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Kornelis H. Miskotte's *Biblical ABCs* *A Theological Provocation*

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Abstract

Kornelis H. Miskotte's theology generally, and his *Biblical ABCs*—an important wartime work newly translated into English—in particular represent a welcome provocation to contemporary Christian theology. This essay assesses the key theological claims at the heart of the work, reflects critically upon their meaning and significance, and then draws them into conversation with a number of current trends and trajectories in current theological research and writing. In this way, the significance of the work in its own right as well as its—perhaps surprising—relevance to the present theological discussion is brought to light.

Keywords

Miskotte – Torah – Israel – name of God – Christology – Jewish-Christian dialogue – Biblical hermeneutics

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I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments
from me.

Psalm 119:19

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It is the temperate attitude of those who say both 'we know little, too little, Lord!' and 'we have much to learn, there is much to learn here.'¹



1 Prelude and Introduction

My modest task here is to offer some remarks on the theological provocation that is Miskotte's *Biblical ABCs*. These introductory remarks are followed by discussion of the work's treatment of scripture, God, and the Christian life in turn. In each case I work through Miskotte's handling of these themes and pick out their defining features before considering something of their theological import. The article concludes with some more general musings on the significance of Miskotte's work for our understanding of the nature, tasks, and horizon of Christian theological endeavor today. I hope throughout to do at least rough justice to Miskotte's rich, compressed, and suggestive text and that the inevitable selectivity of the discussion will not prove idiosyncratic.

Let me begin with some brief reflections on the *genre* of the work. Miskotte's project is comparable to some degree with other catechetical fighting texts emerging from the German Church Struggle such as Heinrich Vogel's *Iron Ration of a Christian* (1936) or even Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* (1937), all concise works aimed to remind Christians laboring in highly pressurized churches of certain elemental matters of faith for the sake of "galvanizing a better resistance" (133). All three texts are polemical interventions into concrete church-political situations; all three display a fierce embrace of the theology of the Word and rivet their attention to the Bible. "Let us be led back to scripture, to the word and call of Jesus Christ himself," writes Bonhoeffer in his introduction, for "in times of church renewal holy scripture naturally becomes richer in content for us."² The main staple in Vogel's iron ration is the fact that "*God speaks to us*" in and through the biblical witness in a voice "distinct from all other voices which we might well mistake for the voice of God, but which are

1 Kornelis H. Miskotte, *Biblical ABCs: The Basics of Christian Resistance*, trans. E. Hof and C. Cornell (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 48. References to this work are given in parentheses in the text of this essay.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 38, 37.

not his voice.”³ Writing from the occupied Netherlands in 1941, Miskotte certainly agrees: his work opens with the observation that “One characteristic of the change of epochs we are living through is a new attentiveness to the biblical witness” (1) and if the church’s only hope lies in the adventure of “living under the Word” (143 *et passim*) then this means that any and all real “renewal must come from Scripture” (139).

Yet, such comparisons also immediately highlight the distinctiveness of Miskotte’s *Biblical ABCs*. Vogel’s book is straightforwardly catechetical in form and aim, concisely setting out the full scope of the content of Christian confession in a recognizably creedal sequence; Bonhoeffer’s offers a focussed exegesis of key tracts of the New Testament—the Sermon on the Mount together with key Pauline texts—marked by massive Christological concentration. Both works are ardent and rhetorically self-conscious, running close to and then regularly tipping over into proclamation. Miskotte’s book differs by design. It shares Vogel’s educational aim, but not its comprehensive scope or thoroughly dogmatic idiom; and while, like Bonhoeffer’s *Nachfolge*, Miskotte’s *Biblical ABCs* wrestles with scripture directly and intensively, it does so in a different mood, with a different centre of exegetical gravity, and with notable Christological restraint.

But perhaps most markedly, while both Bonhoeffer and Vogel hasten their readers towards “the *essence*” of Christian faith and the pressing “action” that corresponds to it, Miskotte bids his readers to “slow down and moderate” (36). Neither distraction nor quietism are in view, of course. Rather, Miskotte’s invitation is to a more deliberate, reflective, stepwise approach to what is urgent and essential, indeed to what is urgent *because* it is essential. The controlling mode is *didache* rather than *kerygma*, instruction rather than proclamation or *paranaesis*. His immediate purpose is precautionary, that is, to teach “the grammar necessary to avoid *misunderstanding* the essence” (6). Put positively, he aims to foster a disciplined patience upon the “primordial action” from which everything else follows, namely the “*hearing*” of the Word in the words of the scriptural witness (5).⁴ What this requires, he says (with a hint of irony), is merely a “dry and merely formal approach to Scripture” (137) that invites read-

3 Heinrich Vogel, *The Iron Ration of a Christian*, trans. W.A. Whitehouse (London: SCM Press, 1941), 18. Emphasis original.

4 “The community of the Word of God is the community that is brought into being and sustained by the fact that Jesus Christ speaks ... The primary activity of the community of the Word, therefore, is a rather odd sort of activity: the passive activity of hearing.” John Webster, *Confronted by Grace: Pastoral Meditations from a Systematic Theologian*, ed. D. Bush and B. Ellis (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 135.

ers to enter into the text “as a world,” and offers some few “signposts” (47) to aid in exploring the “wide zone of reflecting and seeking and drawing near” that surrounds the event of the Word in the world (1).

