

*The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*

REDEEMPTIVE  
HISTORY  
AND BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATION



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Edited by Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

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## Preface

Over a decade ago the theological genius and unparalleled biblical insight of Geerhardus Vos began to dawn on me. Since then something like this volume has been a hope worked toward as time and other responsibilities have permitted. It has not been realized without the encouragement and considerable help of others. Several years ago Professor Paul Helm of the University of Liverpool, England, proposed such a volume and took the initiative of collecting considerable amounts of the material included here. More recently the enthusiasm and painstaking expertise of the Reverend James T. Dennison, Jr., in uncovering and verifying materials, and especially in producing the bibliography, have been simply invaluable. Miss Susanne Klepper has given generously of her time to reading the page proofs.

The original plan was to include most materials not previously published in Vos's major works. The quantity of such materials has made that impracticable. Included here are all his shorter writings with the exception of sermons and a number of dated items. A volume of sermons and possibly some lecture notes is projected. The book reviews selected either deal with books of continuing influence or provide a valuable statement of Vos's own views. In some instances references in footnotes to works outdated or no longer accessible to the average reader have been removed.

My thanks to the Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary for the leave of absence granted in part to complete this project, and to the publisher for his commitment to it.

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
August, 1979





## Introduction

Truly great biblical exposition does not become outdated. While originally addressed to contemporary issues and problems, it continues to lay hold of and shape the life and thought of subsequent generations of the church. Calvin's commentaries are a notable example. In some instances the real impact of exegetical labor may even fall beyond its own time. Possessing rare and unprecedented insight into the meaning and right handling of Scripture, a truly commensurate influence first begins to materialize in the interpretation and hermeneutical reflection of a later day, despite the warm appreciation and admiration of many contemporaries. This is the case with the work of Geerhardus Vos, most of whose shorter writings are reprinted in this volume.

\* \* \* \* \*

Vos was born of German parents in Heerenveen, in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands, on March 14, 1862. Following the completion of his secondary education he came to the United States in 1881, when his father accepted a call to a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The next seven years were spent in theological study, first in Grand Rapids, then at Princeton Seminary, and then in Germany at Berlin and Strassburg. During this last stage he spent time in the Netherlands, where he had contact with the leading figures in the Reformed community there, including Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. In 1888 he received his doctor's degree in Arabic studies from the philosophical faculty at Strassburg.<sup>1</sup>

Already during his student days Vos provided unmistakable indications of remarkable scholarly ability. The period of European study was facilitated by a fellowship awarded by the Princeton faculty for a thesis on the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch. This work was of such outstanding quality that soon after it was submitted it was published with an introduction by William Henry Green.<sup>2</sup> It demonstrates a capacity for writing on crucial theological issues that is at once penetrating, thorough, and balanced. The character of his doctoral work indicates something of his breadth of interest and aptitude.

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1. Ed. G. Vos, *Die Kämpfe und Streitigkeiten zwischen den banū 'umajja und den banū hāšim* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1888).

2. *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886).

These unusual gifts did not go unrecognized. Even before the completion of his doctoral work he was approached with teaching offers. With the personal involvement of Kuyper he was offered the first professorship in Old Testament theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. However, in what was surely a consequential decision for the Reformed world, he declined, choosing rather to accept an appointment to the faculty of the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, where he taught for five years beginning in the fall of 1888.<sup>3</sup> During this period he was responsible for a wide range of subjects from Greek grammar to systematic theology and carried an instructional load that at times was as high as 25 hours per week. Nevertheless, he managed several major productions, notably his rectoral address of 1891, a historical study of the covenant doctrine in Reformed theology, in Dutch,<sup>4</sup> and a multi-volume dogmatics, also in Dutch.<sup>5</sup>

Sometime during the latter part of 1892 or early 1893 Vos made another crucial decision. He accepted appointment as professor to the newly created chair of biblical theology at Princeton Seminary. This was not an easy decision; he had been approached by the Seminary for the preceding

---

3. Correspondence from Vos to Kuyper seems to show that Vos's own desire was to accept the invitation to the Free University and that the decisive reason for his return to this country was the wishes of his parents. He appears to have wrestled with the alternative between May and October of 1886 and in a letter from Leiden on October 1 communicated his decision to Kuyper. Two paragraphs from this letter are worth quoting for the insight they provide into Vos's person and deep sense of responsibility toward his parents:

Correspondence with my parents has brought about the necessity of making a choice, which is doubly difficult after becoming acquainted with the Free University. If such delicate reasons—as when the relationship between parents and child entered into our thinking—had not rendered the choice wholly unavoidable, it would not have been made. The impulse of an undivided sympathy with the glorious principle that your Institution represents and seeks to propagate, drives me, as it were, within its walls. It would have been an honor and a joy for me to be allowed to serve the Free University with my feeble abilities.

Circumstances, as they have taken shape under God's control, apparently do not permit it. My parents are not able to see the matter in the same light in which I have recently come to view it. If, contrary to their advice and wishes, I dared to follow the pull of my heart, this would cause them grief which I must spare them at any price. Taking this into consideration, I see no other way than to choose the field of labor assigned to me in America.

(translation of a reproduction from the Abraham Kuyper Archive at the Free University of Amsterdam).

4. *De verbondsleer in de Gereformeerde theologie* (Grand Rapids: "Democrat" Drukpers, 1891).

5. This work, a transcript of class lectures, first appeared in handwritten mimeographed form at Grand Rapids in 1896 and was followed by a typed edition in 1910. A shorter mimeographed *Compendium* (handwritten) also appeared (Grand Rapids, 1895).

academic year but had declined.<sup>6</sup> But it proved to be the choice of a lifetime, for he remained there for 39 years, until retirement in 1932 at the age of 70.

The passing of time has cast a veil which makes it difficult to answer clearly a number of questions about this move to Princeton. What motives prompted it? Doubtless there were more than one. Some seem obvious: a lighter, more attractive teaching load, exposure to a larger and more varied student body, certainly too, the strategic importance of Princeton on the American theological scene. But none of these was decisive. Rather, judging from subsequent developments, it would appear that what was especially important and attractive to Vos was the opportunity to concentrate his efforts in the area of biblical theology.

This, in turn, raises a more important question. What is the background to Vos's interest in biblical theology? What formative factors shaped his deep attraction to this discipline? Apart from a long-standing and deeply rooted interest in the doctrine of the covenant, it is difficult to find the answer to this question in either the Princeton or the Dutch tradition of Reformed theology as Vos was exposed to them. In 1891 the Princeton faculty had requested the Board of Directors to establish a professorship

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6. William Henry Green, Vos's former teacher in Old Testament, appears to have been especially involved in efforts to bring him to Princeton. This concern was impelled by the larger situation developing in the Presbyterian Church (the Briggs controversy came to a head at the General Assembly of 1893) and the increasing prominence of the Seminary as a citadel for the defense of Reformed orthodoxy. In this context Green felt strongly that Vos with his gifts belonged at Princeton and wrote him so repeatedly. After Vos had declined an invitation for the fall of 1892, Green wrote in the following vein: he compares Vos to an engineer at work on a minor job in the interior when his services are needed at the coast, where a major break in the dykes threatens the entire country with devastating flood waters, and he concludes, "Does he do right? Is a man at liberty to decline a public duty in a time of general peril, however willing he may be to remain in obscurity and whatever local value may attach to his less conspicuous labour? My dear Dr. Vos, this may be the turning point of your whole life, on which your entire future may hinge, and the service you can render to the cause of Christ. Remember that the master, under whose orders you serve, rules the whole field of battle, and not one corner of it merely. Is he not calling you to a point where you can do his work more effectively, and where there is a more pressing need than where you are now?" (reproduction of a letter, March 18, 1892, kindly made available by B. H. Vos). An index of the character of the younger Vos was his ability to refuse so urgent an appeal from such a distinguished figure.

