

In memoriam Marinus de Jonge (1925-2016)

Marinus (Rien) de Jonge, Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christian Literature at Leiden University from 1966 to 1990, passed away on 26 December 2016. He had turned 91 on 9 December of that year.

Marinus de Jonge focused on four areas in his research efforts. The first of these was the Jewish and early Christian expectation of the future in the period 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., especially as articulated in the ancient writing entitled “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs”. De Jonge had learned from Albert Schweitzer that Jesus and his followers were convinced that the end of time was imminent and that God’s reign on earth was breaking in. To better understand this eschatology, de Jonge decided to make the “Testaments” the subject of his Ph.D. thesis. His supervisor and doktorvater in Leiden was Johannes de Zwaan, but he did much of his doctoral work during a year of study in Manchester (1951-1952) under the supervision of T.W. Manson. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1953 he always kept working on the “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs”, arguing indefatigably in numerous publications that this writing is not a Jewish work with Christian interpolations, but a second-century Christian composition using Jewish traditions. He also published a fresh critical edition of its Greek text and an extensive commentary on it, in collaboration with H.W. Hollander and Th. Korteweg.

De Jonge’s second area of research was the Johannine literature. He wrote commentaries on the Epistles as well as the Gospel of John. But what interested him most in these writings was their understanding of Jesus. They present Jesus in a unique relationship with God the Father: As the Son, Jesus speaks and acts in perfect unity with the Father. Yet he is sent by the Father and subordinate to him at the same time. Johannine Christology was for de Jonge a welcome alternative to that of the fourth-century councils.

The third area in which de Jonge was engaged was the question of how Jesus acquired the high recognition he received within a century of his death. In his answer to this question de Jonge made it clear that the main point in Jewish eschatology was not the coming of an Anointed One or a prophet or any other intermediary, but the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ followers believed that with him, in his message and activity, God’s reign on earth was at hand. Whether or not Jesus himself was the Anointed One, was of secondary importance: some believed he was, others did not. But all Jesus’ followers were convinced that he had brought near the kingdom of God and had in fact inaugurated it. This is also how Jesus understood himself. Not his person was what it was all about, but the dynamic presence, the “already and not yet”, of the dawning kingdom of God. De Jonge discussed it in detail in his *Christology in Context* (1988).

The fourth area to which de Jonge devoted his time and energy was that of the translation of the Greek New Testament into natural Dutch. He collaborated intensely with others on various new versions published by the Netherlands Bible Society.

De Jonge’s scholarly work is strictly philological and historical in nature. Its results are therefore accessible to anyone interested. At the same time it definitely seeks to serve present-day theology and the way the Church expresses its message. According to de Jonge, historical research into early Christian texts can not only make a contribution to correcting misunderstandings in systematic theology, but can also help to bring about a new appreciation of useful but forgotten ideas. Biblical exegesis has a task in finding material needed for equipping and renewing theology.

As a scholar, Marinus de Jonge was internationally held in high esteem. He was close friends with numerous prominent colleagues from Yale to Jerusalem. Many of them honoured him by contributing to the Festschrift offered to him on the occasion of his retirement, *From Jesus to John. Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*, edited by Martinus C. de Boer, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

De Jonge gave guest lectures at universities in the U.S.A., Great-Britain and on the continent, and read papers at many international conferences. He was President of the international Society for New

Testament Studies in 1985-1986 (in Trondheim and Atlanta, GA) and President of the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense in 1975.

Many students of de Jonge, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere, are grateful to him for what they have learned from him.

For his publications, see 'A Bibliography of the Writings of Marinus de Jonge 1953-1990', in M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Collected Essays*, Leiden: Brill 1991, pp. 314-326 (publication of a supplement 1990 - 2008 is under consideration). For an autobiographical portrait, see M. de Jonge, 'Theologisch zelfportret', *Kerk en theologie* 59 (2008), pp. 5-17.

Henk Jan de Jonge (no relation)