the status questionis see F. Wessels Wie was Jesus Regtig? Oor die histories Jesus (Wellington: Lux Verbi, 2006).
the word ‘God’ in the context of first century Jewish and later Christian monotheism. It is Wright’s way of talking about the identity of God. It is interesting to note the relationship of the various disciplines in the methodology of Wright as it relates to Christology. The quest for the historical Jesus is theologically motivated, and therefore it combines historical and theological research. Historical research does not stand on its own, but it is determined by the texts of the first and second century. For Wright the text of the New Testament has a referential function to the realities of first century Judaism, and so the historical work unfolds those realities. This ultimately leads to a clearer image of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

We turn now to Wright’s interpretation of the Hymn. In his interpretation we will find his theological position. The Climax of the Covenant\footnote{Wright, N.T., The Climax of the Covenant, Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1991).} is one of Wright’s earlier publications on Paul’s Christology. In the book he highlights several key passages from Paul’s letters, which he considers as basic building blocks of the Pauline Christology. It is his contention that the Hymn can only be properly understood in the context of Paul’s theology.

Wright’s focuses on two aspects of the Hymn’s interpretation: one the ‘Adam-christology’ and the other on verse 6 of the Hymn and the problematic understanding of the word \(\alpha`rpagmo.j\) as it relates to Christ’s voluntary abandonment of His equality with God, and His full identification with the human condition. Interpreters often note a certain parallelism between Christ in Philippians 2 and Adam. They see in the obedience of Christ the reversal of the disobedience of Adam. Christ has abandoned the rights and privileges of being God. Adam’s sin was that he grasped at the given opportunity to be like God. From this parallelism Christ is understood as the \textit{Urmensch} which gives rise to Gnostic interpretations of the Hymn. However, we will focus on the second aspect of Wright’s analysis because it is here that he is most explicit about the meaning of the Hymn as it relates to the identity of Jesus Christ.

Wright, before making his own position clear, traces the scholastic debate as it unfolded in modernity. We will summarize its main points in order to get an impression of the nature of the debate. The discussions concerning the word \(\alpha`rpagmo.j\) involved mainly matters of Christ’s identity. The issue at hand in these discussions was the proper understanding of the word: on the one hand as Christ was in the form of God not by an act of robbery, but it was His from the beginning, and on the other hand as Christ did not consider His divinity as something He grudgingly held on to. He relinquished that right and became a human being. Following the two interpretations there are a myriad of options considering the being of Christ. Wright notes that the first interpretation was typical of the Western Christologies whereas the second was typical of the Eastern Christologies.

The two interpretations produce different options considering the identity of Christ.\footnote{See Wright, N.T., The Climax of the Covenant, 81.} Wright argues that Martin and Lohnmayer follow the Western interpretation and thus deems them unhelpful. They contend in their interpretations that Christ was divine but not yet equal with the Father; He received that honor only after His abasement. From this position Christ’s identity with the Father was not from the beginning, but was achieved after the incarnation. The achievement was not an act of robbery but something that was given to Christ. This interpretation makes the \(\muo`rphi\eta\ \thetae\delta\omega\) very problematic, because one has to create a separate category where Christ fits in, before His incarnation, which at the same time is also apart from the Father. Wright turns his criticism against this position, basically going against a Western understanding of Christ.
Wright’s argument is that the Eastern interpretation is much closer to what Paul had in mind with the Hymn. “The idiom here used clearly assumes that the object in question— in this case equality with God— is already possessed. One cannot decide to take advantage of something one does not already have”.\(^{324}\) It is also something that is unexpected. One might expect from God or from rulers to make the most of the position they are in. It is here that Wright makes use of a historical argument to support one of the theological points the Hymn makes. “Over against the standard picture of oriental despots, who understood their position as something to be used for their own advantage, Jesus understood his position to mean self-negation, the vocation described in vv. 7-8.”\(^{325}\)

Wright’s conclusion and main point is best captured in the following citation. “The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God. Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying) image, Calvary reveals the truth about what it meant to be God. (…) incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as appropriate vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.”\(^{326}\)

He makes two important points. First, that the Hymn is about the incarnation of the divine and that the incarnation is nothing less than the self-revelation of God as love. Incarnation, as it is articulated in the Hymn, is not meant to downplay the divinity, but to present God as Jesus Christ. He is the God who takes upon Himself the lowliest of human conditions and the cross. It was God who was crucified. Second, the Hymn and picture of God in it, is meant to be corrective. The crucified God is a critical instance against all human endeavors to create God. The cross is not only an incident in the life of God, but one of the main signs pointing towards His true identity. He is a God that human imagination would save from the cross, but He in His freedom and love, rather chose to carry the cross. The cross identifies God as love, sacrificial love that does not seek His own good, but the good of the other. This is the main reason Wright’s interpretation is challenging for theologians. He understands the text as addressing the very issue of the identity of God over against human constructions of God.

Martin traced the interpretive tendencies in modernity as they moved from the dogmatic interpretations to the ethical and moral interpretations and then finally to the phenomenological understanding of the Hymn. Wright through his interpretation has shown that the theological message of the Hymn is far more conclusive than any other interpretation. Wright understands that the meaning of the Hymn is ultimately rooted in Pauline theology, which in turn is rooted in Jewish monotheism. In other words the meaning of the Hymn is found in the over-all theology of the Scriptures. Wright manages to integrate in his work both biblical theology and systematic theology. This means a certain turn in the theological field.

Earlier we have talked about the fragmented aspect of the various theological disciplines. In the work of Wright we signal a certain integration of various disciplines for the service of theology, i.e. talk of God. Exegesis or historical research do not stand alone, but contribute to a constructive theological discourse on the nature of biblical theology and ultimately to systematic theology. This was exactly what we were after in the second half of the dissertation. To show ways in which biblical theological notions of God and His identity can help develop a systematic talk about God. So far we contended that when we talk about God,

\(^{324}\) Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 82.
\(^{325}\) Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 83.
\(^{326}\) Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 84.
we do not mean to talk about a constructed idea of God, but about God who comes and acts in the lives of His people, revealing Himself as a vulnerable God. He attached His identity to them as a way of giving Himself as their God. The Hymn to the Philippians identifies this God as Jesus Christ. To talk about God means then to talk about the identity of God who has revealed Himself in the history of Israel as YHWH, and more concretely as Jesus Christ, the crucified one.

Summary

We focused our biblical theological research by looking at the New Testament, specifically at the Letter to the Philippians. This chapter is a continuation of our biblical theological foundation of the talk of God. Our main question in this chapter has been: how does the apostle Paul talk about God in relation to His identity? We went about answering this question in three points.

First, we have placed the letter in the context of the church in Philippi. We have seen what the function of the letter in that community was and the weight it carried. A letter from an apostle was no small thing. For the first century believers, it was a challenge to believe in God in Jesus Christ. They had to make certain theological adjustments. For Jewish believers in Christ it meant that the God they knew and worshiped as YHWH was to be called by the Name revealed, i.e. Jesus Christ. For the gentile believers it meant the abandonment of the pantheon and learning to live with this one God, Jesus Christ. These theological challenges ended up spilling over into their daily lives and thus became a problem of identity. It was this problem that Paul was addressing in his letter. In his letter it is the Hymn, in chapter two that carries the essence of what he wants to convey theologically.

Second, we read through the Hymn and made some observations about the way Paul talks about God in the Hymn. We sought to establish that, even though the letter is written in Greek, its primary meaning is derived from the Old Testament and from the whole of biblical theology. This safeguards us from falling for into an esoteric interpretation of the Hymn. There is an interesting movement in the Hymn, from God to humanity and from humanity back to God. This movement takes place in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul talks about God as being God and as having become a human being, at the same time, in the person of Jesus. Jesus, having been in the form of God, has come down and abased Himself to the lowest of human conditions, slavery. In this condition He received the Name above all Names. Receiving the Name meant the self-identification of God in His person. This identification formed the main point of Paul’s theology in the passage. “Jesus Christ is LORD” in other words Jesus Christ is YHWH, Jesus is God’s self-identification in history. So, if the Philippians are to identify themselves with anyone, they ought to identify themselves with Jesus, who is the Christ, the Lord, to the Glory of God.