In view of the principals involved, an interesting, if somewhat different, view of Vos's move to Princeton is found in the private correspondence from Kuyper to Bavinck. In a letter of January 24, 1894, Kuyper remarks in passing that while perhaps Vos went too far in becoming a Presbyterian, he did well to leave Grand Rapids since to remain there would have meant his "academic murder"! (R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966], pp. 81, 291: "Vos ging misschien te ver met naar de Presbyterian te gaan, maar deed in elk geval goed met het schooltje in Grand Rapids te verlaten. Dat zou hem wetenschappelijk vermoord hebben.").

of biblical theology.<sup>7</sup> However, this action seems more to reflect a recognition of the growing importance of that field in the broader theological scene and of the need to give it a place in the curriculum than a strongly felt concern developing organically from work already being done at the Seminary. A conception of biblical theology is present, to be sure, in A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, less clearly in Charles Hodge, but is not elaborated or given any special prominence,<sup>8</sup> nor, more importantly, does it influence their theological methods in any significant way. On the Dutch side, Kuypers's viewpoint is ambivalent. He rejects the notion of biblical theology. However, both he and Bavinck call for a study of the history of revelation, the latter especially emphasizing both the importance and traditional neglect of such study.<sup>9</sup>

The period of study in Germany certainly must have stimulated Vos's interest in biblical theology. But the "critical" conception he encountered there can hardly have been a decisive positive influence.<sup>10</sup> At any rate, already in his inaugural address given in May, 1894, he provides a clear, fully developed discussion of the idea of biblical theology and its place among the other theological disciplines. The apparent conclusion is that Vos's work in biblical theology is largely without direct antecedents and indicates the originality with which he wrestled with the matter of biblical interpretation in the Reformed tradition. It should also be emphasized, however, that he had a strong sense of his own place in that tradition and

7. Minutes of the faculty meeting of May 1, 1891.

8. Cf. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), p. 22; B. B. Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), pp. 65ff. (reprint of an 1896 article); C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1871] 1893), vol. I, pp. 1f.

9. Cf. A. Kuypers, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerheid* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1909), vol. III, pp. 166ff.; H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, [1906] 1967), vol. I, pp. 315-318. I have tried to explore more fully the developments touched on in this paragraph in "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975-76):284-288. On the grounds for Kuypers's rejection of biblical theology, see my "Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul," ed. E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens* (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 229-231.

10. An indication of Vos's outlook on the broader situation in biblical theology is provided by the following remark: "The modern tendency to transform Biblical Theology into an out-and-out historical science, represented by such men as Wrede, has a certain degree of justification; although, of course, in the form in which it is championed at present, it proposes to make our science a purely naturalistic and secular branch of study, a mere subdivision of the history of religions. But surely we are not reduced to the alternative of following either the old systematizing or the new evolutionary principle of treatment. From the latter we need only learn to place greater emphasis upon the historical nexus of the several types of truth deposited in the Scriptures, without thereby abating in the least our conviction concerning the supernatural genesis and growth of the body to which they belong" (*The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 11 [1900]:702). This statement was called to my attention by Professor Paul Helm.

the thoroughly Reformed character of his work. Writing at the height of his career, he observed that Reformed theology "has from the beginning shown itself possessed of a true historic sense in the apprehension of the progressive character of the deliverance of truth. Its doctrine of the covenants on its historical side represents the first attempt at constructing a history of revelation and may justly be considered the precursor of what is at present called Biblical Theology."<sup>11</sup>

The long Princeton years were relatively quiet and untroubled, given over to teaching, research, writing, and occasionally preaching, with long and pleasant summers in the mountains of central Pennsylvania. Apparently there were no outside involvements or other complications which interrupted this pattern in any substantial way. Although he could and on occasion did state his position clearly and forcefully on the raging church controversy of this period, he did not, as did several of his colleagues, become extensively involved.<sup>12</sup> Gentle and naturally retiring, he did not acquire a large following among the students. By many, perhaps the majority, he was probably more respected than understood. No doubt his lectures were like his writings, intrinsically difficult because of the wealth of insight packed into virtually every sentence.

The years of retirement appear to have been peaceful, spent first in southern California and then in Grand Rapids, where Vos died on August 13, 1949, at the age of 87. He lies buried in Roaring Branch, Pennsylvania, not far from the family summer home, beside his wife of 43 years, the author of the well-known *Child's Story Bible*, who died in 1937. He was survived by three sons and a daughter.

It is always difficult to recapture faithfully the personal profile of a past figure, especially someone as reserved as Vos. Besides exceptional breadth and depth of learning seasoned with a subtle, yet delightful, sense of humor, what seems to have most impressed those who knew him was his modesty and piety. The word *piety* is so overworked that it has become almost meaningless. We must rehabilitate its true sense, however, if we are to understand Vos and his work. His piety was not some shallow emotion or narrowly conceived sector of experience but a deeply religious devotion that controlled everything he was and did. Its depth is plain, for example, in his chapel sermons. But what should especially be emphasized here is that it was an integral and determinative factor in his scholarship. A careful, continuing study of his writings makes this clear. Piety was the productive principle of his remarkable labors. Nothing better expresses what

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11. "Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diatheke," *The Princeton Theological Review* 14 (1916):60; see below, p. 232.

12. Vos was received from Classis Holland of the Christian Reformed Church by the Presbytery of New Brunswick and ordained April 24, 1894. He was still on its roll at death.

is true of his own work than what he once wrote about the Apostle Paul: "To take God as source and end of all that exists and happens, and to hold such a view suffused with the warmth of genuine devotion, stands not only related to theology as the fruit stands to the tree: it is by reason of its essence a veritable theological tree of life."<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The following remarks do not provide a thorough examination and evaluation of Vos's writings and methodology. Nor do they attempt to illustrate his interpretive principles by applying them to particular texts or exegetical problems. Rather they are intended only to introduce, to point out the way into his work and to indicate something of its value for contemporary biblical interpretation. How well they do that only a careful reading of this volume and his major publications will be able to determine.

In a word, Vos is significant because he is the father of a Reformed biblical theology, or, as he much prefers to describe the discipline, "History of Special Revelation."<sup>14</sup> This is certainly not to say that prior to him in the Reformed tradition there was no awareness or appreciation of the

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13. (*The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 61). This brief biographical sketch is based on personal conversations and correspondence as well as the following memorial notices and biographies: G. D. De Jong and W. D. Vanderwerp, in the *Semi-Centennial Volume* of the Theological School and Calvin College (Grand Rapids, 1926), pp. 28, 29, 32, 96-98; H. H. Meeter, *The Banner* 84 (September 2, 1949): 1046f.; *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 43, 3 (1950):41f., 44f.; J. G. Vanden Bosch, *The Reformed Journal* 4 (November, 1954):11-14. Cf. also the sketch of K. M. Campbell introducing the privately published translation of Vos's Calvin rectoral address, *The Covenant in Reformed Theology* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. i-iii. An interesting and appreciative, if not entirely congenial, survey and assessment of Vos's work have been given recently by J. F. Jansen, "The Biblical Theology of Geerhardus Vos," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 66, 2 (Summer, 1974):23-34.

14. *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), preface, p. 23. This preference is based primarily on material grounds but also involves historical considerations (pp. 17-20). Discounting a handful of occurrences in the context of German pietism, the term "biblical theology" first gained currency in the late Enlightenment, where it designated a more or less distinct program of rationalistic biblical scholarship which denied the verbal inspiration of Scripture and viewed biblical interpretation essentially as a purely historical, descriptive (rather than a normative) discipline, and which had as one of its principal objectives to show that there is a wide disparity between biblical teaching and orthodox Protestant dogmatics (e.g., the work of J. P. Gabler). As is well known, this movement (along with the concomitant "historical-critical" method) has had an almost incalculable influence in biblical studies down to the present. Just one unfortunate result has been the understandable tendency within evangelical and Reformed circles to be suspicious of anything that goes by the label "biblical theology." Where present, this attitude, in turn, has led to a neglect or, at most, rather inhibited recognition of the legitimate kind of study which meanwhile has been begun by Vos and others. For his own part, despite the disadvantages, Vos hesitated to abandon a name which has become "fixed by long usage" (preface). For a survey of the history of biblical theology see the discussion of O. Betz in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), vol. II, pp. 432-437. Cf. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," pp. 281-284).

historical character of revelation. Attention to the historical progress of revelation is given with the Reformed concentration on the idea of the covenant and is present in such dissimilar figures as Coccejus and Jonathan Edwards. Also an essential concern of Protestant orthodoxy, especially since the Enlightenment, has been to maintain and defend the historicity of the biblical narratives. Even more broadly, one can say that from the very beginning, in confrontation with gnosticism and gnosticizing tendencies, the church has continued to be aware that salvation and faith depend vitally on what God has done in history, especially on the historical character of the work of Christ. But Vos is the first in the Reformed tradition, perhaps even the first orthodox theologian, to give pointed, systematic attention to the *doctrinal* or *positive* theological significance of the fact that redemptive revelation comes as an organically unfolding historical process and to begin working out the methodological consequences of this insight.