So, the *Biblical ABCS* meets us as an unusual kind of catechesis. Its aim is to prime us and facilitate our reading and hearing of scripture for the sake of confronting—or shall we say, being confronted by—its essential content. The work is not itself that confrontation but, rather, looks only to set the stage for it, to prepare its way. Perhaps in this we are not wrong to hear a quiet yet distinct echo of John Calvin's declared purpose in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, namely, “to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling.”⁵ Without betraying this goal, Calvin's preparatory and heuristic project inevitably transgresses its own limitations in ways both homiletic and dogmatic. So, too, does Miskotte's. As he says with understatement in the closing pages, “already in this preparatory grammar you may have sensed the breadth of God's love ... from afar, perhaps, you heard the murmur of the Teaching as the source of life, of living discipline, of living virtue, of living action” (146). Work of this kind “cannot completely avoid the Bible's principal content” (64), for there is no prolegomenon to theology that is fully insulated from its eventual subject matter and so not itself already theological in some important sense. Yet, Miskotte himself puts the matter in a much more existential register with his confession that the *Biblical ABCS* is in fact “born out of *terror* and *passion*” (137). The terror and passion of Christian existence under Nazi occupation? To be sure. In this context, attending to the biblical ABCS becomes a decidedly “*tactical*” and “*factual*” necessity (146). Openness to the importance of the concrete situation and the ‘context of communication’ in which Christian theology is undertaken is a hallmark of Miskotte's work both here, in his previous works on the *Essence of Judaism* and *Edda and Torah*, and again in *When the Gods Are Silent*, his postwar magnum opus.⁶

But there is also another terror and passion at work here: namely, the terror and passion ingredient in the encounter with the subject matter of the Bible itself and in wrestling with the object of the faith and hope of the people of God as such. Hence, the grammatical focus and quality of Miskotte's task does

5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), preface to the 1559 edition.

6 Cf. the sections “Concerning the World” and “Concerning the Church,” *Biblical ABCS*, 15–16. Cf. also: “What is *said* in the world matters to the church. Naturally, the content matters—but also the form and fundament, since everything that happens within the world-of-the-word touches the mission of the church to *lehren* and to *lernen*, to teach and to learn” (73).

not signal a retreat into a ‘cool place’ of Wittgensteinian ‘contemplation’; rather, it is, as he himself says, the first “*offensive*” move “in the epic battle of spirits” (146).⁷ The lessons it has to teach amount to a call to arms: a summons to take responsibility for the language of the biblical witness, to labor to do justice to its distinctive forms and functions, and to acknowledge that these witnesses do not address us simply “in order to communicate ... in a game with no consequences.”⁸ Thus Miskotte’s modest grammatical proposals in fact give voice to an arduous ethics of responsible reading and hearing of scripture *qua* scripture. This theological grammar “comes in hot,” as it were, because it is the grammar *of the Bible*, that is, an account of the internal logic of a library of witnesses who, as “*instruments of the Truth*,” address to us “words for our life” (36). Miskotte’s “elementary grammar” might, as he says, “*at most*” be “an imprint of the uniqueness of the [divine] Name” (47). But it is just such a holy imprint, nonetheless.

To be clear, the specific ethical quality I have in view inheres in the formalism of the project itself. Life “under the Word,” life lived “from out of” scripture can take its proper shape only when it recognizes, inhabits, and corresponds to the “ground design, the constitution, the model, the frame, the pattern, the fabric and its warp and weft” (5), to the “ground-structure” (31) or “ground-pattern” (42) of the Bible, to the “particular *order* [that] governs it” (36), to “the fixed pattern of Revelation” that demands “reading from the particular to the general” (24; cf. 44). Miskotte’s preoccupying concern throughout is simply to display this inherent *taxis* of scripture. Responsible interpretation is urged to recognize and honor it as the *sine qua non* of proper understanding. The stakes are high: for neglecting “the biblical *order* and defying the ABCs is ... fatal to the security, joy, and resilience of our lives” (32).

Notwithstanding all of this, we need to ask what we can ask and expect of Miskotte’s book. As he himself emphasizes, *Biblical ABCs* is not itself a work of dogmatics, not itself a systematic elaboration of the *content* of the biblical witness. Its occasional, tactical quality as a timeous intervention into the pressing crises of the Dutch churches under the conditions of war-time occupation mark it as an “irregular” exercise in Christian thinking, to be sure. And so in one sense it is something *less* than dogmatics: something merely preliminary and

7 See D.Z. Philips, *Philosophy’s Cool Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) and especially *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The remark, “*Essence* is expressed in grammar ... Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar),” famously occurs in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. and trans. P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), § 371 and § 373.

8 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. A. Aronowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 21.

preparatory, as he has pleaded. Yet, precisely because of what it is, it is a work that confronts us as something *more* than dogmatics: a fiercely concentrated effort to discern the necessary and sufficient biblical conditions of possibility for faith and life and thereby also the vital prolegomenon to any and all Christian theology. That it points toward dogmatics in just this way does not diminish but, I suggest, actually heightens its theological importance.

2 Some Theological Variations on Biblical-Grammatical Themes

2.1 *Scripture as Christian Torah (Chapters 1 and 2)*

We begin where Miskotte himself begins, namely, with the concise case for recognizing and receiving the Bible as a whole, and the Old Testament in particular, as Christian *torah*. ‘Teaching’ or ‘instruction’ names both the quality and the *telos* of the biblical witness across all its many and varied forms: “All the Bible is Teaching” (12). Neither metaphysical explanation nor moral admonition, *torah* is, rather, true teaching “from God”—indeed, it is the impact of “God meeting our spirit” (10)—given to direct “a wide and open and yet still quite definite life” (10). An exercise of saving divine power, it takes the form of direction, guidance, judgment, counsel; it “points” a way, inviting decision and change; from it we can “learn *life*” (12). Addressed to the “activity and endeavour” of individuals and congregations, it is (as to form) mobile, multifaceted, symphonic, able to interject into diverse affairs in order to stir up and shape every good work. Miskotte’s citation of question 91 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* in this context (14) reminds us that this territory is native for Reformed theology. And we might consider his opening gambit to be a redeployment and amplification of the traditional “third use of the law” into a methodological prolegomenon, a polemical recollection that this “third use” is truly, as Calvin taught, the *proper* and *principle* use and so in some sense rightly precedes and comprehends all other discussion of Christian faith and life.⁹ For Miskotte, this calls the church back to its “first vocation: to learn and to live from out of the holy Teaching” (16).