Third, we have looked at the reception of this Hymn through the ages. Our aim was to identify some of the interpretive issues, which presented themselves. Three main periods have been of interest to us: the early Christian theologians, the reformers and, finally, the modern interpreters. It has been interesting to see how Paul’s main message of the identity of God in Jesus has made its way to the present. Through the ages, various theological and philosophical objections have been presented to this very identification. The tendency on the part of the objectors was to down play either one or the other of this paradoxical identity of God revealed in a human being. So what did we learn from our short historical overview? The challenge for the theologian, through the ages and today, is to work out the implications and the applications of this scandalous message, which has been handed down to us. The question of God’s identity forms the essential foundation of any responsible theology.
Conclusion - The identity of God and Theology

6.1. Adriaanse and the problem of modern theology – An answer

The working thesis of our study is that theology fundamentally is talk about God and more specifically talk about the identity of God. We have submitted our thesis to the test in light of the religious scientific critique of theology. It was meant to compare theology to the scientific demands for an academic discipline. H.J. Adriaanse’s work was the guideline for discussing the matters related to the test. He argues that, considering the scientific developments of the last two centuries, theology defined as talk about God, is impossible. The reason is that God, as such, is a metaphysical matter and thus not open for public inquiry. One can only talk about ‘God’ as a concept, which is intrinsically related to human religious consciousness and the human ability to project a higher being. His conclusion is: theology considered from a scientific perspective, is a non-academic discipline. Therefore Adriaanse calls for the abandonment of theology and proposes ‘religious studies’ as a more ‘scientific’ alternative.

We formulated Adriaanse’s challenge in the following question: does theology deserve the adjective ‘academic’? Is there a kind of God talk that is justified or at least plausible for such an academic discourse?

The overall argument of the thesis is that considering the main narrative texts of our theological tradition (the basic texts in the Bible) and the long and rich history of God talk, there is no reason why theology ought not to be an academic discipline. To answer Adriaanse’s challenge, we can say that we understand that there might be difficulties considering the scientific developments of the last century. Exactly those developments are problematic when it comes to theology and specifically to God talk. Modern scientific theory works with a definition of God as a metaphysical transcendent being. Then it considers this God inaccessible and impossible to talk about Him. Adriaanse in his criticism of classic theology focuses on the wrong God. Adriaanse has a concept of God, which is other than the paradigm of God talk in Israel and the Church. Our main argument against Adriaanse is that we do not talk about God as the one who is above the line unrelated to His presence, but we talk about God who is present in His acting in the history of His people.

Even though the God Adriaanse rejects, i.e. the one who is above the line, he makes provision for God talk, but in an unexpected way. God’s presence is experienced in the suffering of human beings, as he talked about the deportation of the Jews during the Shoah. It is there where the word ‘God’ may ‘fall in’. So there remains a place where God talk is possible, namely in the midst of human suffering and pain. We referred to this, in chapter three, where we talked about the absence of God in the experiences of Israel in Egypt. God’s absence or hiddenness was the reason Israel cried out in prayer to God. In turn, God gave Himself through His Name. In chapter four we talked about Israel in Exile and their struggle to understand God in His absence. We made the point that YHWH by participating in the history of His people made Himself vulnerable, because He connected His identity to the identity of His people. The history of Israel in a certain sense is the history of YHWH. In the Christological hymn of the fifth chapter the suffering God takes upon Himself the suffering of this world, by taking upon Himself the lowest of human conditions. It is there that God is given to us.

When we look to God's presence in this perspective everything changes and God talk is really possible. Indeed not as a constructed metaphysical Being which is above the line, but as God
who is experienced at the cross roads of the world and its history. Not necessarily in the successes and the victories of history, but precisely at those moments, which contest the existence of God. YHWH comes and gives Himself to be known in the cross of Jesus, which we remember and participate in by sharing the broken body of the Eucharist.

Therefore biblical theologically we see no reason why theologians should abandon theology as God talk. The nature of the texts and their content puts us into a position where we can affirm that theology is indeed talk about God in a specific way about His identity. The texts give voice to those human experiences, which tell of God and who He is. To follow Adriaanse and denounce theology, as not being God talk, would be to ignore these texts and what they say about God, humanity and the world. Miskotte paved the way for our biblical theological arguments. He made the point that there is indeed place where God talks to humanity, namely in the proclaimed Word of God. We have argued further that biblical theology shows the way of talking about God and His identity and also that to whom God speaks become the carriers of His presence in this world. So there is a concrete place where not only God speaks, but we who have heard also talk about God. In this dissertation we have made it plausible that in biblical theology there is no indication why theology should be seen anything less than talk about God as He indentified Himself in the history of His people.

At this point there remains another critical question that may be asked at the end. It also connects and complements our answer to Adriaanse’s challenge. Is biblical theological talk of God not just as much a projection of ‘God’ as the one that we criticize based on biblical theological arguments? Are the texts not just as much projections (a certain interpretation of historical events) rather than descriptions (adequate telling of historical events)? Can biblical texts truly be about God or merely about ‘God’? And if they are about God than are they enough to answer and ultimately undermine the modern problems related to God talk?

If we only would have the texts on them-selves then we would find the above critical questions more than valid, but there is more than texts. We want to submit the following points for consideration:

1. Are the Biblical texts adequate sources for a theological discourse on the identity of God? The text and the narratives do not come to us value free. It is postmodern optimism that there is nothing between the text and the reader and that the reader has the sole authority over the text. There is much more in the texts than meets the eye. There is whole history of transmission (narratives that have been passed on), canonization (narratives that have been considered authoritative) of the biblical narratives. These do not make biblical theological arguments weaker rather stronger because its shows on the side of Israel that these texts were constitutive for their identity and their own speaking about God.

2. Biblical narratives also deal with problems of interpretation. In the third chapter Moses is concerned how his theology, God talk, will be received, interpreted and understood by the Israelites. It seems that Moses does not want to theologize unless he is told how he is to talk about God, namely by His Name. God gives him sings to confirm that He has spoken indeed. The prophets had to go through the same kind of scrutiny, their speaking about God or speaking in the name of God. Their words were also measured and interpreted. There were criteria by which they were able to rightly interpret the texts. The truth is also that Israel sometimes lacked the wisdom to interpret what has been said and made a mess of it; these were according to the prophets the reasons Israel was taken into Exile. So biblical theologically we can
argue that there is a right way to talk about God. Biblical theologically we can outline a normative way to talk about God and that is what we have done in the last three chapters.

3. Within the texts there is a strong differentiation between God, YHWH and the gods of the nations and idol worship. This indicates that in the biblical narratives there is a qualitative difference between ‘God’ and Gods. This is also a major point of difference with Adriaanse. He argues that all that there is ‘God’ as humans project a higher being. This precisely what Ezekiel is criticizing in Israel’s secularized Temple worship. The priests project their own hidden ways on YHWH and then they call Him absent. This kind of theologizing in strongly condemned. In the condemnation we see criteria by which God is differentiated from ‘God’. We would go as far as to say that the Old and the New Testament are in essence anti religious. They are like this in their criticism of the human’s willingness to create their own gods rather than following the God who has spoken in their lives and is present in their history.

4. This is the reason why see Miskotte as paving the way for us in arguing that in theology when we talk about God we talk specifically about the Name, YHWH. God who revealed Himself through His acts in the history of His people Israel and the Church.

5. The identification of Jesus with YHWH, as we argued in chapter five, brings the speaking about God ‘from above’ and ‘from down’ together. Speaking about Jesus Christ and Him crucified is speaking about the God from above. This is the essence of the Hymn from the Letter to the Philippians. The biblical texts do not seem to divide reality into transcendence and immanence. The immanent Jesus Christ hanging on the cross is God. Speaking about Christ is speaking about God as such. This is the reason why in the fourth chapter we rejected Mettinger’s false dichotomy (pg. 83-84). He sees that certain names of God refer to His transcendence and others to his immanence. Our argument is that the Name of God does refer to God Himself. The immanent God is the transcendent God. The Philippians letter puts this in these terms: Jesus Christ is LORD, i.e. Jesus Christ is identical with YHWH.