Two statements, one from Vos's Princeton inaugural and the other written well into retirement, serve to bracket his entire life's work and also to pinpoint its thrust in a highly instructive fashion. "It is certainly not without significance that God has embodied the contents of revelation, not in a dogmatic system, but in a book of history, the parallel to which in dramatic interest and simple eloquence is nowhere to be found."<sup>15</sup> "The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest."<sup>16</sup>

(1) In the first place, these nearly identical statements are important because they express the generalization or overall characterization which controls Vos's approach to Scripture, namely, the historical character of the Bible. The immediate context of each as well as the rest of his writings makes clear that these statements do not intend to suggest what is obviously incorrect, that the Bible is a kind of uniform historiography. Rather their point is that the *subject matter* of biblical revelation is essentially historical. Just in the great variety of literary types that make up Scripture—law, prophecy, poetry, gospel, epistle, apocalypse—there is a common focus, and this focus is historical. Specifically, the focus or orientation of Scripture in all its parts is the history of God's accomplishment of the redemption of his covenant people, which reaches its climax in the work of the incarnate Christ. So far as its content is concerned, biblical revelation is redemptive-historical (or covenantal) and christocentric.

What needs to be made clear is that for Vos this generalization holds for biblical revelation in its entirety. His point is not that by far the largest part of Scripture or its main emphasis concerns the redemptive

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15. *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1894), pp. 37f.; see below, p. 23.

16. *Biblical Theology*, p. 26.



work of Christ while the other, less prominent portions are basically independent of this concern, related to redemption only indirectly or not at all. Rather, in its way every single aspect or strand in the rich diversity of biblical revelation is oriented to salvation in Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ constitute the focal point of all biblical revelation.<sup>17</sup>

This can be seen especially from the way in which Vos discusses the relationship between redemptive deed and revelatory word or, more broadly, the relationship between the historical processes of redemption and (verbal) revelation.<sup>18</sup> His basic point is that revelation is the interpretation of redemption. God's word invariably has his redemptive deeds for its subject matter. Indeed, apart from redemption revelation has nothing to say; "it would be suspended in the air."<sup>19</sup>

Revelation is a function of redemption. For this reason revelation comes in a historically progressive fashion. The accomplishment of redemption is not a divine work which breaks into history only at a single point. Rather, it consists in the long history of God's covenantal activity, which begins already in the Garden of Eden and consummates in the work of Christ. Accordingly, the pattern of God's redemptive deeds sets the pattern by which he reveals himself verbally. Revelation is historically progressive because redemption is historically progressive and epochal in its realization. The history of revelation (including inscripturation) is an essential strand

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17. A comment or two may be helpful here to avoid misreading Vos in the light of contemporary discussion about Scripture, especially within a Reformed context. In making the above emphasis Vos is not denying or overlooking a *prefall*, *pre-redemptive* verbal revelation. Chapter 3 of his *Biblical Theology*, for instance, is devoted to "The Content of Preredemptive Special Revelation." Plainly a distinction exists, however, between the history of revelation, the actual revelation process, and the Bible as the (inspired, revelatory) record of that historical process. Scripture, whose own production is part of the history of revelation, is not a loose anthology of divine oracles. Inscripturation serves a specific and unified purpose which is best described in one word as *redemptive*. To be sure, the Bible tells us about God's work of creation, the original condition of man, and the historical fall, but it does not do so just to provide additional information or a broader orientation unrelated to its redemptive message. Its record of preredemptive states of affairs serves a specifically redemptive purpose—to provide the background and context for the work of redemption. Apart from a knowledge of God as creator, the original goodness of creation (including man), and the character of sin as disobedience rooted in Adam's fall, redemption is unintelligible. The Scriptures never equate God's work of creation with his work of redemption; they always safeguard the independence and priority of the former. On the other hand, the Bible always considers creation in the light of its (the Bible's) focus on the redemptive work of Christ. This involves no reduction (and certainly no dichotomy), because redemption is re-(new) creation, cosmic in its scope. In the light of these considerations the term "redemptive" is properly applied to the *Bible*, to *biblical* revelation in its entirety without unduly narrowing its scope or restricting it as the self-revelation of God as creator and redeemer. Also, when the actual process of revelation is considered as a whole, the description of it, too, as redemptive need only be qualified with reference to its *prefall* beginnings.

18. *Biblical Theology*, pp. 14ff.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

within the history of redemption as a whole. Again, revelation is redemptive-historical.

The balance in this overall assessment of Scripture ought to be appreciated. On the one hand, it emphasizes the absolute necessity of Scripture as the direct verbal self-revelation of God. It does not fall into the perverse dilemma between “deed revelation” and “word revelation” in favor of the former that characterizes so many current views of revelation. On the other hand, it reminds of what is too easily lost sight of by those with a high view of Scripture: the Bible is not an end in itself. This is meant in the sense that it would not exist apart from the redemptive-historical, covenantal matrix out of which it comes and with which it is concerned. Formal predications of Scripture (e.g., necessity, sufficiency, clarity, authority) must always be carefully controlled by the (redemptive) focus and subject matter of Scripture. This means that without introducing unwarranted dichotomies or an undue restriction of the scope of revelation a certain accent needs to be maintained. Revelation is not so much divinely given *gnosis* to provide us with knowledge concerning the nature of God, man, and the world as it is divinely inspired interpretation of God’s activity of redeeming men so that they might worship and serve him in the world. The reason that revelation is historically progressive is not merely pedagogical. The coming of Christ in “the fullness of time,” not the education of the people of God, ultimately shapes the progress of revelation. The deepest motive controlling the flow of the history of revelation is not instruction but incarnation. Scripture provides no basis for an intellectualistic conception of revelation or theology. It is everywhere directed (as redemptive-historical) to the full historical life of man. As Vos puts it, “The circle of revelation is not a school, but a ‘covenant.’”<sup>20</sup>

This outlook on Scripture has important consequences for interpretation. Several of the most basic will be discussed here briefly.

(a) The hermeneutical significance of Vos’s work can be seen most easily by viewing it in a certain historical context. It is not always recognized how vitally concerned the Protestant Reformation was with matters of biblical interpretation. Over against patristic and medieval schemes of multiple senses, the Reformers, realizing that nothing less than the gospel itself was at stake, insisted that the text had but one true sense, and they were intent on determining that sense. Further, the *sola scriptura* itself is pointedly hermeneutical. It is directed against the notion that the ongoing body of tradition (interpretation) controlled and validated by the teaching office of Rome is necessary for a right understanding of the Bible. This hermeneutical thrust Luther made explicit in the well-known dictum that Scripture interprets itself.

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

It is fair to say that where the Reformation insistence on the sufficiency of Scripture continues, developments in theological method are (or ought to be) largely a matter of trying to think through and clarify how this self-interpretation takes place. The point is not that the Bible is to be understood in isolation, apart from the historical situation in which each book was written, although this misunderstanding persists. Rather, to say that Scripture interprets itself means that it has one pervasive sense—a unified meaning. Because it is God's word, the Bible is a unity, so that any one part has its place within the unified teaching of the whole. A particular passage is located within a pattern of God-given contexts which can only serve to clarify. The pervasive meaning of Scripture should be brought to bear on any single portion. Biblical revelation is self-elucidating because it has an organic, unified structure.

It is just in terms of these considerations that Vos is so helpful. The cumulative impact of his various exegetical studies is to clarify with unprecedented insight the basic structure of biblical revelation, its pervasive meaning. His work counters the ever-present tendency to view the Bible as a mass of ambiguously related particulars for which some extrabiblical prolegomena or systematics supplies the necessary structuring principles. Biblical revelation has its own structure, which impresses itself readily on the properly receptive interpreter. Ultimately this structure is not literary but is resident in the subject matter itself, present in the marked and irreducible variety of literary forms which Scripture displays. The basic structure and unity of biblical revelation are the structure and unity of the history of revelation which it faithfully records. And the structure of the history of revelation, as the ongoing attestation and interpretation of the redemptive history that centers in Christ, is that of an organically unfolding process of a maturing organism. Theology which is *rigorously* and *methodically* controlled by this perspective will not only be prone to reach thoroughly biblical conclusions; it will also tend to begin with the right *questions*. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the biblical-theological method or, better, the redemptive-historical orientation exemplified by Vos is, to date, the most fruitful and pointedly biblical realization of the Reformation insistence that Scripture interprets Scripture.

(b) Vos's work is characterized by considerable attention to the human authors of the books of the Bible. This feature is subject to misunderstanding and is perhaps even suspect to some who stand with Vos in the tradition of orthodoxy where, especially since the Enlightenment, considerable (and necessary) premium has always been placed on emphasizing the divine authorship of the Bible. Vos's interest, however, is not to point out and emphasize the alleged "humanity" of Scripture at the expense of its divine origin. Rather, his concern is with the history of revelation, and this concern inevitably directs attention to the human writers. Concentration on

revelation as a historical process invariably draws attention to the varied human instrumentality that is an integral factor in giving shape to that process. It is just in terms of the distinguishing characteristics and peculiarities of the respective biblical authors and what they have written that revelation itself is historically differentiated. The tendency, in the interests of maintaining the unity and divine authorship of Scripture, to minimize or ignore the distinctiveness of each of the human writers is unfortunate not only because in its own way it suggests a conflict between divine and human elements in Scripture, but also because it bars the way to a more pointed and articulate grasp of biblical teaching. Careful attention to the writings of the various authors in all their respective individuality and particularity will only serve to disclose in all its rich diversity the organic unity of biblical revelation.