The theme “Scripture as Torah” announces both the fundamental role of the Old Testament in Miskotte’s theological vision and his keen sense of Christian solidarity with Jewish neighbors in an hour of trial. Both motives combine in Miskotte’s confession that “[w]e are experiencing again how much we are connected with Israel through the holy Instruction that we have received from

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), II.7.12.

God" (5). This remark suggests that the crisis that elicits the need for the *Biblical ABCs* is nothing if not a crisis concerning *this* connection. The particular medium in which the problem of disconnection of church and Israel appears in this context is that of *language* and of the language of scripture in particular. Miskotte considers language to hold "an exceptional position" (71) in the life of human beings; for the people of God, language is the way in which "they become involved in the life and purpose of the Lord" (72). It is precisely because he is alert to the troubling "*decay*" of human language in the present, and the evident forgetfulness of the quality and form of biblical language in the churches, that the *Biblical ABCs* takes the form of "a linguistic inventory of the Teaching" (73) as found in the Old Testament. Miskotte takes this to be the *sine qua non* of any future faithfulness and renewal in church and theology and essential for the exercise of Christian responsibility in relation to contemporary Judaism.

Miskotte's approach to the scriptures as *torah* also calmly but boldly militates not only against Nazi anti-Judaism but also against what Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt has called the "inveterate mistrust" Christianity has long shown toward its Jewish contemporaries in matters of biblical interpretation.¹⁰ Of course, Marquardt's own life-work was a sustained assault on this mistrust and, more than that, a positive endeavor to attain what he once suggestively called a "Protestant Joy in the Torah."¹¹ Miskotte stands in the front ranks of those contemporary Christian theologians and exegetes committed to the 'repatriation' of the fundamentals of Christian faith and life into the nexus of Israel's history, scriptures, and so historical Jewish faith.¹² Moreover, Miskotte's fundamental intuitions about the devastating impact of the loss of knowledge of scriptural *torah* and its elementary grammar find profound resonances in the recent work of Brent Strawn. Strawn's 2017 book *The Old Testament Is Dying* offers a detailed and troubling almost "terminal" diagnosis of the disappearance of knowledge of the language, narratives, and thought-forms of the Old Testament in the Christian churches of North America. His research shows that most Christian communities operate with a kind of "pidgin" version of the language of the Hebrew scriptures, in which even "so much of the little that is

10 Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theological Audacities*, trans. Paul S. Chung (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 71.

11 F-W. Marquardt, *Evangelische Freude an der Tora* (Tübingen: tvT Verlag, 1997).

12 See H. Martin Rumscheidt, Foreword to *Theological Audacities*, xii. Cf. also Kendall Soulen here. From the Dutch context, Frans Breukelman and more recently also Edjan Westerman, *Learning Messiah: Israel and the Nations: Learning to Read God's Way Anew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018).

retained ... is, as it were, 'mispronounced,' which is to say, either misunderstood altogether or (re)understood in fundamentally different ways."¹³ Strawn's compelling study goes on to confront some of the grim theological and ecclesial consequences of this development in ways that tell of the abiding import of Miskotte's programmatic vision here.

2.2 *The LORD God of Israel (Chapters 3 to 9)*

Arguably, the heart of Miskotte's book is its treatment of the Lord God of Israel. I cannot do justice to its rich elaboration here. But I concentrate upon what I take to be his own central concern: namely, the particular *taxis* of the scriptural witness to God, that is, that ground-pattern and direction and sequencing which sits beneath, runs through, and superintends "Scripture in spite of its kaleidoscopic variety" (59). Discerning and honoring this *taxis* is what makes identification of *this* God possible by way of disciplined "*attentiveness to the particular*" (63). There is perhaps no word so often italicized by Miskotte than "*this*" as in "*this* God" (and given his predilection for italics, that is saying something!). The essential form of the Old Testament witness is deferred or indirect ostension, a linguistic pointing to the acts, the way, and the word, of the Lord in order to point ultimately to the One whose acts they are, whose way it is, and whose word is spoken. Taken together, this ostension picks out and identifies the Lord, the One who bears the unspeakable Name, *this* God. Appearing in the world of ancient religions, Miskotte says, "the Name *distinguishes* God *from other beings, gods and demons*" (18) and he goes to explain programmatically:

The central place of the Name means that revelation is always a *particular* revelation—always has been, is, and will be. God has a name: God is not the nameless one. God is not the All, but is known as a reality that distinguishes itself *in* the world *from* the world. God does not appear to us as the most general, that which can be found everywhere, but rather as the most unique, that which can be sought and found somewhere specific ... that *this* God is *our* God—herein lies our salvation.

19

On such terrain as this, the business of theology proper is *biblical* all the way down: denominating, describing, displaying, distinguishing, and so dis-

13 Brent Strawn, *The Old Testament is Dying* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 131. This linguistic description of the situation might be thought akin to Alasdair MacIntyre's account of how modern communities generally operate "in the ruins" of what were once coherence traditions of life and thought.

ambiguating the profile of the Lord exegetically, and thus fixing attention ever more intensely upon the singularity of the Name, “I who will be there howsoever I will be there” (Exod. 3:14). In short, Miskotte’s entire program is wagered on the claim “that *this* God wills to be known in *this* way, to be called upon and approached *like so*—*that* is decisive for the whole of human existence” (21).