6. The modern assumption is that what is immanent cannot be transcendent and the opposite (see Kant). Biblical theology is a criticism of this because it talks about God, who is transcendent, in terms of history, human experiences that are transmitted and canonized narratives. The reception history of these biblical narratives, in Christian theology, shows that the task of God talk, for theologians has not been an obvious task. In every generation theologians had to translate biblical theology in light of the demands of their day. This commitment to translation is ultimately what defines our own theological quest for understanding the ways in which we can talk about God in our own day and age. For the fathers of the Church it was a matter of keeping to the Apostolic understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures and the ensuing Credos. It was an apologetic kind of God talk. The reformers saw themselves, theologically in the same line as the fathers, even though they had a different historical context, namely their struggle with the Mother Church. At the heart of their struggle was the recuperation of a biblical theological understanding of God and His salvation in Jesus Christ. God talk for the reformers was not merely an abstract concern but a reality which brought about major changes in the Church and the lives of those who made the message their own. The Enlightenment, as a critical ideology, had the most influence.
on our contemporary understanding of theology. The achievements of the European Enlightenment, most poignantly summarized by the *Kantian Critique*, presented theology with the challenge of the seeming impossibility of *God talk*. Theologians have been working with this criticism, some to recover theology as a legitimate *God talk* and some by appropriating the challenge as a modus operandi for doing theology. Our work is intended as a contribution to a more constructive theology, which takes the challenges of our day seriously and at the same time seeks a theological outworking of them.

Now, at the end of our study and inquiry about these issues, it is our assertion: *Theology is God talk, especially in this specific way of talking about the identity of God.* Theology is a multifaceted discipline encompassing exegesis, church history, practical theology and systematic theology. They all have developed their own methods of enquiry and discourse. They all have their respective merits and standing in the broad field of theology. Often these various specializations function on their own, rarely interacting with each other. Perhaps a move toward a clearer understanding of the task of theology as *God talk* could bring more unity within the field. If all the different disciplines are dots in the theological constellation, the systematic theologian’s role is ‘to connect the dots’ and bringing unity in the segmented field of theology.

At its heart, theology is a matter of talking about God. However, as we say this, we also realize that the task of *God talk* is not obvious, and it is often very difficult. There remain not only experiences, which confirm our knowledge of God, but there are also those that challenge it. Often the challenge to the knowledge of God is more apparent and real than the presence of God. Our study on the identity of God has sought to show that there is room precisely for these negative experiences, too. Exactly these anomalies tell us of God, who cannot be captured by systems of thoughts and put in service of ideals. As theologians, our task is talk about God, specifically, about YHWH who identified Himself in history as Jesus Christ.

Now we want to present a short theological discourse outlining some of the main systematic theological perspectives considering the identity of God.

### 6.2. *The Identity of God* - systematic theological perspectives

*Sources of Christian theology and the identity of God*

At the beginning of our study, we set out to engage with the religious-scientific critique of theology, which dominates today’s discussions on the content, method and the aims of the discipline. Our approach to the discussion was to combine systematic theology and biblical theology as a means of addressing some of the critical issues. One of the main aspects of the religious schools’ critique concerns *the theology of God* and the ambiguities related to the *talk about God*. We posited the following thesis as an answer to this criticism: *theology is talk about God, specifically, talk about the identity of God*. The study on the *identity of God* emerged from the thought that there is much more to be said about God than what came forth from the critical discourse on ‘God’ of the religious-studies school.

Essentially, what we were dealing with is the understanding of the word ‘God’. The *identity of God* substantiates what we understand by the word ‘God’. By using the term ‘identity’, we point toward a dynamic understanding of the word ‘God’, which is fundamentally defined by the Name of God, i.e. YHWH. The Name, theologically speaking, qualifies the meaning of
the word ‘God’. It is not a constructed understanding of the word, where God is defined as a high being which exists outside the reality we experience as human beings. Adriaanse’s criticism of theology pertains exactly to this ‘God’. He understands classic theology as being about a constructed ‘God.’ That is the reason why he opts for understanding the word ‘God’ as a human projection. The word ‘God’, for Adriaanse, ultimately emanates from the religious imagination of humans.

The way we understand the word ‘God’ is the way biblical narratives identify God. Through those narratives God exists as a separate entity who talks, acts and moves. He appears to people, talks to them, and relates to them so much that there is talk of a marriage between God and His people. The biblical narratives identify God as a person who gives His Name and where His Name is called upon, there He is as well. He does not simply exist: He acts. He does things like saving people, judging people and restoring them. He does so not outside the perceived reality but in the reality of their lives, in their history. His people’s history is His history as well. We understand that theology pertains to this God. When we talk about God we talk about YHWH. Theologians through the ages have struggled with this very issue, namely to show that the identity of God is decisive for their respective theologies, i.e. God talk.

Athanasius in his work shows how the Name is decisive for the understanding of the word ‘God.’ It is not a mere label, but the essence of who God is in His being. Because of the Name, God is identified in the history of His people Israel, and in the person of Jesus Christ. When theologians talk about God they must have Jesus Christ in mind. For Thomas the revelation of the Name is at the heart of his philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Often his ‘five ways’ are considered only as philosophical arguments, but the centrality of the quote from Exodus 3:14 qualifies his method as theological. The existence of God is not rooted in philosophical constructs but in the revelation of the Name of God, which allows for further conceptualizations on the way the theologian may talk about God. This is the essence of Thomas’s argument in the ‘proofs of God’. Calvin follows the same line of argumentation, God revealed Himself in His Name and in the covenant relationship with His people. The Name of God is not a grammatical construct but the revelation of His being.

Only in modernity does this kind of theologizing become problematic. Even though Barth acknowledges the fact that God is known in His revelation, he pays tribute to modernity by declaring God a mysterious God, whose act of revelation is at the same time an act of concealment. The revelation of the Name is then the refusal to give a name. Barth induces ‘mystery’ and hiddenness in order to protect God from modern humanity. We see this as the logical conclusion of Barth’s epistemology, rather than an ontological experience and struggle with the hiddenness of God. We mean the kind of experiences that were at the basis of Israel’s distress and bewilderment in the Egyptian captivity. Or the Psalms that deal with the experiences related to the confronting reality of the absence of God. The identity of God becomes apparent in the conditions that Adriaanse refers to as circumstances in which the word God might fall in. The word God falls in the direst of life circumstances, because it is precisely where God is and meets humanity.

The above approach to theology and God talk is criticized in modern scientific approaches to religion and theology. Adriaanse argues for the impossibility of the revelation of God and the knowledge of God from the perspective of the divided reality. There is an all-dividing line between the physical and the metaphysical. According to his theory the divine is ‘locked up’ above the line in timelessness and spacelessness. What is above the line is out of reach for those who are under the line, because they are conditioned by time and space. This implies
that the actual source of the human talk about God is the human ability to project an ideal divine being. This is what we call the loss of talk of God in theology. The theologian cannot talk about God as such, but he must talk about ‘God’ as a projected entity. God in this case is not the self-revealing God anymore but the ‘God’ who fits the philosophical conjectures of the scientist.

Miskotte is right to point out that God is not to be sought after in the human consciousness but in the revelation of His Name, YHWH. God in His Name stands over against humanity and calls them out of their self created bondage of Nihilism. Theology does not start with humanity’s ability to project God, because they cannot. Miskotte states: they have lost any sense of the sacred and the divine. All that remains for humanity is the deafening silence of the gods. According to Miskotte it is YHWH who breaks through this silence by His Word. He is the one, who comes and addresses humanity and leads them out of their despair. The implication of Miskottes theology is that while the gods are silent, YHWH speaks. The silence of the gods is the silence of the idols erected by human projection. Miskotte, against these silent gods, posits the God of the Old Testament, the God of Israel, who revealed Himself in His Name. His theological approach to theology and anthropology is tempting to follow, but in the final analysis it turns out not to have solid ground in human history. Miskotte’s God talk on a fundamental level is determined by the demands of his context, a rapidly secularizing society.