(c) Vos's work reflects a marked sense of *continuity* between himself, the contemporary interpreter, and the writers of the New Testament.<sup>21</sup> "Still we know full well that we ourselves live just as much in the N.T. as did Peter and Paul and John."<sup>22</sup> Paul, for instance, is viewed as a theologian and "the father of Christian eschatology."<sup>23</sup> This emphasis, too, is subject to misunderstanding. The point is not to deny or tone down the important difference between the New Testament writers and their interpreters, or the completeness and sufficiency of the canon. Rather, despite those differences, best expressed by the distinction inspired—uninspired, or canonical—noncanonical, both are concerned with a common subject matter, the history of redemption (or more simply and pointedly, the *gospel*). The New Testament writer and his interpreter have in common (1) essentially the same redemptive-historical interest (the text is, of course, the only and infallible means of access for the interpreter), and they share this interest from out of (2) basically the same redemptive-historical context or epoch, defined on the one side by the resurrection of Christ and by his return on the other. Granted that theology itself ought to be essentially exegetical, based on interpretation of Scripture, this orientation tends to insure a more biblical focus and more biblical boundaries to the entire theological enterprise.

(2) The two statements quoted above are also noteworthy because of their almost identical form. Both express what the Bible is *not* as well as what it is. It is not a "dogmatic handbook"; its structure is not that of a "dogmatic system." Such pointedly antithetical formulations are surely deliberate and confront a more than purely hypothetical misunderstanding. There is little question that Vos is countering what he considers a tendency in Protestant orthodoxy to deal with Scripture largely in terms of the *loci*

21. For a fuller discussion of this point, see "Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul," pp. 228-237.

22. *Biblical Theology*, pp. 325f.

23. *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. vi.

or topical structure of dogmatics and in so doing to treat its statements as more or less isolated proof-texts.

How legitimate is such criticism? This is a large question and one that requires careful, sympathetic attention. Unfortunately, answering it is made all the more difficult by the widespread tendency at present to write off developments in seventeenth-century Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy as a distortion of Scripture and a perversion of the Reformation. Nevertheless, the observation is in order that those with a high view of the Bible often do tend to use it as a handbook of doctrinal tenets and ethical principles without adequate attention to context.

Precisely in the contexts of the key statements under consideration Vos emphasizes the doctrinal character of biblical revelation and the system of truth in Scripture. An antidoctrinal bias is the furthest thing from his mind. However, his interpretation of Scripture, his explanation of particular statements and portions in terms of their full biblical, redemptive-historical context makes impressively clear what is too often overlooked, namely, that the biblical authors did not write *primarily* to provide materials for a topical (*loci*) presentation of their teaching.

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The burden of Vos's program of biblical theology is to orient biblical interpretation to the history of redemption in a pointed and programmatic fashion. Again, the issue is not simply the historical character of redemption or the prominence of narrative material in Scripture. Something much more basic is in view: the history of redemption as the subject matter or focus of the entire biblical record. Revelation has its structure and serves its (undeniably multiple and diverse) functions as the progressive attestation and interpretation of the ongoing work of redemption. Any theological reflection basing itself on biblical interpretation must recognize and work from out of this redemptive-historical framework. The redemptive-historical perspective is an indispensable horizon for understanding Scripture in part or as a whole.

In bringing these comments to a close, it may be useful to note what appear to be some guidelines and tasks for current Reformed and evangelical interpretation and theology that follow from this fundamental orientation.

(1) Biblical interpretation is necessarily historical work. The exegete, among other things, is a historian. This is meant not only in the sense that the biblical documents have a historical origin and background to be investigated, but also in the sense that their subject matter is historical. All involved in careful study of Scripture—the academic theologian, the pastor preparing to preach and teach, any believer intensely occupied with the text—need to remain aware of the historical dimension of their task. The notion has to be avoided that the historical character of the Bible must some-

how be overcome before we have the truth for today. It is no more the case that the Bible is true in spite of or apart from its historical qualification than it is the case that the death of Christ is efficacious in spite of its historicity. In fact, to remove the negatives and disjunctives from the preceding sentence will disclose the integral tie between truth and history from a biblical point of view: the Bible is true in view of its historical qualification, just as the death of Christ is efficacious in view of its historicity. The outstanding demand here is for an adequate, fully developed statement of the historical character of truth that does not degenerate into a relativity of truth.

(2) The history of redemption is not some special kind of history. It is not a strand more or less isolated from the mainstream of history. Nor does it have anything to do with the notion of a detemporalized *Geschichte* prevalent in so much contemporary theology. In this sense of some kind of isolation or dimensionalism the expression "redemptive history" can be misleading. Rather, it has to do with that pattern of decisive divine activity subsequent to the fall until the coming of Christ by which God is exercising his lordship over the whole of history in the interest of accomplishing his eternal purposes for the entire creation. Consequently, an important and unavoidable question is the relation of redemptive history or, most pointedly, the redemptive work of Christ to the whole of history. This may simply be a variation on the perennial question of the relationship between special revelation and general revelation, or between the Bible and the special sciences. But it puts that question in a more pointedly biblical and potentially more concrete fashion. Or to pose another, related question, what is the relationship between the cosmic kingship of the resurrected Christ and his rule over the church. What are the role and expectations of the New Testament church in the world? Or take an even more specific question, what is the set of continuities and discontinuities between the church during the time of its apostolic foundations and the subsequent history of the church? For instance, does the conviction of those who hold that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit (e.g., tongues) have ceased in the church rest largely on *a posteriori*, historical grounds, or may it not be the case that there is a deeper basis, resident in the structure of New Testament revelation and the history of redemption? Again, does not consideration of the relevant passages in terms of just the same structure compel the conclusion that the New Testament injunctions against women occupying the office of elder in the church continue in force? These are just some of the inescapable questions posed by biblical revelation itself in terms of its redemptive-historical framework, and which are also to be answered in terms of that framework.

(3) A redemptive-historical orientation is not some kind of dispensable exegetical luxury. At stake is nothing less than the right way of interpret-

ing Scripture. Although the notion continues to be widespread, it is simply not the case that grammatical-historical method properly works with individual units of the text, independent of the synthesis or overview provided by biblical theology. To be sure, careful, detailed exegesis is essential, and such exegesis is easily falsified when controlled from a broader perspective foreign to the text. If it reflects on what it is doing, however, even the most painstaking handling of a particular text is aware that it interacts reciprocally with, and to that extent is controlled by, a larger outlook. Any single part has its place within the whole and is fully intelligible only in terms of a proper understanding of that whole. This is especially the case with Scripture. At issue here is simply the fundamental principle that the text is to be interpreted in the light of its context. In the case of Scripture, the redemptive-historical structure or framework established by Scripture itself is the contextual factor having the broadest bearing on a given text.

(4) In Protestant orthodoxy dogmatics or systematic theology has always had a central place. The goal of scholarly biblical study as a whole is an exhibition of the system of truth taught in Scripture, usually by a presentation of the total biblical teaching under appropriate headings (*loci*). What is in question here is not this goal but the efforts customarily made to reach it. Just in pursuing its topical interest orthodox dogmatics needs to give greater, more careful attention to the redemptive-historical character of biblical revelation and to the progressive nature of revelation. In other words, there is need to recognize the necessary interaction between systematic theology and biblical theology and not to view the two as more or less unrelated disciplines, each going its own way with a common set of biblical data. One of Vos's own students, Professor John Murray, has expressed this point most trenchantly:

Systematic theology is tied to exegesis. It coordinates and synthesizes the whole witness of Scripture on the various topics with which it deals. But systematic theology will fail of its task to the extent to which it discards its rootage in biblical theology as properly conceived and developed. It might seem that an undue limitation is placed upon systematic theology by requiring that the exegesis with which it is so intimately concerned should be regulated by the principle of biblical theology. And it might seem to be contrary to the canon so important to both exegesis and systematics, namely, the analogy of Scripture. These appearances do not correspond to reality. The fact is that only when systematic theology is rooted in biblical theology does it exemplify its true function and achieve its purpose.<sup>24</sup>

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24. "Systematic Theology. Second Article," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 26 (November, 1963):44ff. A few lines later Murray speaks of "the tendency to abstraction which ever lurks for systematic theology" and of biblical theology as the counter-actant. The context makes plain that he sees this "tendency to abstraction" to consist specifically in the tendency to de-historicize biblical revelation. Cf. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," pp. 291ff.