On the one hand, Miskotte here points the way toward a kind of theology we know well: one hesitant of extrabiblical speculation and devoted to the realistic narrative identification of God from the pages of scripture; one that knows God as a “*Being-in-Act*” whose identity *in se* is no different “from the way God approaches us in God’s self-revelation” (49); one where divine perfections and predicates—“Living, personal, loving” (53), and so forth—are compressed ciphers for expansively recounted patterns of action discerned and distilled from the “holy history” (52) in which divine faithfulness overruns human faithlessness, divine patience outbids human confusion, and divine mercy overreaches human defection, loss, and contempt (53).¹⁴ Miskotte imagines theologians “becoming as naïve as the Bible” (42) once more, and by such second naïveté pursuing a manner of “thinking biblically” whose form and content does justice to the fact that “God is God and *goes along God’s own way*” (95).¹⁵

On the other hand, Miskotte’s “grammar of God” also points in some less familiar directions. His emphasis on “the Name” as the axis around which all theology proper must turn is an uncommon one in Christian theology. Reflecting both the fundamental priority afforded to the Old Testament witness and lessons learned from his own study of Judaism (both ancient *and contemporary*¹⁶), Miskotte identifies the Name, the logic of its operation, and our relationship to it, as *the unsettling key* to “all the richness and depth of Scripture,” insisting that “one should never *get used to this*” Name (23). That our thinking and speaking of God is governed from the first by the grammar of a singular, proper name is decisive for the *taxis* of all theology. It establishes the strict and irreversible order of speaking and so also of knowing and thinking of God, what he calls “the method of the Name”: that “we move from the singular, specific God toward a confession of Godhead [deity]” (30), in the manner of the

14 English-language readers may feel that Miskotte here shares key intuitions with later postliberal proposals by, for example, Hans Frei or Robert Jenson. See Hans Frei, *Theology & Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Robert Jenson, *The Triune Story: Collected Essays on Scripture*, ed. Brad East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

15 Paul Ricoeur and André LaCocque, *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

16 See his dissertation *Het Wezen der Joodsche Religie* (Amsterdam/Paris, 1932).

Psalmist's command: "Acknowledge that the Lord is God" (100:3). First, *this* God, "and *only then*" the question of deity as such.¹⁷

Tethered to the singularity of the Name in this way, all subsequent predication of God moves in the only sequence it reasonably can: from the Name to the other names of God, then to the acts of God, from which are inferred first the communicable attributes (virtues), to which are further applied the incommunicable attributes.¹⁸ As Miskotte summarizes, "the attributes of God are the *attributes of God's actions*. What we say about God, what comes to our lips in praise and prayer, can be nothing else than an inference from God's *actions*, from *God's deeds*" (60). We might say, our thinking and speaking about God moves from the Name designating the unique subject, to that subject in act, to the quality of these acts and thus of the acting subject, and finally to the quality of the quality of the acts of the acting subject. The necessary discipline here is to "observe the order of God's virtues in spite of their wild abundance" (59).

This distinctive *taxis* of divine predication can and must permanently structure our own reflection and discourse about God. If we are not (dangerously) to misunderstand the Lord, then we must honor the biblical *ordo loquendi* at every turn. As Miskotte explains,

by referring to the *order* or attributes or virtues, we mean an *order-for-us*: a sequence in our cognizance and experience, and therefore a sequence for our confession and praise and vitality ... Knowing the *way* that humans come to the saving knowledge of God—which is to say, *the Name* of God—belongs to the biblical ABCs. Such knowing is not a one-time event but a continuous renewal, through which our joy may remain.

38

Theology is simply not at liberty to ignore or circumvent the "depth grammar" of the Old Testament witness that places the singular, living, and redeeming Lord of the exodus at its permanent and dynamic center—the "act of Deliverance" (68)—and sees all else emerging "centripetally" (5) therefrom. This "*order-for-us*" is ingredient in revelation itself, a crucial aspect of its salutary form. To attempt to restate the teaching of theology proper according to another order—even and especially a putative *ordo essendi*—would be to gain nothing in particular and to threaten to "distort" (39) much.

17 "The Name is God's *self*, as God reveals that self in a certain, definite relationship to earthly reality" (18).

18 "The 'communicable' attributes precede, and the 'incommunicable' attributes follow" (43).

Miskotte has little appetite for the delights of perfect-being theology and is deeply uninterested in the abstract-question deity as such.¹⁹ As he sees it, the traditional incommunicable attributes of God arrive late on the scene as modifiers of the key relational descriptors that tell of the shape and direction of the concrete acts of the Name: the “particular” eternity, omnipotence, infinity, and so forth of “*this* God,” or even better, as merely adverbial glosses upon the quality of the acts of grace and mercy and faithfulness of *this* God (40). Here we see the power of this “grammatical” analysis to reshape profoundly our understanding and use of theological concepts.

But is there a metaphysical correlate to the relentless and determinative emphasis Miskotte places upon the incomparable *thisness* of the divine identity in his biblical grammar? Perhaps we might speak (awkwardly and no doubt improperly) of a certain divine “haecceity.” But to what gain would we do so, when we could simply honor that *thisness* with manifold, well-formed speech of God richly funded from a disciplined hearing and inhabitation of Israel’s witness to its Lord? Much more important to Miskotte than the metaphysics are, I think, the *poetics* of the divine Name.

Remember the axiom that “through God’s acts, God distinguishes God’s self *in* the world *from* the world” (92). As Miskotte sees it, each and every act of God as an act of self-revelation participates in this *distinguishing* of God from the world; all the ways and works of God share in the one great salutary work of disambiguating the Lord, *this* God, from the world and everything in it, including the gods. As the ultimate source of this divine polemic, the “Name of God is [itself] the anti-pagan monument par excellence” (27). In making great this claim, Miskotte is winding tight the mainsprings of Reformed iconoclasm with a key forged by the annihilating *thisness* or *singularity* of the Lord of Israel.²⁰ Such iconoclasm is ingredient in theology’s labor to trace and to rehearse in its own all-too-human thought and speech God’s own relentless act of self-distinction.

Positively, it is precisely by way of these polemical, particularizing acts that God “travels the road to humankind” (92). When it comes to the “nomadic” Lord of Israel, it is “from knowing God’s Way [that] we come to know God’s essential divinity—and not the other way around” (80). This way is the variegated sacred

19 “We renounce autonomous abstractions” (49) and repudiate the prospect of bringing “the revelation of God into a closed system” (43).