The way we talk about God is neither the theoretical ‘God’ of philosophy nor a God who is only proclaimed in the Word, but the God who is identified in the history of people. God has an identity and is not merely a definition; therefore He does not fit any philosophical system or rationality that tries to domesticate Him according to its own rules. This is precisely the problem, the biblical narratives about YHWH, address. Time and time again we hear the motto: YHWH is God and not the idols. The Shema, one of the most basic and important confession of Israel, is a reminder of this very truth. YHWH does not conform to the ideals of His people. They have to live with the knowledge that their God is God, which means that He is free to be and act according to His own will. He is not to be manipulated nor used for their purposes. It is by grace that He enters into the vulnerable covenantal bond with them. YWHW, by participating in the lives of His people, attaches His identity to them. Just like a married couple, the participants become one and share the same history. Even though they are two different people, by being in relationship they are one. The history of Israel, is YHWH’s history in their interrelated identities. This is the reason why knowing God is not a matter of epistemology but of history, as the cumulative experiences of those whose lives have been addressed, touched and defined by this God.

The hiddenness of God and contesting experiences

So far we argued that there is knowledge of God and that there is a valid talk of God, but at the same time we realize that the knowledge of God is not self-evident. This realization lies also at the heart of Adriaanse’s critique of classic theology. Adriaanse is categorical about the fact that scientifically there is nothing to be said about God. This clear-cut rejection has nothing to do with the method of modern scientific theory or the divided reality we have described before, nor does it have to do with what Barth rejected as natural knowledge of God. It has to do with something that is inherent in the knowledge of God. There is a certain experience of the hiddenness of God. He is absent and it seems that He does not participate in history. There are times when God is not detectable in everyday life. This leads some to conclude that God is so far beyond this world that He either does not exist or is incapable to intervene. God talk under these circumstances becomes impossible.
Barth understands the hiddenness or the mystery of God as something positive. For Barth the revelation of God is at the same time an act of concealment. We argued that Barth does this in order to ‘protect’ God from absolute immanence. The hiddenness of God in this case accounts for those difficult experiences that are unexplainable. It has a positive function in filling the gaps of the intellectual struggles one might have with evil and suffering. Theologians are often challenged in light of extreme events in history about the whereabouts of God. The mystery of God is a favoured answer to flee to. ‘We do not understand what is happening only God knows’ or ‘God’s ways are not our ways’ are the sort of answers given. The positive appreciation of the mystery of God is much more telling about human rationality than about God Himself. Theologically there is a tendency ‘to protect God’, but for other reasons than Barth. In this case it means to save Him from the challenging experiences of life and suffering. God, in face of human suffering, does not fit the ideal world. In an ideal world God would act and not allow suffering to happen. Since He does not act it must be because He is mysterious and we do not understand Him.

Imitating the real presence of God for created, projected and controlled experiences is called idolatry. The priests gathered in the inner room of the Temple (Ezekiel 8) are guilty of this very sin. They project their own hidden ways on God and thus define YHWH as silent and hidden. The experience of the hiddenness of God in the book of Ezekiel does not lead to a cry of desperation as it did in the Exodus narratives, but it leads to secularization. Since God is absent the Israelites say ‘we will follow our own ways,’ ‘we will make idols and gods in our image.’ Those gods are not an entity as such; they are an intrinsic part of the human intellect. This means that the word ‘God’ has its origin, not in experience, but in reflection and projection of the human mind.

Secularization, as we have mentioned in chapter 4, is the loss of the otherness of God. To be fair to Barth this is also the reason he positively appreciates the hiddenness of God. In the Book of Ezekiel the prophet notes a certain secularization that was taking place in Israel. It is a secularization, which is marked by the projection of the elders of Israel. They are the ones that hide in the temple. They are the ones that project their hidden ways on God and call Him as absent God. The hiddenness of God is projected onto God. Bewilderment about the otherness of God does not lead to prayer but leads to secularization. They inquired about God through the prophet, as if the word of YHWH and His guidance is something automatic. This is what we noted as the ultimate sign of secularization. The cult, as a whole, lost its sacramental identity and became a self-serving institution.

People in the secularized culture of today have their own version of this. It is most apparent in their understanding of identity as something makeable. In other words identity is a construct. And not only is identity considered being a construct, but also the reality they inhabit. Humans in general are in charge of the outcome of their lives; in the end life is what they make of it. They project a perfect self-image and work all of their lives to realize that ideal. Paired with a projected self image, comes also a projected God. This God is made perfect in every way possible and is made into the guarantor of happiness and self-fulfillment. God is seen as the one who guaranties the good life one aspires to live. This kind of religiosity is true secularism. When one talks about a religious upheaval in society this kind of religiosity is what is meant. The human and God relationship in this perspective has nothing to do with an encounter between humanity and the living God, but with wishful thinking. Miskotte rightly criticizes this.
Human identity and the people of God

The truth of the human condition is that identity is given. We do not bring forth our own lives but we are given birth to. The one who gave birth to us conditioned us. To a certain degree we realize that we are not born with clean slates but with tainted lives full of the pains, sufferings and brokenness of those who came before us. As human beings we carry our histories and the histories of those that raised us and to whom we are related either by blood or by the history of our lives. We have interrelated identities and it means that we are dependent on each other in understanding who we are. The crux of our identities does not lie ahead of us in the future. We are not what we are becoming. Our identities are defined and are in a sense given. The critical question considering the biblical texts is: can we live with the givenness of our lives? Or do we need the ideal perfect self to give meaning and purpose to our lives because the realities of our human condition are ultimately unbearable?

The actual presence of God with His people comes also to expression in a variety of human experiences, such as awe, confusion, wonder, worship, etc. It is, however, not an esoteric experience, but rather an encounter with God. Moses did not create or project a God, but he encountered His presence. The encounter was not self-evident, but it interrupted his life and the lives of those he had to lead. The presence of God is an interruption, because God does not emanate out of the best human thoughts, but comes from the ‘outside in.’ Moses hesitated to accept the call of God. That is a sign of the interruption and bewilderment one experiences in an encounter with God. YHWH’s call is not a call to self-fulfillment but a call to loose one’s identity and to live with the interruption as an all-defining experience. This God, YHWH, is not so much in history that He becomes submerged in the consciousness of humanity (absolute immanence), nor is God so much above history that any correlation is lost (absolute transcendence). This is the reason why when we talk about the identity of God we also have to talk about revelation, specifically revelation as an encounter with the presence of God.

The biblical narratives are theology, talk about God, par excellence. In biblical-theological terms, to talk about God is to talk about His Name, which intrinsically is related to His being and acting. He is present where His Name is. The Name YHWH encompasses both the actuality and the historicity of God’s presence. God is actually present in the events which are foundational for the history and identity of His people. The markers of His presence are directive in nature, pointing towards Him. These markers have become the symbols by which God is identified amidst His people. The Tent of Meeting and later the temple have been some of the major symbols of His presence in Israel. The Glory theology is precisely about YHWH’s cultic presence. The cult with all its instruments was essential in mediating the presence of God to the people. The cultic place gives a concrete presence in time and space and thus brings to expression the historicity of God’s identity.

The identity of God and specifically the historicity of His Name show that there is a certain givenness when it comes to God as well, but in a different way. God in His identity has also history and that is the reason why He does not conform to our ideals. God is given in a certain sense in the history of His people, marked by events of liberation, redemption, exile and restoration. But the central aspect of God’s Name is His identity in Jesus Christ, who has been identified by the Name above all names. The historicity of the identity of God safeguards the theologian from constructing a metaphysically adequate God. The theologian in his talk about God must start with what is given, namely Jesus Christ. God’s participation in the history of His people is evident in the Name, specifically when it suffers damage. It is the vulnerable historical presence of God that is the true testimony to His Name. It is precisely God on the
cross who is the ultimate criticism of the ‘ideal’ God of metaphysics, which probably would not be moved in its detachment.

The identity of God’s people and YHWH are interrelated identities. YHWH attached His Name, i.e. His presence to His people throughout the wilderness wanderings and later when they lived in the land. YHWH was with them through the mediation of the temple and cult. The people were to be a reflection of His presence towards the nations. They were to be the mediators of God’s presence throughout creation. This is what it means to be related to God and to have a sacramental identity. True human identity is a sacramental identity. Humanity must point beyond itself to the reality of YHWH. They do so not in perfection but in the brokenness of the human existence. It is this brokenness that YHWH shares with us on the cross of Christ. The essence of our human identity is not what we make of it, or what others made of it, but knowing that our condition and existence are hidden in Christ.