(5) Protestant orthodoxy still owes a debt to itself and the Scriptures it values so highly. A truly fateful development in modern church history took place during the latter part of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries when the historical consciousness which blossomed at that time was almost immediately coupled with the assumption of man's rational autonomy. The rather rapid result was widespread rejection of the doctrine of verbal inspiration and the impaling of biblical studies on the false dilemma: history or verbal inspiration—*either* careful and responsible historical ("historical-critical") study of the Bible which unquestionably shows historical and doctrinal contradictions *or* anxious insistence on the inspiration and doctrinal unity of the biblical documents involving neglect or suppression of their historical character. But this perverted state of affairs has been made even more confused by the reaction of orthodox interpretation to the increasingly dominant "historical-critical" tradition. It has forcefully rejected the autonomy principle of the latter, but at the same time, in practice at least, it has not challenged the false dilemma that this position of autonomy creates. Too often orthodox theology has left the impression that intensive preoccupation with the historical diversity of the Bible will somehow jeopardize its doctrinal unity, and that the latter is best maintained by minimizing the former. There has been considerable careful and often excellent grammatical-historical investigation of individual passages and books but very little wrestling with the historical diverse composition of biblical revelation as a whole.

The unity of the Bible, after all, is not something that has to be established or demonstrated in any constitutive way. Doctrinal unity is there, in the text, prior to the activity of any interpreter, because the Scriptures are the written word of God. The present task incumbent upon the community of interpreters convinced of this is to explore fully and vigorously the progressive and differentiated character of biblical teaching so that the true shape of its unity, as unity in historical diversity, may become more apparent. The discharge of this obligation will not only have apologetic value with reference to those who insist on twisting diversity into disunity. It will also serve a much higher end—that the church hears and lives by the Scriptures in all of their symphonic depth and power.

The legacy of Vos is the down payment on this debt.

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.





**MAJOR BIBLICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL STUDIES**



## The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline\*

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

It is with no little hesitation that I enter upon the work to which you have called me and to-day more formally introduced me. In reaching the conclusion that it was my duty to accept the call with which you had honored me, I was keenly alive to the incongruity of my name being associated in the remotest manner with the names of those illustrious men through whom God has glorified Himself in this institution. Some of those at whose feet I used to sit while a student here, are fallen asleep; a smaller number remain until now. The memory of the former as well as the presence of the latter make me realize my weakness even more profoundly than the inherent difficulty of the duties I shall have to discharge. While, however, on the one hand, there is something in these associations that might well fill me with misgivings at this moment, I shall not endeavor to conceal that on the other hand they are to me a source of inspiration. In view of my own insufficiency I rejoice all the more in having behind and around me this cloud of witnesses. I am thoroughly convinced that in no other place or environment could the sacred influences of the past be brought to bear upon me with a purer and mightier impulse to strengthen and inspire me than here. The pledge to which I have just subscribed is itself a symbol of this continuity between the past and the future; and I feel that it will act upon me, not merely by outward restraint, but with an inwardly constraining power, being a privilege as well as an obligation.

Although not a new study, yet Biblical Theology is a new chair, in this Seminary; and this fact has determined the choice of the subject on which I purpose to address you. Under ordinary circumstances, the treatment of some special subject of investigation would have been more appropriate, and perhaps more interesting to you, than a discussion of general principles. But Biblical Theology being a recent arrival in the Seminary curriculum and having been entrusted to my special care and keeping, I consider it

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\* Inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology in Princeton Theological Seminary, delivered in the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton on May 8, 1894. Originally published by Anson D. F. Randolph & Co. (New York, 1894), 40 pp.

my duty to introduce to you this branch of theological science, and to describe, in general terms at least, its nature and the manner in which I hope to teach it.

This is all the more necessary because of the wide divergence of opinion in various quarters concerning the standing of this newest accession to the circle of sacred studies. Some have lauded her to the skies as the ideal of scientific theology, in such extravagant terms as to reflect seriously upon the character of her sisters of greater age and longer standing. Others look upon the new-comer with suspicion, or even openly dispute her right to a place in the theological family. We certainly owe it to her and to ourselves to form a well-grounded and intelligent judgment on this question. I hope that what I shall say will in some degree shed light on the points at issue, and enable you to judge impartially and in accordance with the facts of the case.

### **The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline**

Every discussion of what is to be understood by Biblical Theology ought to proceed from a clear understanding of what Theology is in general. Etymology, in many cases a safer guide than *a priori* constructions, tells us that Theology is *knowledge concerning God*, and this primitive definition is fully supported by encyclopedic principles. Only when making Theology knowledge concerning God do we have the right to call it a separate science. Sciences are not formed at haphazard, but according to an objective principle of division. As in general science is bound by its object and must let itself be shaped by reality; so likewise the classification of sciences, the relation of the various members in the body of universal knowledge, has to follow the great lines by which God has mapped out the immense field of the universe. The title of a certain amount of knowledge to be called a separate science depends on its reference to such a separate and specific object as is marked off by these God-drawn lines of distinction. We speak of a science of Biology, because God has made the phenomena of life distinct from those of inorganic being. Now, from this point of view we must say that no science has a clearer title to separate existence than Theology. Between God as the Creator and all other things as created the distinction is absolute. There is not another such gulf within the universe. God, as distinct from the creature, is the only legitimate object of Theology.

It will be seen, however, on a moment's reflection, that Theology is not merely distinguished from the other sciences by its object, but that it also sustains an altogether unique relation to this object, for which no strict analogy can be found elsewhere. In all the other sciences man is the one who of himself takes the first step in approaching the objective world, in subjecting it to his scrutiny, in compelling it to submit to his experiments

—in a word, man is the one who proceeds actively to make nature reveal her facts and her laws. In Theology this relation between the subject and object is reversed. Here it is God who takes the first step to approach man for the purpose of disclosing His nature, nay, who creates man in order that He may have a finite mind able to receive the knowledge of His infinite perfections. In Theology the object, far from being passive, by the act of creation first posits the subject over against itself, and then as the living God proceeds to impart to this subject that to which of itself it would have no access. For “the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.” Strictly speaking, therefore, we should say that not God in and for Himself, but God in so far as He has revealed Himself, is the object of Theology.

Though applying to Theology in the abstract and under all circumstances, this unique character has been emphasized by the entrance of sin into the human race. In his sinful condition, while retaining some knowledge of God, man for all pure and adequate information in divine things is absolutely dependent on that new self-disclosure of God which we call supernatural revelation. By the new birth and the illumination of the mind darkened through sin, a new subject is created. By the objective self-manifestation of God as the Redeemer, a new order of things is called into being. And by the depositing of the truth concerning this new order of things in the Holy Scriptures, the human mind is enabled to obtain that new knowledge which is but the reflection in the regenerate consciousness of an objective world of divine acts and words.

This being so, it follows immediately that the beginning of our Theology consists in the appropriation of that supernatural process by which God has made Himself the object of our knowledge. We are not left to our own choice here, as to where we shall begin our theological study. The very nature of Theology requires us to begin with those branches which relate to the revelation-basis of our science. Our attitude from the outset must be a dependent and receptive one. To let the image of God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures mirror itself as fully and clearly as possible in his mind, is the first and most important duty of every theologian. And it is in accordance with this principle that, in the development of scientific theology through the ages, a group of studies have gradually been separated from the rest and begun to form a smaller organism among themselves, inasmuch as the receptive attitude of the theological consciousness toward the source of revelation was the common idea underlying and controlling them. This group is usually designated by the name of Exegetical Theology. Its formation was not a matter of mere accident, nor the result of definite agreement among theologians; the immanent law of the development of the science, as rooted in its origin, has brought it about in a natural manner.

In classifications of this kind general terms are apt to acquire more or less indefinite meanings. They tend to become formulas used for the purpose of indicating that certain studies belong together from a practical point of view or according to a methodological principle. In many cases it would be fanciful to seek any other than a practical justification for grouping certain branches together. So it is clear on the surface that much is subsumed under the department of Exegetical Theology, which bears only a very remote and indirect relation to its central idea. There are subservient and preparatory studies lying in the periphery and but loosely connected with the organic center. Nevertheless, if Exegetical Theology is to be more than a conglomerate of heterogeneous studies, having no other than a practical unity, we must expect that at its highest point of development it will appear to embody one of the necessary forms of the essential idea of all Theology, and will unfold itself as *knowledge concerning God* in the strict sense of the term. The science in which this actually happens will be the heart of the organism of Exegetical Theology.