20 Cf. on this motif, the 2012 inaugural address by Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer, “(This One is) One and Unique. On the Task of Respecting the Singularity of the Name,” trans. Martin Kessler: <https://www.rinsereelingbrouwer.nl/this-one-is-one-and-unique/> (accessed June 2022).

history of this “restless” (80) God with the wandering people of God, a history in which the divine Word-Act pursues its “*course* across the earth, realising its task, completing its project” (81). Miskotte suggests that we understand the history of God’s sovereign entanglement with human beings best by remembering especially its “nodal points,” of which Jesus Christ is the “decisive Middle” (83).

The appearance of the name Jesus Christ only at this point in the proceedings reminds us that Miskotte fully funds his biblical theology from the Old Testament, though it lies open to a christological gloss. These glosses, when they come in the treatment of theology proper, are just that: supplementary comments that further specify Miskotte’s elemental grammar of the Name and Act and Way of God respectively. So, we read that Jesus Christ is “the *fulfilment, confirmation, and perpetuation* of the *one* name of God, YHWH” (28); in this one, total, human life “the name has taken shape,” and so he represents the “*epicenter*” of all other naming of God, providing it essential “content” (28–29). This fulfilment ratifies that “God is a ‘human’ God” fundamentally “aligned toward humankind,” accessible, “smaller,” philanthropic (28). As a gloss on the Act of the Lord, the sending of the Son provides the “*criterion* of the acts of God” (64): the “coming of the Messiah, the totality of his words, works, and wonders, the act-of-all-acts, which is his death and resurrection” is the “central,” “singular and unique, final and unreserved” act of God from which we learn “the character, the meaning, and the goal of all the acts that God has done *in* the world and yet *against* the world ... *on behalf of the world*” (64). Finally, as a gloss on the Way of the Lord, Jesus Christ is the “decisive Middle” of the transit of God, the one in whom the Lord “goes the way of all flesh” as *his* own way, in condescension and humiliation, taking up “our life and our death,” joining us “in our lot even into outer darkness” (83).

This christological discourse abides by the elementary Old Testament grammar and flows firmly in the channels of the established “ground structures,” without overflow or marked deviation. Christology does not unsettle or rupture these structures; rather, it is a dogmatic “site” at which these very structures find their “decisive” and most intense iteration, the culmination and epitome of the *Biblical ABCs* that “*enlivens*” our appreciation and understanding of the whole (83). Even though it is notably “downstream,” as it were, in the exposition of the elementary grammar of the Bible, the Christology adumbrated here is “high” in the sense that, for Miskotte, discourse about Jesus Christ concerns nothing other or less than the Name, Act, Word, and Way of the Lord. This account of Christology as formally derivative but materially “decisive” is intriguing, for it warrants the strongest possible affirmation of the continuity of the church’s faith with Israel’s own, identifying Jesus as a definitive repetition of the Name in all its dynamism

And what, then, of the trinity of the God of the gospel? In what may well be the only non-trivial trinitarian statement in the text, Miskotte writes, “The *Lord* is *also* called Father, in this same way that God may be called the Mighty One, the Lord of Hosts, the Godhead, just [as?] this *Same One* is called, addressed, and confessed as *Son* and *Spirit*—but this is too broad a territory to cross at this time” (32). It would be ill-advised to read too much out of this single sentence, but it points in an intriguing direction: for Miskotte casts the names Father, Son, and Spirit here among “the other names of the Name,” suggesting perhaps that the elemental biblical grammar prioritizes not a monotheism—something Miskotte considers at best a secondary interest—but rather the *this-ness* of the Lord as the originary reality upon which trinitarian discourse subsequently supervenes. Something like this is suggested when Miskotte remarks: “‘Father’ is more truly an *epithet* of the Name than the reverse” (32). Perhaps we should hear echoes here of Karl Barth’s account of the doctrine of the Trinity as a conceptual expansion upon faith’s acknowledgment that “God reveals Himself as the Lord”—though Miskotte himself might prefer to say instead that “The LORD reveals Himself as God.”²¹

We might associate Miskotte’s overall orientation and approach to the doctrine of God with several different contemporary impulses. First, there are clear parallels with certain prominent recent examples of Old Testament theology: one thinks of the opening three hundred pages of Walter Bruggemann’s *Old Testament Theology*, which unpacks “Israel’s Core Testimony” to the Lord precisely by way of stylized grammatical analysis of its verbal sentences, nouns, adjectives, utterings, and markings;²² or the work of the late Terence Fretheim, whose preoccupying question concerned “the *kind of God*” in whom the Israelites believed, and who insisted that the answers we give must reflect the Bible’s own naïveté.²³ Second, Miskotte’s privileging of the Old Testament as the seat of the elementary grammar of theology proper is paralleled variously in contemporary theological projects as diverse as Kendall Soulen’s *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, Robert Jenson’s *Systematic Theology*, and (with particular intensity) the first two volumes of Katherine Sonderegger’s *Systematic Theology* whose stated ambition to write Christian doctrine of God

21 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 § 9, ed. and trans. T.F. Torrance and G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 348–383.

22 Walter Bruggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 117–316.

23 See Terence Fretheim, *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim*, ed. M.J. Chan and B.A. Strawn (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 25 for the remark quoted here.

(including the Trinity) entirely on the basis of theological exegesis of the Pentateuch tracks closely with Miskotte's vision.²⁴ To this we must certainly add the arresting theological program announced by Rinse Reeling Brouwer in his "farewell lecture" from the Miskotte-Breukelmann Chair in 2019, under the title of "The Teaching of Moses and the Teaching of the Church."²⁵

2.3 *The Christian Life as Sanctification of the Name (Chapters 10 through 12)*

Third and finally, the theme of sanctification represents "so weighty a letter of the spiritual alphabet that anyone who understands it understands almost everything," and "virtually everything that remains outstanding is contained within the right understanding of *this* matter, or better, of this act: of sanctification" (90). For Miskotte, the "expansive" motif of sanctification encompasses soteriology as a whole and so provides the controlling rubric for a range of other key terms that are not treated here, including "Covenant, Flesh, Spirit, World" and "Priest, Prophet, King, Temple, Sacrifice" (91). In this account sanctification is certainly "first soteriology" but also in a way "first anthropology," as it marks the place at which humanity first really emerges as a distinctive theme in the grammar. But not as an autonomous theme: for Miskotte suggests that we must anchor our thinking firmly in the *verbal* aspect of sanctification, that is, in the divine *act* of sanctifying, of setting apart, of "*interfering* with" and "requisitioning" into service women and men and things, of our "joining and being led by the Lord" (92, 98). Consequently, "holiness" is less an inhering quality than it is a trace marker of the event of having been seized by God, that creaturely *difference* from the world within the world that corresponds to God's own holiness, that is, to God's own self-distinction "as the Other *in* the world *from* the world" (91, 92, 96, and so on).