Christology and the identity of God
To talk about God is to talk about Jesus Christ. When we talk about Jesus Christ we talk about the presence of God with His people, those who are gathered around Him in worship. He is not the God of the superlatives or the God of the omnis. God in Jesus is not the God who fits the categories of metaphysics as a mute, locked up in heaven, perfect, unmoved God. He has shown Himself to be God in becoming a human being of the lowest rank, a slave. Given this it is hard to imagine that Jesus deserves worship. He in His acts does not fit the ideals we have for a God. He comes in ways that are much like ours, broken and full of suffering. The highest He got was the height of the cross, the crown of the King is the crown is made of thorns, but He is the one who is identified as YHWH. It is hard to worship a God who hangs on the cross, its much easier to worship a powerful God who does what is expected of a God.

God is given to us in Christ Jesus. This means that the understanding of the God is congruent with the Name of Jesus. It was this that the theologians through the ages were trying to make clear in their theologies, from the earliest Christian writers, through the reformation and up to modernity. It is the conviction that when we as theologians talk about God we are not talking about an unknown God, but we talk about God who revealed Himself most clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not that we cannot talk about God. We as theologians should not to hesitate to talk about God, since to talk about God means to talk about the identity of God, i.e. Jesus Christ.

He is the God who is present in history as a man who lived and died on a roman cross. His historical presence determines the way we understand who God is. He is the one who took upon Himself the human condition and carried its brokenness. By doing so it is most evident that He is indeed God. This is precisely the message of Paul in the Philippian Hymn. God did not consider Himself so much of a God that He could not empathize with the human condition. He took upon Himself this condition to show even more what it means to be God and at the same time to show what it means to be a human being. Thus Christology has both theological and anthropological implications. Who is this God called Jesus? He is the God who relinquished the right to self-gratification and took the road of offering Himself to those He wanted to save. From this it is clear that to be human means to give up the human ideal to self-fulfillment in order to find a life hidden in God. God as revealed in Jesus is challenging for the modern humans searching for themselves and for their identity. Identifying with Jesus is an answer to His identification with us. When we know that our lives are carried and hidden in Him, we display in our broken humanity the God we know.
Ecclesiology and the identity of God

The modern tendency in ecclesiology is characterized by aversion from a cultic understanding of the presence of God. More often God is sought after in the human consciousness rather than in the concrete realities of the Church. This tendency comes also from a certain suspicion towards institutions. The criticism is partly justified as long it addresses the loss of the sacramental understanding of the Church and of the sacraments. If the Church and its tools are self-servant, meaning that only exist for their own purposes and not as the mediator of God presence, the criticism is right. When the Church only serves the purposes of its own institution we may talk about secularization. The loss of identity for the Church means the loss of sacramental identity.

Considering the identity of God and the historicity of His presence, the Church with its instruments bids a concrete place for the presence of God. The Church is then the mediator of the presence of God. It is not meant in the negative sense that the Church is the only place where God is present as a self-evident truth. In a more constructive sense, the Church in its worship of God is a sign of the presence of God in this world, not any God but God who identified Himself in Jesus Christ. Thus answering the question: ‘where is God?’ is to say: in the Church where people, in His presence, partake in the sacraments and participate in worship. Does this undermine the achievements of the protestant reformation? The answer is: certainly not. It presents today’s theologian with the possibility of talking about God as a concrete presence rather than a conceptual God. The identity of God and its implications for the Church has a critical input toward the modern tendency of seeing God on the one hand only as a personal and private matter and on the other hand God as being all in all and thus nowhere.

This God cannot be projected. He does not confirm to the highest ideals of humanity nor to the gods they create. Humanity needs authorization, someone to permit them to be who they want to be. They need ideals, gods and ideal images of themselves to become the perfect version of humanity. This is why they create the guarantors of their well-being and the god who is slave to their self-actualization. The givenness of God in Jesus tells us humans otherwise: life is not about self-actualization but about giving up the right to be ourselves. This is what Paul is telling to the Philippians when he exhorts them to have the same mind as Jesus has. It is not merely about ethics and following divine rules. It is much more than that. It is about worship, which means participating in the presence of God, by partaking in the sacraments.

Being baptized means to relinquish that ideal picture of self and realize that Jesus carries the human existence. He carries not the best version of our humanity, but the worst of the human condition. In baptism one receives a new identity, which does not await fulfillment but is realized in Jesus. Being in Christ Jesus is where humans truly belong. True humanity does not mean to be free from God in self-actualization. To be truly human means to reckon with the fact that the human condition is a broken condition. Humans are not gods despite their pretence. This God, despite His broken appearance, saves us from ourselves. God by becoming a human being gives humanity its worth and dignity. The Holy Communion is truly communion because we participate in the presence of God as the ones who are in Christ. The broken bread and shed blood are the reminders that we belong to this God who offered Himself up on the cross. The Communion is the true expression of our identity. What we eat is who we are. We are the symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ, i.e. the presence of God in this world. This is the reason why the Church is not merely an institution in itself, but a sacrament in this world testifying of the presence of God. When we talk about God we talk about this God, Jesus Christ, who is present in this way in this world.
Nederlandse Samenvatting

De Identiteit van God: Moderne en Bijbels-Theologische Begrippen van God

Samenvatting

De hypothese van deze dissertatie is de volgende verklaring: *Theologie is het spreken over God*, en specifieker, *het spreken over de identiteit van God*. Theologie als *het spreken over God* is een betwiste definitie. Het spreken over God is onmogelijk binnen verscheidene wetenschappelijke en academische disciplines. Dit is een van meest gebruikelijke, kritische punten van bezwaar ten opzichte van theologie: God kan niet het object zijn van theologie, zoals onze definitie dat aanneemt, omdat God niet aan de empirische eisen van een wetenschappelijke discipline kan voldoen. De impliciete objectificatie van God, en het gebrek aan empirische bewijzen, plaatst theologie daarom in een problematische positie. In deze dissertatie willen we juist deze uitdaging voor de theologie behandelen.

In het eerste hoofdstuk hebben we de problemen van de theologie in de moderne tijd, die te maken hebben met *God talk*, gepresenteerd. Om het probleem te presenteren, hebben we ons gericht op het werk van de Nederlandse theoloog H.J. Adriaanse. We hebben zijn werk op vier punten geanalyseerd: 1) de rationaliteit van wetenschap, 2) de onmogelijkheid van klassieke theologie, 3) theologie vs. religieuze wetenschap, en 4) theologie en reductionisme.

We begonnen met een kort overzicht van de geschiedenis van de wetenschapsfilosofie, om te proberen het werk van Adriaanse te begrijpen in de context van de wetenschapsfilosofie. Het korte overzicht van de geschiedenis van de wetenschapsfilosofie liet een algemene beweging zien naar de bevrijding van de menselijke rede van externe autoriteiten, zoals de Bijbel en de Natuur. Kant systematiseerde de *autonomie van de rede* en hij verhoogde daarmee de positie van de rede tot de exclusieve autoriteit voor het menselijke bewustzijn. *Hoe ken je?* is de vraag die alle wetenschappelijke ondernemingen moeten beantwoorden. Theologisch gezien, komen rede en rationaliteit beide samen onder het thema van openbaring. Voor de theoloog is de kennis van God gebaseerd op openbaring. Adriaanse bekritiseerde precies dit punt en het was zijn meest fundamentele bezwaar tegen klassieke theologie. Volgens zijn argumentatie is de correlatie tussen God en de mens onmogelijk, omdat de mens beperkt is tot tijd en ruimte, terwijl dit niet geldt voor God. Uiteindelijk betekent dit dat er niets te zeggen is over God, met behulp van de rede.