Exegetical Theology deals with God under the aspect of Revealer of Himself and Author of the Scriptures. It is naturally divided into two parts, of which the one treats of the formation of the Scriptures, the other of the actual revelation of God lying back of this process. We further observe that the formation of the Scriptures serves no other purpose than to perpetuate and transmit the record of God's self-disclosure to the human race as a whole. Compared with revelation proper, the formation of the Scriptures appears as a means to an end. Bibliology with all its adjuncts, therefore, is not the center of Exegetical Theology, but is logically subordinated to the other division, which treats of revelation proper. Or, formulating it from the human point of view, all our investigations as to the origin of the Scriptures, their collection into a Canon, their original text, as well as the exegetical researches by which the contents of the Biblical writings are inductively ascertained, ultimately serve the one purpose of teaching us what God has revealed concerning Himself. None of these studies find their aim in themselves, but all have their value determined and their place assigned by the one central study to which they are leading up and in which they find their culminating point. This central study that gives most adequate and natural expression to the idea of Exegetical Theology is Biblical Theology.

In general, then, Biblical Theology is that part of Exegetical Theology which deals with the revelation of God. It makes use of all the results that have been obtained by all the preceding studies in this department. Still, we must endeavor to determine more precisely in what sense this general definition is to be understood. For it might be said of Systematic Theology, nay of the whole of Theology, with equal truth, that it deals with supernatural revelation. The specific character of Biblical Theology lies in this,

that it discusses both the form and contents of revelation from the point of view of the revealing activity of God Himself. In other words, it deals with revelation in the active sense, as an act of God, and tries to understand and trace and describe this act, so far as this is possible to man and does not elude our finite observation. In Biblical Theology both the form and contents of revelation are considered as parts and products of a divine work. In Systematic Theology these same contents of revelation appear, but not under the aspect of the stages of a divine work; rather as the material for a human work of classifying and systematizing according to logical principles. Biblical Theology applies no other method of grouping and arranging these contents than is given in the divine economy of revelation itself.

From this it follows that, in order to obtain a more definite conception of Biblical Theology, we must try to gather the general features of God's revealing work. Here, as in other cases, the organism of a science can be conceived and described only by anticipating its results. The following statements, accordingly, are not to be considered in the light of an *a priori* construction, but simply formulate what the study of Biblical Theology itself has taught us.

The first feature characteristic of supernatural revelation is *its historical progress*. God has not communicated to us the knowledge of the truth as it appears in the calm light of eternity to His own timeless vision. He has not given it in the form of abstract propositions logically correlated and systematized. The simple fact that it is the task of Systematic Theology to reproduce revealed truth in such form, shows that it does not possess this form from the beginning. The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages, proceeding in a sequence of revealing words and acts, appearing in a long perspective of time. The truth comes in the form of growing truth, not truth at rest. No doubt the explanation of this fact is partly to be sought in the finiteness of the human understanding. Even that part of the knowledge of God which has been revealed to us is so overwhelmingly great and so far transcends our human capacities, is such a flood of light, that it had, as it were, gradually to be let in upon us, ray after ray, and not the full radiancy at once. By imparting the elements of the knowledge of Himself in a divinely arranged sequence God has pointed out to us the way in which we might gradually grasp and truly know Him. This becomes still more evident, if we remember that this revelation is intended for all ages and nations and classes and conditions of men, and therefore must adapt itself to the most various characters and temperaments by which it is to be assimilated.

We feel, however, that this explanation, however plausible in itself, is but a partial one, and can never completely satisfy. The deeper ground for the historic character of revelation cannot lie in the limitations of the



human subject, but must be sought in the nature of revelation itself. Revelation is not an isolated act of God, existing without connection with all the other divine acts of supernatural character. It constitutes a part of that great process of the new creation through which the present universe as an organic whole shall be redeemed from the consequences of sin and restored to its ideal state, which it had originally in the intention of God. Now, this new creation, in the objective, universal sense, is not something completed by a single act all at once, but is a history with its own law of organic development. It could not be otherwise, inasmuch as at every point it proceeds on the basis of and in contact with the natural development of this world and of the human race, and, the latter being in the form of history, the former must necessarily assume that form likewise. It is simply owing to our habit of unduly separating revelation from this comprehensive background of the total redeeming work of God, that we fail to appreciate its historic, progressive nature. We conceive of it as a series of communications of abstract truth forming a body by itself, and are at a loss to see why this truth should be parcelled out to man little by little and not given in its completeness at once. As soon as we realize that revelation is at almost every point interwoven with and conditioned by the redeeming activity of God in its wider sense, and together with the latter connected with the natural development of the present world, its historic character becomes perfectly intelligible and ceases to cause surprise.

In this great redeeming process two stages are to be distinguished. First come those acts of God which have a universal and objective significance, being aimed at the production of an organic center for the new order of things. After this had been accomplished, there follows a second stage during which this objective redemption is subjectively applied to individuals. In both the stages the supernatural element is present, though in the former, owing to its objective character, it appears more distinctly than in the latter. The whole series of redeeming acts, culminating in the incarnation and atoning work of the Mediator and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, bears the signature of the miraculous on its very face. But the supernatural, though not objectively controllable, is none the less present during the later stage in each case where an individual soul is regenerated. Revelation as such, however, is not co-extensive with this whole process in both its stages. Its history is limited to the former half, that is, it accompanies in its progress the gradual unfolding of the central and objective salvation of God, and no sooner is the latter accomplished than revelation also has run its course and its voice ceases to speak. The reason for this is obvious. The revelation of God being not subjective and individual in its nature, but objective and addressed to the human race as a whole, it is but natural that this revelation should be embedded in the channels of the great objective history of redemption and extend no further than this. In point of fact,

we see that, when the *finished* salvation worked out among Israel is stripped of its particularistic form to extend to all nations, at the same moment the *completed* oracles of God are given to the human race as a whole to be henceforth subjectively studied and appropriated. It is as unreasonable to expect revelations after the close of the Apostolic age as it would be to think that the great saving facts of that period can be indefinitely increased and repeated.

Even this, however, is not sufficient to show the historic character of revelation in its full extent. Up to this point we have only seen how the disclosure of truth in general follows the course of the history of redemption. We now must add that in not a few cases revelation is *identified* with history. Besides making use of words, God has also employed acts to reveal great principles of truth. It is not so much the prophetic visions or miracles in the narrower sense that we think of in this connection. We refer more specially to those great, supernatural, history-making acts of which we have examples in the redemption of the covenant-people from Egypt, or in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In these cases the history itself forms a part of revelation. There is a self-disclosure of God in such acts. They would speak even if left to speak for themselves. Forming part of history, these revealing acts necessarily assume historical relations among themselves, and succeed one another according to a well-defined principle of historical sequence. Furthermore, we observe that this system of revelation-acts is not interpolated into the larger system of biblical history after a fanciful and mechanical fashion. The relation between the two systems is vital and organic. These miraculous interferences of God to which we ascribe a revealing character, furnish the great joints and ligaments by which the whole framework of sacred history is held together, and its entire structure determined. God's saving deeds mark the critical epochs of history, and as such, have continued to shape its course for centuries after their occurrence.

Of course we should never forget that, wherever revelation and the redemptive acts of God coincide, the latter frequently have an ulterior purpose extending beyond the sphere of revelation. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were acts not exclusively intended to reveal something to man, but primarily intended to serve some definite purpose in reference to God. In so far as they satisfied the divine justice it would be inaccurate to view them under the aspect of revelation primarily or exclusively. Nevertheless, the revealing element is essential even in their case, the two ends of satisfaction and of revelation being combined into one. And in the second place, we must remember that the revealing acts of God never appear separated from His verbal communications of truth. Word and act always accompany each other, and in their interdependence strikingly illustrate our former statement, to the effect that revelation is

organically connected with the introduction of a new order of things into this sinful world. Revelation is the light of this new world which God has called into being. The light needs the reality and the reality needs the light to produce the vision of the beautiful creation of His grace. To apply the Kantian phraseology to a higher subject, without God's acts the words would be empty, without His words the acts would be blind.