24 R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), *The Divine Name and the Holy Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2011), and his most recent, *Irrevocable: The Name of God and the Unity of the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022); Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) together with the valuable study of Sang Hoon Lee, *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel in Robert W. Jenson's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016); and Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015) and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Processions and Persons* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021).

25 Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer, "Het onderwijs van Mozes en het onderwijs van de ekklesia" (2019), http://theoluniv.ub.rug.nl/158/1/ReelingBrouwerR_Afscheidsrede_7mei2019.pdf (accessed June 2022), as well as "Die Tora als Unterricht auch für die Ekklesia," *Texte & Kontexte. Exegetische Zeitschrift* 42:1–2 (2019), 25–37.

What it means to be made different in *this* way is exactly the content of sanctification. Miskotte, however, restricts himself to explicating its form. His leading theme in all this is human emancipation from religion. As he explains, “God *wills to release them* from the thrall of the gods and the pagan powers” (93) to separate them out from the “chaotic” churning of the world for the sake of their life on earth (101–102). The grammatical discipline of theology proper—all of which might be summed up as the linguistic discipline of God’s own *holiness*—has already inaugurated this salutary work, acting as a “precaution: a preventative measure intended to pre-empt our disposition toward religion and to intercept our pagan thinking” (38).

Now, sanctification as “a long road, a struggle, a process” is essentially the human business of owning this emancipation, of inhabiting this freedom from religion, of *being released* in this way, and so not *having* other gods because and as one “remains by” and “keeps with” the deliverer and redeemer (94–96). Interestingly, Miskotte finds a clear and unanxious grammar of human agency in all of this: responsive and responsible to God’s act of sanctification, human beings “must be ready to answer: to improve and to change” (10); they must actively “sanctify *themselves* because they are sanctified” precisely as those *already* “consecrated, confronted, called, chosen” (98). Since “life itself *consists in actions*” (75) and “the human *is* their life, their act *is* their *being*,” sanctification assumes a “dual and dramatic character”: it involves a trusting and joyful human celebration of emancipation in a total life-act that admits and owns and praises the fact that God has already and mercifully not left us to ourselves but graciously and decisively *interfered* with us and our world (98–99): in short, in sanctification. “*This* God is our God, and this One is the Actor who has made us actors also. Something *happens*, on both sides. One side precedes and predominates, but nonetheless, the event occurs truly for both,” so that “these humans will no longer belong to themselves” but rather have “nothing left but relationship, covenantal relationship, to God” (102–103).

Miskotte counts this pattern as part of the “ground-structure” of the biblical witness: “humankind is called to act because according to the biblical testimony, God exists in *this* way, as the Name, the virtues, the acts. God speaks in reality, humans answer in reality” (75). And so the action of “keeping the commandments” just is that life-act in which we keep faith with the Lord, “remember[ing] what God has *accomplished*, and to Whom [we] belong” (104).

Again, as to form, Miskotte emphasizes the *negative* aspect here. Ingredient in the sanctification of the Name is active *disbelief* and *disobedience* vis-à-vis the chthonic and religious powers driving natural life. This religion-critical impulse is counted among the elemental features of biblical faith, an especial bequest of Israel to Christian faith: “we must learn that the anti-pagan charac-

ter of Scripture and the impossibility of natural theology are *all decisive*" (146); or again, "Scripture is *wholly anti-pagan testimony*, repelling the natural religion of the human heart" (142). And so, in committing ourselves to this drama of sanctification, our trust and belief find worldly expression in acts of lively *distrust* and *disbelief*. As he puts it, "The more firmly we believe in the Name, the more unbelieving we become toward the primordial powers of life" (147). Indeed, "*God makes the elect people into UNBELIEVING PEOPLE*" as regards "the world and all its gods" (93).

In an extraordinary passage Miskotte sets out "exactly what sanctification entails," along these very lines:

The beginning and the principle of it all is *the divine gift of unbelief*, just as God's own existence is itself the constant, creative denial of the divine power of nature, of fallen angels, of pharaohs and heroes. *This* God signifies the disenchantment of the world; and the sanctification that this God effects is the de-divinization, the disenchantment of the world on our behalf. May this unbelief continue to grow, so that it becomes our "second nature."

94

Having previously wound up the mainsprings of iconoclasm in theology proper, Miskotte releases the catch, as it were, so that the very life of the people of God now unspools as an energetic honoring of God's own act of self-distinction *in* the world *from* the world, a human and humane repetition of the Lord's vital demythologizing of the world. Miskotte here gestures toward the necessity of a religion-critical ethics and politics that owns and enacts the emancipatory iconoclasm of the Saboteur God of Israel, the Lord who knows that sacralized power never sides with the poor of this earth.²⁶ This too can be understood as the form of "expectation," in other words, what it looks like for the people of God to "get ahead of themselves" and to *anticipate* the consummation of the reign of God even now by *exalting* the Name in just this way (127 f.)