Op het moment dat theologie getest werd volgens de eisen van moderne wetenschappelijke theorie, werd het duidelijk dat theologie geen wetenschappelijke discipline is. Voor Adriaanse betekende deze conclusie dat theologie geherstructureerd moest worden, wat een beweging van een *theocentrisch* naar een *antropocentrisch* begrip van theologie impliceert. Het hoofdzakelijke object van onderzoek wordt dan, voor de theoloog, de religieuze mens. In een openbare context zoals een universiteit werd theologie vervolgens religiewetenschap. Dit proces van herstructurering is, volgens ons, reductionistisch. Adriaanse bespreekt de kwestie van reductie op sympathieke wijze. De theoloog die werkt voor een openbare universiteit moet *Disciplina Arcani* praktiseren. Omdat God met geloof te doen heeft, en niet behoort tot de cirkel van de algemene rationaliteit, is het beter dat God als een geheim bewaard wordt, zodat het risico wordt vermeden dat de theoloog pseudo-wetenschap verwetens wordt.
We besloten onze analyse van Adriaanse’s argument met een korte aantekening over de complexiteit van zijn werk, dat zelfs een ware worsteling van zijn kant laat zien. Ook al wijst hij het publieke belang van het spreken over God of klassieke theologie beslist af, er blijft toch een plaats waarop spreken over God niet alleen mogelijk maar zelfs gepast is, namelijk in het midden van het menselijke lijden.

In het tweede hoofdstuk presenteerden we het werk van H.K. Miskotte als een paradigma voor het doen van theologie in de seculiere wereld. Het werk van Miskotte staat in contrast met het werk van Adriaanse. Zij representeren twee manieren waarop theologie gedaan kan worden in de context van een seculariserende samenleving en kerk. We benaderden het werk van Miskotte door zijn theologische antropologie te bestuderen, welke gedomineerd wordt door zijn kritiek op het nihilisme en zijn theologie, die op zijn beurt gedomineerd wordt door Miskotte’s waardering voor de theologie van het Oude Testament.

In het eerste deel van het tweede hoofdstuk, richtten we ons voornamelijk op Miskotte’s analyse van de context waarin hij werkte als theoloog. Sinds het midden van de twintigste eeuw is Nederland aan het seculariseren. Miskotte had een scherpzinnig vermogen voor het begrijpen van zijn tijd, en hij herkende de problemen van het nihilisme. Het was het opkomende bewustzijn binnen en buiten de Kerk. Het product van deze tijden was wat hij noemde de ‘vierde man.’ Dit was het archetype van de verlichte mens, die doof was voor alle overreding van buitenaf, die bovendien elk besef van geloven in God verloren was, en die uiteindelijk simpelweg niet meer geïnteresseerd was. Het was deze mens die Miskotte in gedachten hield bij het schrijven van zijn theologie.

In het tweede van het hoofdstuk hielden we ons bezig met Miskotte’s theologie, door middel waarvan hij zich richtte tot de ‘vierde man.’ Het Oude Testament vormde het paradigma van waaruit hij niet alleen bij machte was zich te engageren met zijn tijd, maar ook kritiek kon leveren. Ten eerste was er een kritiek op elke vorm van natuurlijke theologie en de menselijke neiging naar religiositeit. Ten tweede, de openbaring van de Naam is niets minder dan de aanwezigheid van God bij zijn volk. God, in zijn openbaring, is tegelijk aanwezig en verborgen op hetzelfde moment. God is een aanwezigheid die ons aanspreekt en die tegenover ons staat. Tenslotte hebben we de relevantie van Miskotte’s werk voor hedendaagse theologie overwogen. Dit vormde de conclusie van het eerste deel van onze dissertatie, waarin we hebben gekeken naar de moderne problemen en tendensen ten opzichte van het spreken over God zoals dit samenhangt met de identiteit van God.

In de tweede helft van ons onderzoek hebben we ons beziggehouden met een bijbels-theologisch begrip van spreken over God en de identiteit van God. Hiervoor hebben we drie passages uit de Bijbel geselecteerd die de primaire hypothese van onze dissertatie op significante wijze bespreken.

In het derde hoofdstuk keken we eerst naar de context waarin de openbaring van de Naam van God plaatsvond, in Exodus 3. We hebben betoogd dat een van de primaire thema’s van de introducerende hoofdstukken van het boek Exodus, de afwezigheid van God is. We hebben dit thema vanuit twee perspectieven besproken: vanuit een textueel perspectief en vanuit een existentieel perspectief. We bemerkten dat God uit de hoofdlijn van het is weggelaten. Dit was niet toevallig, maar is een essentiële narratief kenmerk van het boek Exodus. We noemden dit, vanuit theologisch oogpunt, de verborgenheid van God. De conclusie was dat de aard van Gods verborgenheid niet wijst op non-existentie, maar juist op verborgen
aanwezigheid. Dit betekent dat God op indirecte wijze aanwezig was als de Ene waartoe de Israëlieten zich richtten in gebed en naar Wie ze het uitschreeuwen om hulp.

Vanuit het andere perspectief behandelden we het thema van de afwezigheid van God als een menselijke ervaring. We focusten op twee sleutelwoorden die ons een ingang gaven in de menselijke ervaring van de afwezigheid van God. De twee woorden waren cry en groan. De afwezigheid van God, in de bijbelse literatuur, is een negatieve menselijke ervaring, vaak uitgedrukt door middel van klaagliederen en gebeden van verbijstering. We hebben ook aangemerkt dat de Schrift geen verklaring levert voor het fenomeen van de afwezigheid of verborgenheid van God. We zagen dit als een contradictie van het moderne optimisme en de postmoderne voorkeur voor het mysterie Gods.

Het thema van de identiteit van God was het tweede punt uit het behandelde verhaal uit Exodus. We hebben de passage van Exodus 3:1-16 geïdentificeerd als een ontmoeting tussen God en Mozes. Deze ontmoeting was een cruciaal keerpunt omdat het de plaats was waar God Zijn identiteit en Zijn doelen voor Mozes en Israël openbaarde. We betoogden dat God daadwerkelijk aanwezig was bij Mozes. In hun ontmoeting werd de Naam van God geopenbaard. Derhalve hebben we ons gericht op de dialoog tussen Mozes en YHWH. Tijdens de dialoog werden twee identiteiten duidelijk. De identiteit van Mozes werd duidelijk als degene die was geroepen om de Israëlieten uit Egypte te leiden. Nadien werd de identiteit van God geopenbaard. Hij openbaarde Zichzelf als de Ene die de naam “Ik Ben die Ik Ben” heeft. De naam slaat op de onafgebroken aanwezigheid van YHWH bij Israël. God, die historisch gezien de God is van de Vaderen, is hun God op dat moment en hij zal hun God zijn in de toekomst. Verder hebben we de distinctie laten zien tussen de historiciteit en de actualiteit van de aanwezigheid van God. We betoogden dat de twee weliswaar verschillend zijn, maar desalniettemin wezenlijk identiek. Wanneer we spreken over de identiteit van God, spreken we daarom over de identiteit van de actuele (hier en nu, volgens de ervaring) aanwezigheid en over de historische aanwezigheid van God.

Het derde punt van dit hoofdstuk hield zich bezig met het doel van de openbaring en de kennis van de Naam. Op dit punt waren we het eens met Childs, dat het ultieme einde van de openbaring van de Naam en de kennis van God niet het bevredigen van iemands honger naar kennis en nieuwsgierigheid is, maar om bewustzijn te creëren voor de aanwezigheid van God met als doel aanbidding. God is aanwezig in aanbidding, zoals Hij te kennen is door de getuigenis van de Schrift, maar Hij blijft een mysterie voor diegenen die Hem aanbidden. Het is geen mysterie van iets dat of iemand die onbekend is, maar het mysterie van iemand die bekend is, omdat Hij zichzelf geopenbaard heeft.

We beëindigden het hoofdstuk met een korte receptiegeschiedenis waarin we de belangrijkste interpretaties van Exodus 3:14 besproken, die te maken hadden met de theologie van God. De omvang van deze receptiegeschiedenis beslaat de tijd vanaf de vroege Christelijke schrijvers, tot de Middeleeuwen en de moderniteit. We hebben gezien hoe de passage in de verschillende eeuwen geïnterpreteerd is vanuit de zorgen van die specifieke tijd. De receptiegeschiedenis laat ook zien dat deze passage tot de moderniteit is geïnterpreteerd als het spreken over het zijn van God, in tegenstelling tot de moderne interpretatie moeilijkheden.