A second ground for the historic character of revelation may be found in its eminently practical aspect. The knowledge of God communicated by it is nowhere for a purely intellectual purpose. From beginning to end it is a knowledge intended to enter into the actual life of man, to be worked out by him in all its practical bearings. The Shemitic, and in particular the Biblical, conception of knowledge is distinguished from the Greek, more intellectualistic idea, by the prominence of this practical element. To know, in the Shemitic sense, is to have the consciousness of the reality and the properties of something interwoven with one's life through the closest intercourse and communion attainable. Now in this manner God has interwoven the supernaturally communicated knowledge of Himself with the historic life of the chosen race, so as to secure for it a practical form from the beginning. Revelation is connected throughout with the fate of Israel. Its disclosures arise from the necessities of that nation, and are adjusted to its capacities. It is such a living historical thing that it has shaped the very life of this nation into the midst of which it descended. The importance of this aspect of revelation has found its clearest expression in the idea of the covenant as the form of God's progressive self-communication to Israel. God has not revealed Himself in a school, but in the covenant; and the covenant as a communion of life is all-comprehensive, embracing all the conditions and interests of those contracting it. There is a knowledge and an imparting of knowledge here, but in a most practical way and not merely by theoretical instruction.

If in the foregoing we have correctly described the most general character of revelation, we may enlarge our definition of Biblical Theology by saying that it is that part of Exegetical Theology which deals with the revelation of God in its historic continuity. We must now advance beyond this and inquire more particularly in what specific type of history God has chosen to embody His revelation. The idea of historic development is not sufficiently definite of itself to explain the manner in which divine truth has been progressively revealed. It is not until we ascribe to this progress an organic character that the full significance of the historic principle springs into view.

The truth of revelation, if it is to retain its divine and absolute character at all, must be perfect from the beginning. Biblical Theology deals with it as a product of a supernatural divine activity, and is therefore bound by its own principle to maintain the perfection of revealed truth in all its

stages. When, nevertheless, Biblical Theology also undertakes to show how the truth has been gradually set forth in greater fullness and clearness, these two facts can be reconciled in no other way than by assuming that the advance in revelation resembles the organic process, through which out of the perfect germ the perfect plant and flower and fruit are successively produced.

Although the knowledge of God has received material increase through the ages, this increase nowhere shows the features of external accretion, but throughout appears as an internal expansion, an organic unfolding from within. The elements of truth, far from being mechanically added one to the other in lifeless succession, are seen to grow out of each other, each richer and fuller disclosure of the knowledge of God having been prepared for by what preceded, and being in its turn preparatory for what follows. That this is actually so, follows from the soteriological purpose which revelation in the first instance is intended to serve. At all times, from the very first to the last, revealed truth has been kept in close contact with the wants and emergencies of the living generation. And these human needs, notwithstanding all variations of outward circumstance, being essentially the same in all periods, it follows that the heart of divine truth, that by which men live, must have been present from the outset, and that each subsequent increase consisted in the unfolding of what was germinally contained in the beginning of revelation. The Gospel of Paradise is such a germ in which the Gospel of Paul is potentially present; and the Gospel of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, are all expansions of this original message of salvation, each pointing forward to the next stage of growth, and bringing the Gospel idea one step nearer to its full realization. In this Gospel of Paradise we already discern the essential features of a covenant-relation, though the formal notion of a covenant does not attach to it. And in the covenant-promises given to Abraham these very features reappear, assume greater distinctness, and are seen to grow together, to crystallize as it were, into the formal covenant. From this time onward the expansive character of the covenant-idea shows itself. The covenant of Abraham contains the promise of the Sinaitic covenant; the latter again, from its very nature, gives rise to prophecy; and prophecy guards the covenant of Sinai from assuming a fixed, unalterable form, the prophetic word being a creative word under the influence of which the spiritual, universal germs of the covenant are quickened and a new, higher order of things is organically developed from the Mosaic theocracy, that new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke, and which our Saviour brought to light by the shedding of His blood. So dispensation grows out of dispensation, and the newest is but the fully expanded flower of the oldest.

The same principle may also be established more objectively, if we consider the specific manner in which God realizes the renewal of this sinful

kosmos in accordance with His original purpose. The renewal is not brought about by mechanically changing one part after the other. God's method is much rather that of creating within the organism of the present world the center of the world of redemption, and then organically building up the new order of things around this center. Hence from the beginning all redeeming acts of God aim at the creation and introduction of this new organic principle, which is none other than Christ. All Old Testament redemption is but the saving activity of God working toward the realization of this goal, the great supernatural prelude to the Incarnation and the Atonement. And Christ having appeared as the head of the new humanity and having accomplished His atoning work, the further renewal of the kosmos is effected through an organic extension of His power in ever widening circles. In this sense the Apostle speaks of the fashioning anew of the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of the glory of Christ, saying that this will happen "*according to the working whereby He is able to subject even all things unto Himself*" (Phil. 3:21). If, then, this supernatural process of transformation proceeds on organic principles, and if, as we have shown, revelation is but the light accompanying it in its course, the reflection of its divine realities in the sphere of knowledge, we cannot escape from the conclusion that revelation itself must exhibit a similar organic progress. In point of fact, we find that the actual working of Old Testament redemption toward the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the advance of revealed knowledge concerning Christ, keep equal pace everywhere. The various stages in the gradual concentration of Messianic prophecy, as when the human nature of our Saviour is successively designated as the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Judah, the seed of David, His figure assuming more distinct features at each narrowing of the circle—what are they but disclosures of the divine counsel corresponding in each case to new realities and new conditions created by His redeeming power? And as in the history of redemption there are critical stages in which the great acts of God as it were accumulate, so we find that at such junctures the process of revelation is correspondingly accelerated, and that a few years show, perhaps, more rapid growth and greater expansion than centuries that lie between. For, although the development of the root may be slow and the stem and leaves may grow almost imperceptibly, there comes a time when the bud emerges in a day and the flower expands in an hour to our wondering sight.<sup>1</sup> Such epochs of quickened revelation were the times of Abraham, of Moses, of David, and especially the days of the Son of Man.

This progress, moreover, increases in rapidity the nearer revelation approaches to its final goal. What rich developments, what wealth of blossom-

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1. Cf. T. D. Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, p. 44.

ing and fruitage are compressed within the narrow limits of that period—no more than one lifetime—that is covered by the New Testament! In this, indeed, we have the most striking proof of the organic nature of the progress of revelation. Every organic development serves to embody an idea; and as soon as this idea has found full and adequate expression, the organism receives the stamp of perfection and develops no further. Because the New Testament times brought the final realization of the divine counsel of redemption as to its objective and central facts, therefore New Testament revelation brought the full-grown Word of God, in which the new-born world, which is complete in Christ, mirrors itself. In this final stage of revelation the deepest depths of eternity are opened up to the eye of Apostle and Seer. Hence, the frequent recurrence of the expression, “before the foundation of the world.” We feel at every point that the last veil is drawn aside and that we stand face to face with the disclosure of the great mystery which was hidden in the divine purpose through the ages. All salvation, all truth in regard to man, has its eternal foundation in the triune God Himself. It is this triune God who here reveals Himself as the everlasting reality, from whom all truth proceeds, whom all truth reflects, be it the little streamlet of Paradise or the broad river of the New Testament losing itself again in the ocean of eternity. After this nothing higher can come. All the separate lines along which through the ages revelation was carried, have converged and met at a single point. The seed of the woman and the Angel of Jehovah are become one in the Incarnate Word. And as Christ is glorified once for all, so from the crowning glory and perfection of His revelation in the New Testament nothing can be taken away; nor can anything be added thereunto.

There is one more feature of the organic character of revelation which I must briefly allude to. Historic progress is not the only means used by God to disclose the full contents of His eternal Word. Side by side with it we witness a striking multiformity of teaching employed for the same purpose. All along the historic stem of revelation, branches are seen to shoot forth, frequently more than one at a time, each of which helps to realize the complete idea of the truth for its own part and after its own peculiar manner. The legal, the prophetic, the poetic elements in the Old Testament are clearly-distinct types of revelation, and in the New Testament we have something corresponding to these in the Gospels, the Epistles, the Apocalypse. Further, within the limits of these great divisions there are numerous minor variations, closely associated with the peculiarities of individual character. Isaiah and Jeremiah are distinct, and so are John and Paul. And this differentiation rather increases than decreases with the progress of sacred history. It is greater in the New Testament than in the Old. The laying of the historic basis for Israel’s covenant-life has been recorded by one author, Moses; the historic basis of the New Testa-

ment dispensation we know from the fourfold version of the Gospels. The remainder of the New Testament writings are in the form of letters, in which naturally the personal element predominates. The more fully the light shone upon the realization of the whole counsel of God and disclosed its wide extent, the more necessary it became to expound it in all its bearings, to view it at different angles, thus to bring out what Paul calls the *much-variegated*, the manifold, wisdom of God. For, God having chosen to reveal the truth through human instruments, it follows that these instruments must be both numerous and of varied adaptation to the common end. Individual coloring, therefore, and a peculiar manner of representation are not only not detrimental to a full statement of the truth, but directly subservient to it. God's method of revelation includes the very shaping and chiselling of individualities for His own objective ends. To put it concretely: we must not conceive of it as if God found Paul "ready-made," as it were, and in using Paul as an organ of revelation, had to put up with the fact that the dialectic mind of Paul reflected the truth in a dialectic, dogmatic form to the detriment of the truth. The facts are these: the truth having inherently, besides other aspects, a dialectic and dogmatic side, and God intending to give this side full expression, chose Paul from the womb, molded his character, and gave him such a training that the truth revealed through him necessarily bore the dogmatic and dialectic impress of His mind. The divine objectivity and the human individuality here do not collide, nor exclude each other, because the man Paul, with his whole character, his gifts, and his training, is subsumed under the divine plan. The human is but the glass through which the divine light is reflected, and all the sides and angles into which the glass has been cut serve no other purpose than to distribute to us the truth in all the riches of its prismatic colors.

