**Introduction**

*The Silent God* is an impressive book and in several respects a unique book. As the title indicates, the main theme is divine silence. The theme plays a role in the lives of ordinary Jews and Christians who are familiar with the biblical claim that God spoke to people in a distant past. If God spoke then, why does he not speak now? Or does he still speak, but in a different, less conspicuous way?

Theologians have discussed these questions extensively and in a systematic fashion. However, *The Silent God* shows that it is necessary to revive the discussion as there is previously unnoticed evidence from ancient sources that deserves to be taken into account. Marjo Korpel and Johannes de Moor compare biblical passages where God is described as silent with other texts from the ancient Near East referring to the silence of gods. They conclude that both the correspondences and the differences are significant for biblical and dogmatic theology.

The analysis proper of the silence of gods in the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts is found in Chapter 6, which despite its relative brevity is clearly a crucial part of the book. In this article, I will focus on the discussion in this chapter and only occasionally refer to the rest of the book. My task is to answer the question of whether the chapter does justice to the biblical evidence. It is most interesting to focus on the authors’ distinction of different ‘categories’ of silence that they apply to divine silence in Section 6.2, ‘Broken Communication between God and Man’, by far the longest section of Chapter 6. Especially the distinction between comprehensible and incomprehensible silence of God deserves attention. However, in order

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to elucidate the discussion in this section, it is necessary to first position it in the rest of the book.

I congratulate the authors with the book and with the attention it has drawn. On several pages they stress that their discussions are certainly not final and that more research must be done. However, I am grateful that they have laid a stable foundation for further study. This article is a modest contribution to the ongoing research into a relevant theological theme to which these scholars were able to draw attention.

**A Marginal Phenomenon**

In order to position Section 6.2 within the book, it is useful to refer to Korpel and De Moor’s earlier statement that explicit references to the silence of God are quite rare in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 1 deals with the idea of a silent God in modernity and not with the ancient evidence. However, already in this chapter the authors point out that the Hebrew Bible contains 1882 instances of verbs or nouns denoting God’s speech and only 29 instances of verbs and nouns denoting God’s silence. They do not specify which verbs and nouns they included in the statistics, which is probably due to their wish to appeal to a wide readership. However, it stands to reason that among the verbs that denote God’s silence are הָשָׁח, ‘to be silent’, and טָכָשׁ, ‘to be at rest’. The authors probably also included the cases in which God announces that he will not be silent, although they might also be seen as cases denoting God’s speaking. Despite the lack of specification, however, there is no reason to doubt the conclusion that there is only a very small number of verbs and nouns that express the silence of God. The Bible appears to contain only a few explicit references to God’s silence. The authors contrast the marginality of God’s silence in the Bible with the ‘modern captivation’ with God’s silence that they observe in modern literature and media, in modern theology and philosophy, and in agnosticism and atheism.

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3 Korpel, De Moor, *The Silent God*, 35.
4 The verb הָשָׁח has God as its subject in Isa. 62:3; 64:11; 65:6; Ps. 28:1 (*qal*); Isa. 42:14; 57:11 (*hifʿil*). The verb טָכָשׁ has God as its subject in Isa. 18:4; 62:3; Ezek. 16:42; Ps. 83:2 (*qal*); Job 34:29 (*hifʿil*). All of these verses are referred to in Section 6.2. The verb טָכָשׁ is mentioned explicitly at p. 121 (n. 37) and 241–242.
6 Korpel, De Moor, *The Silent God*, 35.