Er zijn drie belangrijke punten die we maakten in het derde hoofdstuk. Ten eerste, de openbaring van God en Zijn Naam is een antwoord voor de uitroepen, het kreunen en de verbijstering van Israël. YHWH openbaarde Zichzelf als God te midden van lijden. Ten tweede, de openbaring van God is ook Zijn aanwezigheid, tegelijk actueel en historisch. Openbaring is niet slechts een epistemologische oefening, maar een ontmoeting met de
tegenwoordigheid van God. Athanasius, Thomas en Calvijn betoogden in hun interpretaties ook voor een bijbels-theologisch begrip van God, tegen een filosofische constructie van God. Voor hun is het dramatische van Gods afwezigheid en verbijstering minder duidelijk omdat zij God kennen als Jezus Christus. Het derde punt dat we maakten was dat Gods fundamentele verborgenheid gezien kan worden als een positieve theologische uitspraak; we nuanceerden onze uitspraak als zijnde tegenovergesteld aan Barth’s bevestiging van Gods verborgenheid in Zijn primaire objectiviteit. Gods verborgenheid is geen deel van Zijn Wezen, zoals Barth dat zou zeggen, maar het heeft met de menselijke ervaring van de afwezigheid van God. Ook al kennen we God in Zijn openbaring, we hebben Hem niet in onze greep.

In het vierde hoofdstuk hebben we gekeken naar de Naam- en Glorie-theologiën van het boek Ezechiël. Allebei vormen van theologie zijn indicatoren van de aanwezigheid van God, een van de historische aanwezigheid en de andere van de cultische aanwezigheid. We hebben gefocust op de Naam-theologie omdat het een sterke historische indicator is van Gods aanwezigheid bij zijn volk. Het is een aanwezigheid die tot uitdrukking komt in de relatie tussen YHWH en Israël. Het is een verbondsrelatie, die uitstekend verbeeld is als een huwelijksliefsrelatie. Binnen deze binding vinden twee belangrijke gebeurtenissen plaats: oordeel en restoratie.

In het deel over oordeel besproken we de theologische kwestie van de afwezigheid van God vanuit drie perspectieven. Ten eerste, we spraken over de afwezigheid Gods in termen van menselijke projectie. Als een menselijke projectie leidt dit in zekere zin tot secularisatie of, zoals in het geval van het boek Ezechiël, tot afgoderij. Ten tweede, we spraken over de symptomatische ontrouw van Israël ten opzichte van YHWH, zoals is te zien in Ezechiëls kritiek op de geschiedenis van Israël. Uit de wildernis tot de tempelperiode, Israël bewees zichzelf ontrouw aan YHWH in elke generatie. Ze leefden alsof ze niet het volk van God waren en als ware er helemaal geen God. Het derde en laatste perspectief was Ezechiëls visioen van de aanwezigheid van God, de glorie, die de tempel verliet. De consequentie van Israëls ontrouw (secularisatie), in de cultische zin, leidde tot het vertrek van God uit de tempel als een daad van oordeel. Het interessante is dat het oordeel niet het laatste woord of daad was binnen de relatie tussen YHWH en Israël, maar juist een restoratie.

Het vertrek van God uit de tempel betekende ook dat Hij de mensen achternar ging die in ballingschap waren. Hij is niet gebonden door de grenzen van de tempel, maar Hij is daar waar mensen Zijn Naam aannemen. Israël riep de Naam aan in ballingschap, en de Naam was daar met hun, in genade. YHWH was met hen, betoorde Ezechiël, niet om hun roep, maar omdat Hij zorg heeft voor Zijn Naam. De aanwezigheid van God in Zijn Naam betekent ook de restoratie van Israëls lot. De panelen van de geschiedenis getuigen van YHWH’s naam, niet alleen bij Zijn volk, Israël, maar ook bij alle natiën. YHWH is aanwezig te midden van Zijn volk door denken van restoratie, welke zo ver gaan als de vernieuwing van het hart. YHWH, door bij Zijn volk te zijn, laat kwetsbaarheid zien. Door Zijn Naam te verbinden aan de geschiedenis van Zijn volk, maakt God zichzelf ongescheiden aan de geschiedenis van Zijn volk. Door hun identiteit werd Zijn volk het symbool van Zijn Naam te midden van alle natiën. Uiteindelijk prefigureert dit YHWH’s aanwezigheid te midden van Zijn volk in de persoon van Jezus Christus.

Het vijfde hoofdstuk is een vervolg van ons bijbels-theologische fundament voor het spreken over God. De belangrijkste vraag in dit hoofdstuk was: hoe spreekt de apostel Paulus over God in relatie tot Zijn identiteit? We hebben deze vraag in drie stappen getracht te beantwoorden.
Ten eerste, we plaatsten de brieven in de context van de kerk in Philippi. We hebben gezien wat de functie van de brief is binnen deze gemeenschap, en het gewicht dat het had. Een brief van een apostel was geen kleinigheid. Voor de gelovigen van de eerste eeuw was dit een uitdaging om in God te geloven, geïdentificeerd als Jezus Christus. Zij moesten bepaalde theologische veranderingen doorvoeren. Voor Joodse gelovigen die in Christus geloofden betekende dit dat de God die zij kenden en aanbaden als YHWH, genoemd moest worden naar de geopenbaarde Naam, namelijk, Jezus Christus. Voor de gelovige heidenen betekende dit het afzweren van het pantheon en het leren leven met deze ene God, Jezus Christus. Deze theologische uitdagingen vloeiden over naar hun dagelijkse levens en werden daarom een probleem van identiteit. Juist dit probleem werd door Paulus besproken in deze brief. De hymne bevatte het belangrijkste theologische punt van Paulus.

Ten tweede, we lazen de hymne door en maakten een aantal observaties aangaande de manier waarop Paulus over God spreekt in de hymne. We probeerden aan te tonen dat, ook al is de brief in het Grieks geschreven, de primaire betekenis uit het Oude Testament komt en uit het geheel aan bijbelse theologie. Dit waarborgt dat wij niet vervallen in een esoterische interpretatie van de hymne. Er is een interessante dynamiek in de hymne, die van God naar de mens beweegt en dan vanaf de mensheid weer terug naar God. Deze dynamische beweging vindt geheel plaats in de persoon van Jezus Christus. Hij die in de vorm van God was, is naar beneden gekomen en heeft zich verlaagd tot de allerlaagste menselijke conditie, slavernij. In deze conditie ontving Hij de Naam boven alle Naam. De Naam ontvangen betekende de zelf-identificatie van God in de persoon van de gekruisigde Christus. Deze identificatie vormde het belangrijkste punt van Paulus’ theologie in deze passage. “Jesus Christus is HEER” met andere woorden, Jezus Christus is YHWH, Jezus is Gods zelf-identificatie in de geschiedenis. Dus als de Filippenzen zichzelf met iemand moeten identificeren, dan zouden ze zich moeten identificeren met Jezus, die de Christus is, de Heer.

Ten derde, we hebben gekeken naar de receptie van deze hymne door de eeuwen heen. Ons doel was het identificeren van een aantal interpretatiekwesties, die zich zouden aandienen. Drie hoofdperiodes waren het interessantst voor ons: de vroege Christelijke theologen, de hervormers, en tenslotte, de moderne interpreteren. Het was interessant om te zien hoe Paulus’ hoofdboodschap betreffende de identiteit van God in Jezus zijn weg heeft gevonden tot het heden. Door de eeuwen heen zijn er verscheidene theologische en filosofische tegenwerpingen gepresenteerd tegen deze identificatie. De tendens van degenen met tegenwerpingen was het bagatelliseren van een van beide onderdelen van deze paradoxale identiteit van God geopenbaard in een mens. Wat hebben we daarom geleerd van dit korte historische overzicht? De uitdaging voor de theoloog, door de eeuwen en vandaag de dag, is het uitwerken van de implicaties en applicaties van deze aanstootgevende boodschap, die is doorgegeven aan ons. De vraag naar Gods identiteit is het essentiële fundament van elke verantwoordelijke theologie.