Of course, Miskotte can and does also speak positively of sanctification as the pursuit of a properly and deflationary "worldly living" marked by "sobriety and practicality," a "true" or "genuine worldliness" [*echte Weltlichkeit*] (143),

26 For God himself is the primal iconoclast: "God who is from the outset Saboteur, Underminer, Disperser, Lampoonist of nature when it inflates itself to godhead. God is the great Mutineer (Isa 8:13), *because* God desires to be the Saviour and Redeemer of the poor, afflicted creature" (90).

perhaps even a “religionless” Christianity.²⁷ But, it is fair to say that the driving energy in his presentation lies with the critical characterization of the holy life as a life summoned to revolt against its dehumanizing entanglements in sacralized networks of “religious” and “natural life.” For Miskotte, the offensive launched by scripture against *homo religiosus* is an originary and inalienable event in the life of the people of God and so essential to the “ground structure” of the *Biblical ABCs*.

Reflecting on this treatment of sanctification, two contemporary points of comparison come to mind. First, while religion-critical theologies are unfashionable at the moment, there are exceptions to be noted, not least the work of Hans-Joachim Kraus, who, in addition to addressing the topic directly and at length in his book *Theologische Religionskritik*, also incorporates the theological critique of religion into the “elementary grammar” of his *Systematische Theologie* and its precursor, *Reich Gottes: Reich der Freiheit*.²⁸ Interestingly, Kraus shares Miskotte’s Reformed faith and also was an Old Testament scholar for many years before his “translation” into the post of Professor of Systematic Theology at Göttingen, and this feature of his theology is undoubtedly funded chiefly from Israel’s witness. Also interesting in this regard is Christopher Morse’s vision of contemporary Christian dogmatics as the relentless prosecution of “theology as the task of faithful disbelief.”²⁹ Like Miskotte, Morse conceives of the priority of the critical task in the Christian life, a rigorous and continual struggle to discern together in the community of faith just what allegiance to *this* God requires us to abandon, leave off, repudiate, and resist. Such “faithful disbelief” has active distrust and disavowal as its ethical and political corollary in Morse’s work in a way redolent of Miskotte’s vision.

27 He mentions Oskar Hammelsbeck explicitly at just this point, attributing to him the phrase *echte Weltlichkeit* and appealing to his 1939 text, *Leben unter dem Wort als Frage des kirchlichen Unterrichts*. *THE* 55 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1939), a work Hammelsbeck prepared in his role as Catechist for the German Confessing Church in Berlin. This talk of ‘genuine worldliness’ also appears, of course, in Bonhoeffer’s *Letter and Papers from Prison*, and may well originate in part from Hammelsbeck, who was close to Bonhoeffer. See Oskar Hammelsbeck, “Zu Bonhoeffers Gedanken über die mündig gewordene Welt,” *Evangelische Theologie* 15:4–5 (1955), 184–199.

28 See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theologische Religionskritik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), *Reich Gottes: Reich der Freiheit. Grundriß Systematischer Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), esp. 55–63, 110–111, 119–121, and *Systematische Theologie im Kontext biblischer Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983).

29 Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit. A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2009).

Second, one might also draw Miskotte's thinking here about "self-sanctification" and human agency in response to and in concert with God's prior sanctification and call into an interesting conversation with features of the theological anthropology developed by David Kelsey in his recent *Eccentric Existence*.³⁰ Kelsey's revisionist project looks to develop a theological anthropology not predominated by soteriological framing and concerns generally, or by preoccupation with sin and its problematic in particular. In this it draws deeply upon sustained engagement with the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, a body of scripture that affords a different "take" on human being than that commonly delivered into dogmatics from controlling reflection upon the creation and fall stories of Genesis 1–3. The interesting point of comparison I see is this: like Kelsey, Miskotte's account of humanity under the rubric of sanctification is advanced almost entirely without reference to sin, and its essential logic is certainly not determined chiefly by some typical account of the "problem of sin" and the demands of reconciliation. This is a notable, if quietly understated, feature of Miskotte's presentation.³¹ But when Miskotte sets out sanctification according to a fundamentally *redemptive* grammar, that is, when he casts it as an emancipatory process, his theological anthropology is indeed set in a decisively soteriological framework. But the problem to which sanctification is the solution is not chiefly that of sin, guilt, and forgiveness, but rather of human captivity to the elemental powers of the world, the flesh, those gods "which are no gods," religion, idolatry, and finally of *Fate*. Human beings are understood here, *pace* Kelsey, according to a fundamentally soteriological grammar but not the traditional moral one Kelsey himself has in mind, but rather according to a cosmic one that comes to expression in the compressed concept of "religion."

3 Coda and Final Questions

We have been concerned with three key themes in Miskotte's work: first, with the recognition and recovery of the scriptures as a whole, and the Old Testament in particular, as *torah* for Christian Faith and its "mother tongue"; second, with the elemental grammar of theology proper whose *taxis* is built around acknowledgement and articulation of the implacable *thisness* of God; and third, with his account of sanctification as emancipation from the natural

30 David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2009).

31 Sin is discussed very briefly as "betrayal of the covenant," but this is not the problem to which sanctification as such is the solution.

condition of religion in which God and the human are ordered partners, as it were.³² Throughout, we have noted how, in keeping with the elemental quality of the scriptures as instruction, Miskotte always associates biblical doctrine—its form, its emphases, its order—with *life*. The matters we have been considering are crucial, as he says more than once, precisely “for the gravity and fervour of our life” (43), or again, for the sake of “the security, joy, and resilience of our lives” (32). Indeed, the teaching of scripture just is “a ‘world to dwell in’: it speaks about our own life” (65).³³

In conclusion, let me simply attempt to formulate some questions Miskotte’s *Biblical ABCs* might provoke for contemporary theology.