**Conclusie**

De hypothese van onze dissertatie was dat theologie in essentie spreken over God en, specifieker, het spreken over Gods identiteit is. We hebben onze hypothese getoetst in het licht van de religieuze wetenschappelijke kritiek op theologie. Het was de bedoeling theologie te vergelijken met de wetenschappelijke eisen aan een wetenschappelijke discipline. Het werk van H.J. Adriaanse was een gids voor het discussiëren van kwesties die met de tekst te maken hadden. We betoogden dat, gezien de wetenschappelijke ontwikkelingen van de laatste twee
eeuwen, theologie gedefinieerd als spreken over God onmogelijk is. De reden is dat God een metafysische kwestie is en daarom niet open voor een openbare navraag. Iemand kan alleen spreken over ‘God’ als een concept, dat intrinsiek gerelateerd is aan het menselijke, religieuze bewustzijn en de menselijke eigenschap een hoger wezen te projecteren. De conclusie is: theologie overwogen vanuit een wetenschappelijk perspectief is een niet-academische discipline. Adriaanse roept daarom op tot het verlaten de theologie en stelt ‘religieuze studies’ voor als een meer ‘wetenschappelijk’ alternatief. We formuleerden Adriaanse’s uitdaging in de volgende vraag: verdient theologie het bijvoeglijke naamwoord ‘wetenschappelijk’? Is er een bepaalde manier van spreken over God dat gerechtvaardigd of tenminste geloofwaardig is voor een dergelijk wetenschappelijk verhandeling?

Het overkoepelende argument van de hypothese is dat er, gezien de belangrijkste narratieve teksten van onze theologische traditie (de basisteksten in de Bijbel) en de lange en rijke geschiedenis van het spreken over God over God, geen reden is waarom theologie geen wetenschappelijke discipline zou mogen zijn. In reactie tot de uitdaging van Adriaanse kunnen we zeggen dat we begrijpen dat er moeilijkheden kunnen zijn, gezien de wetenschappelijke ontwikkelingen van de afgelopen eeuw. Juist deze ontwikkelingen zijn problematisch voor theologie en, specifiek, voor God talk. Moderne wetenschappelijke theorie werkt met een filosofische definitie van God als een metafysisch, transcendent wezen.

Vervolgens beschouwt het deze God als onbereikbaar en als onmogelijk om over te spreken. In zijn kritiek van klassieke theologie focust Adriaanse op de verkeerde God. Adriaanse heeft een concept van God, dat anders is dan het paradigma van God talk in Israël en de Kerk. Ons hoofdargument tegen Adriaanse is dat we niet spreken over God als degene die boven de grens is, afgescheiden van Zijn tegenwoordigheid, maar we spreken over God als zijnde aanwezig in Zijn handelen in de geschiedenis van Zijn volk.

Adriaanse laat nog steeds ruimte voor God talk, ook al wijst hij de God af die boven de grens is, zij het op verrassende wijze. Gods aanwezigheid is ervaren in het lijden van mensen, zoals wanneer hij sprak over de deportatie van de Joden tijdens de Holocaust. Op zulke momenten mag het woord ‘God’ ‘vallen.’ Er blijft dus een plaats waar God talk mogelijk is, namelijk, te midden van menselijk lijden en pijn. We hebben hiernaar verwezen, in hoofdstuk drie, waar we spraken over de afwezigheid van God in de ervaringen van Israël in Egypte. Gods afwezigheid of verborgenheid was de reden dat Israël het uitriep naar God in gebed. Op zijn beurt gaf God Zichzelf door Zijn Naam. In hoofdstuk vier spraken we over Israël in ballingschap en hun worsteling om God te begrijpen in Zijn afwezigheid. We maakten het punt dat YHWH, door te participeren in de geschiedenis van Zijn volk, Zichzelf kwetsbaar maakte, omdat Hij Zijn identiteit verbond met de identiteit van Zijn volk. De geschiedenis van Israël is in een bepaalde zin ook de geschiedenis van YHWH. In de Christologische hymne van het vijfde hoofdstuk, wordt het lijden dat God op zich neemt het lijden van de wereld, omdat Hij de laagste menselijke conditie op zich neemt. Daar is het punt waarop God aan ons gegeven is.

Wanneer we Gods aanwezigheid overwegen vanuit dit perspectief verandert alles en wordt God talk echt mogelijk. Inderdaad niet als een geconstrueerd, metafysisch wezen, die boven de grens is, maar als een God die ervaren wordt op het kruispunt van de wereld en haar geschiedenis. Niet noodzakelijkerwijs in de successen en de overwinningen van de geschiedenis, maar juist op die momenten die het bestaan van God aanvект. YHWH komt en geeft Zichzelf om gekend te worden in het kruis van Jezus, welke we herinneren en waarin we participeren door het delen in het gebroken lichaam van de Eucharistie.
Bijbels-theologisch zien we daarom geen reden waarom theologen theologie als God talk zouden moeten achterlaten. De aard van de teksten en hun inhoud plaatst ons in een positie waar we kunnen bevestigen dat theologie inderdaad is, spreken over God in een specifieke manier over Zijn identiteit. De teksten geven een stem aan die menselijke ervaringen die spreken over God en wie Hij is. Het volgen van Adriaanse en daarmee de theologie af te wijzen, theologie als spreken over God, zou betekenen dat we de teksten negeren en wat deze teksten zeggen over God, de mensheid en de wereld. Misschot plaveide de weg voor onze bijbels-theologische argumenten. Hij maakte het punt dat er inderdaad een plaats is waar God spreekt tegen de mensheid, namelijk in het geproclameerde Woord van God. We hebben verder betoogd dat bijbelse theologie de weg wijst voor het spreken over God en Zijn identiteit, en ook dat degene waar God tot spreekt dragers worden van Zijn aanwezigheid in deze wereld. Er is dus een concrete plaats waar God niet slechts spreekt, maar waar wij die Hem hebben horen spreken, ook spreken over God. In deze dissertatie hebben we het plausibel gemaakt dat in bijbelse theologie er geen indicatie is waarom theologie gezien moet worden als minder dan spreken over God zoals Hij Zichzelf heeft geïdentificeerd in de geschiedenis van zijn Volk.

Nu, aan het einde van onze studie en onderzoek naar deze kwesties, is het onze concluderende bewering dat: Theologie is God talk, vooral in de specifieke manier van het spreken over de identiteit van God. Theologie is een discipline met meerdere onderdelen, het omvat exegese, kerkgeschiedenis, praktische theologie en systematische theologie. Elk heeft zijn eigen methoden van onderzoek en verhandeling ontwikkeld. Elk heeft zijn eigen verdiensten en staan in het brede veld van de theologie. Vaak gebeurt het dat deze specialisaties op zichzelf functioneren, en nauwelijks met elkaar wisselwerking kennen. Misschien brengt een duidelijker begrip van de taak van theologie als God talk ons dichter bij eenheid binnen het veld. Als alle verschillende disciplines als stippen zijn in een theologisch sterrenbeeld, dan is het de taak van de systematisch theoloog om de stippen te verbinden en daarmee eenheid te brengen in het gefragmenteerde veld van theologie.

In zijn wezen is theologie een kwestie van spreken over God. Maar op het moment dat we dit zeggen, moeten we ons ook realiseren dat de taak van God talk niet evident is, en vaak zeer moeilijk. Er zijn niet slechts ervaringen, die onze kennis van God bevestigen, maar er zijn ook ervaringen die dat betwisten. De uitdagingen aan het adres van de kennis van God zijn vaak duidelijker en echter dan de aanwezigheid van God. Ons onderzoek naar de identiteit van God heeft getracht te laten zien dat er juist in die negatieve ervaringen ook ruimte is. Juist deze anomalieën vertellen ons over God, die niet gevangen kan worden in gedachtesystemen of geplaatst in de dienstbaarheid aan idealen. Als theologen is het onze taak over God te spreken, en specifieker over YHWH die Zichzelf geïdentificeerd heeft in de geschiedenis als Jezus Christus.
Bibliography

Abbreviations

CD Church Dogmatics
CCEL Christian Classics Ethereal Library
EEC Encyclopedia of Early Christianity
LW Luther Werke
NDT New Dictionary of Theology
NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NPNF Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
RGG Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart 4th edition
ST Summa Theologica
TDNT Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
OER Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation

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