1. Miskotte’s work raises pressing questions concerning the nature of scripture and the interrelation of the Old and New Testaments in particular. What more might be said of this relation? To what extent, if any, does the New Testament not only repeat, confirm, and consolidate the elementary grammar of the Old Testament witness, but perhaps also add to it or amend it? Is the “grammatical traffic” only ever one way, as it were? What difference does it make, if any, that the Christian church and theology receive the Old Testament and its witness only through the medium of its particular reception and deployment in the New Testament? Does this transit in any way transform the received grammar?³⁴

Relatedly, when it is said that in attending to the *Biblical ABCs* we Christians experience again how deep is our connection with Israel, just how capacious is the “Israel” to which the church is (re)connected? Does it extend to include, as, for example, F.-W. Marquardt would insist, postbiblical Judaism and the legacies of Midrash and Talmud? Does it dispose Christian theology in any particular way toward contemporary Judaism and Jewish thought, which, of course, can and does relate to the *Tanakh* in greatly different ways, not all of which might be adjudged to inhabit the “elementary grammar” Miskotte has espied?

2. Regarding the place and function of Christology in the elemental grammar of scripture as Miskotte portrays it: If it is right that Christology does little dis-

32 See Wolf Krötke, “Gott und Mensch als ‘Partner.’ Zur Bedeutung einer zentralen Kategorie in Karl Barths *Kirchliche Dogmatik*,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 6 (1986), 158–175.

33 In this it shows the sensibility shared with Rosenzweig’s ‘New Thinking’ with its concern with life, also famously the final word of Rosenzweig’s great work, *The Star of Redemption*—see Franz Rosenzweig, *New Thinking*, ed. and trans. Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

34 This question is pursued with a particular interest in the Gospel of Luke by Ad van Nieuwpoort, *Tenach Opnieuw. Over het Messiaanse tegoed van het evangelie naar Lukas* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep 2006).

crete work here in establishing the particularity of our thinking and speaking about God, what are we to make of this? Does Miskotte invite our “christologically overdetermined” theology to undergo a fundamental recalibration? Do the *Biblical ABCs* teach firmly what Katherine Sonderegger repeatedly asserts in her own recent work, namely, that “Not all is Christology!”?³⁵ Has Miskotte taken a decision to displace Christology in some sense and to some degree for the sake of orienting the church to other neglected biblical and dogmatics goods? Is it, in fact, time for a long overdue demotion of Christology within Christian theology on the basis of a better discernment of the elemental grammar of the biblical witness and its “proportionality”? And just how tactical and/or how “principled” is this move of Miskotte’s? Is the formal “humbling” of Christology chiefly for the sake of a better solidarity with the Synagogue? Or is it a necessary corrective for reasons entirely internal to Christian dogmatics? Relatedly—how might the account of sanctification offered by Miskotte change if more were explicitly made of the role of Jesus Christ in delineating its form and content, as might be done in a discourse about discipleship?

3. Regarding the theological critique of religion, one might ask just how tenable is Miskotte’s view of religion, funded as it is by here by a perhaps now dated phenomenological approach committed to distilling the essence of religion. The sharp dichotomy between biblical faith and natural religion also presents itself as ripe for a little bit of deconstruction, searching out all the ways in which the purity and priority of the former is, in fact, already muddled with and by the latter. Can the (admittedly deeply unfashionable) account of the human as *homo religiosus* ingredient in this rendering of the elementary grammar of the Bible be sustained under critical pressure from the sociology of knowledge, historicism, ideology critique, the diagnosis of orientalism, and the contemporary internal “crisis of religious studies”? Or might it actually be open to restatement and rehabilitation on the basis of engagement with renewed contemporary phenomenological interest in religion, in the work of French thinkers such as Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Falque, but also such English-language “new phenomenologists” as Aaron Simmons and others?³⁶

35 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Doctrine of God*, xvii, 322, 331, 363, 417.

36 While Marion’s work in this field is well known, that of Emmanuel Falque is perhaps less so. See his trilogy of extraordinary texts, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), and *The Guide to Gethsemane: Anxiety, Suffering, Death*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology. A Philosophical Introduction*

Beyond these concerns, one notes that the theological critique of religion can be a particularly awkward and unwelcome guest where Christian theology as an academic discipline shelters in institutional spaces held open by the positive recognition of “religion” as a field of humanistic/social scientific inquiry of some actual public and/or political interest. What challenges does the ongoing reception of Miskotte’s work raise for theology under such conditions?

4. But are we yet ready for theology at all as a community? Given the “death of the Old Testament” (Strawn), are our seminary and college curricula still fit for purpose, to the extent that they recklessly assume formed familiarity with the *Biblical ABCs* rather than instructing in them *ab initio*? Do we need to take up Miskotte’s practical suggestion to build and operate the *Lehrhaus /bet midrash* beside the church if Christian theology is to take responsibility for the post-Christendom situation that demands that the Christian community (synagogue-like) deliver its own fundamental instruction in sociocultural contexts in which the wider public culture no longer does, or wants to, deliver it? Are Reformed churches and congregations particularly well-placed to venture such educational experiments?

5. One final question: Miskotte’s *Biblical ABCs* and his wider theological program raise a pointed question as well about the living relation of Church and Synagogue, Christian theology and Jewish thought. We might ask whether Miskotte’s work calls Christian churches (and their theology with them) to the vocation that they share with the Moabite Ruth, who fiercely commits herself to Naomi (and so to Israel, and so to the God of Israel):

Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

RUTH 1:16–17

In Ruth’s “return,” as André LaCocque comments, “devotion to God comes through devotion to Israel ... a lesson Christians have often attempted to for-

(London: Bloomsbury, 2013), and the work reflected in the collection *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations and Challenges*, ed. J. Aaron Simmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

get.”³⁷ Miskotte suggests that this is a lesson we also learn with our *Biblical ABCs*, namely, that to be tethered to Israel by way of its witness to revelation is the condition of any Christian faith that would be and remain free from the religious confusion and captivity that ever stalks it from within. That proper pursuit of “life under the Word” enjoins *this* vocation perhaps remains one of Miskotte’s greatest provocations for contemporary theology.

37 André LaCocque, *Ruth*, trans. K.C. Hansen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 52. LaCocque cross-references Zech 8:23: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you!’” That this ‘return’ of Ruth to the Judeans does not leave them unchallenged or unchanged is also, of course, a crucial theme of this text, as LaCocque himself discusses, *Ruth*, 28–32.