In some cases growth in the organism of revelation is closely dependent on this variety in the type of teaching. There are instances in which two or more forms of the one truth have been brought to light simultaneously, each of which exercised a deepening and enlarging influence upon the others. The Gospel of John contains revelations contemporaneous with those of the Synoptists, so that chronologically we can distribute its material over the pages of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Nevertheless, taken as a whole and in its unity, the Gospel of John represents a fuller and wider self-revelation of Christ than the Synoptists; and not only so, but it also represents a type of revelation which presupposes the facts and teachings of the other Gospels, and is, in point of order, subsequent to them. The same thing might be said of Isaiah in its relation to Micah. So the variety itself contributes to the progress of revelation. Even in these cases of contemporaneous development along distinct lines and in independent directions, there is a mysterious force at work, which makes "the several parts

grow out of and into each other with mutual support, so that the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.”

We may now perhaps attempt to frame a complete definition of our science. The preceding remarks have shown that the divine work of revelation did not proceed contrary to all law, but after a well-defined organic principle. Wherever there is a group of facts sufficiently distinct from their environment, and determined by some law of orderly sequence, we are justified in making these facts the object of scientific discussion. Far from there being in the conception of Biblical Theology anything at variance with the idea of Theology as based on the revealed knowledge of God, we have found that the latter even directly postulates the former. Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than *the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity*.

It must be admitted, however, that not everything passing under the name of Biblical Theology satisfies the requirements of this definition. From the end of the preceding century, when our science first appears as distinct from Dogmatic Theology, until now, she has stood under the spell of un-Biblical principles. Her very birth took place under an evil star. It was the spirit of Rationalism which first led to distinguishing in the contents of the Scriptures between what was purely human, individual, local, temporal—in a word, conditioned by the subjectivity of the writers—and what was eternally valid, divine truth. The latter, of course, was identified with the teachings of the shallow Rationalism of that period. Thus, Biblical Theology, which can only rest on the basis of revelation, began with a denial of this basis; and a science, whose task it is to set forth the historic principles of revelation, was trained up in a school notorious for its lack of historic sense. For to this type of Rationalism history, as such, is the realm of the contingent, the relative, the arbitrary, whilst only the deliverances of pure reason possess the predicate of absoluteness and universal validity. In this Biblical Theology of Rationalism, therefore, the historical principle merely served to eliminate or neutralize the revelation-principle. And since that time all the philosophical tendencies that have influenced Theology in general have also left their impress upon Biblical Theology in particular. It is not necessary for our present purpose to trace the various lines and currents of this complicated history; the less so since there can be no doubt but that they are rapidly merging into the great stream of Evolutionistic Philosophy, which, whatever truth there may be in its application to certain groups of phenomena, yet, as a general theory of the universe, is the most direct antithesis to the fundamental principles of revelation and Christianity.

That the influence of this philosophy, as it expresses and in turn molds the spirit of the age, is perceptible in the field of Theology everywhere, no



careful observer of recent events will deny. But Biblical Theology is, perhaps, more than any other branch of theological study affected by it, because its principle of historic progress in revelation seems to present certain analogies with the evolutionary scheme, and to offer exceptional opportunities for applying the latter, without departing too far from the real contents of Scripture. This analogy, of course, is merely formal, and from a material point of view there is a world-wide difference between that philosophy of history which the Bible itself outlines, and which alone Biblical Theology, if it wishes to remain Biblical, has a right to adopt, and, on the other hand, the so-called facts of the Bible pressed into the evolutionary formulas. It is especially in two respects that the principles of this philosophy have worked a radical departure from the right treatment of our science as it is prescribed by both the supernatural character of Christianity and the nature of Theology. In the first place, evolution is bent upon showing that the process of development is everywhere from the lower and imperfect to the higher and relatively more perfect forms, from impure beginnings through a gradual purification to some ideal end. So in regard to the knowledge of God, whose growth we observe in the Biblical writings, evolution cannot rest until it shall have traced its gradual advance from sensual, physical conceptions to ethical and spiritual ideas, from Animism and Polytheism to Monolatry and Monotheism. But this of necessity rules out the revelation-factor from Biblical Theology. Revelation as an act of God, theistically conceived of, can in no wise be associated with anything imperfect or impure or below the standard of absolute truth. However much Christian people may blind themselves to the fact, the outcome will show, as it does already show, that the principles of supernatural redemption and natural evolution are mutually exclusive. Hence, even now, those who accept the evolutionary construction of Biblical history, either openly and without reserve renounce the idea of supernatural revelation, or strip it of its objectivity so as to make it less antagonistic to that of natural development. In the same degree, however, that the latter is done, revelation loses its distinctively theistic character and begins to assume more and more the features of a Pantheistic process, that is, it ceases to be revelation in the commonly accepted sense of the term.

In the second place, the philosophy of evolution has corrupted Theology by introducing its leaven of metaphysical Agnosticism. Inasmuch as only the phenomenal world can become an object of knowledge to us and not the mysterious reality hidden behind the phenomena, and inasmuch as Theology in the old, traditional sense pretended to deal with such metaphysical realities as God and heaven and immortality, it follows that Theology must either be entirely abolished, or must submit to such a reconstruction as will enable her to retain a place among the phenomenalistic sciences. The former would be the more consistent and scientific, but

the latter is usually preferred; because it is difficult at one stroke to set aside a thing so firmly rooted in the past. Theology, therefore, is now defined as *the science of religion*, and that, too, in the sense chiefly of a phenomenology of religion, in which by far the greater part of the investigation is devoted to the superficial external side of religion and the heart of the matter receives scant treatment. Applied to Biblical Theology, this principle involves that no longer the historic progress of the supernatural revelation of God, but *the development of the religion* recorded in the Biblical writings, shall become the object of our science. Theology having become the science of religion, Biblical Theology must needs become the history of one, be it the greatest, of all religions, the history of the religion of Israel and of primitive Christianity.

How far this evil has penetrated may be inferred from the fact that there is scarcely a book on Biblical Theology in existence in which this conception of the object of our science is not met with, and in which it does not very largely determine the point of view. It has even vitiated so excellent a work in many respects as Oehler's Old Testament Theology. Of course, there are many degrees in the thoroughness with which this subjectivizing principle is carried through and applied. Between those who are just beginning to descend the ladder and those who have reached its lowest step, there is a very appreciable difference.

First, there are those who think that, though God has supernaturally revealed Himself in words and acts, nevertheless this revelation pure and simple, cannot be for us an object of scientific discussion, except in so far as it has blended with and produced its effect upon the religious consciousness of the people to whom it was given; and that, consequently, we must posit as the object of Biblical Theology the religion of the Bible, and can hope at the utmost to reason back from this religion as the result, to revelation as the cause that has produced it. To this we would answer, that there is no reason to make Biblical Theology, so conceived, a separate science. The investigation of the religion of Israel as a subjective phenomenon, together with the objective factors called in to explain it, belongs nowhere else than in the department of Biblical History. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible itself has recorded for us the interaction of the objective and the subjective factors in sacred history in such a manner that their joint product is nowhere made the central thought of its teaching, but much rather we are invited everywhere to fix our gaze on the objective self-revelation of God, and only in the second place to observe the subjective reflex of this divine activity in the religious consciousness of the people.

Others are more reserved in their recognition of the supernatural. They would confine the revelation of God to acts, and derive all the doctrinal contents of the Bible from the source of human reflection upon these di-

vine acts. In this manner a compromise is obtained, whereby both the objectivity of revelation and the subjective development of Biblical teaching can be affirmed. This view is unsatisfactory, because it loses sight of the analogy between divine revelation and the ordinary way in which man communicates his thoughts. To man, made in the image of God, speech is the highest instrument of revealing Himself, and it would be strange if God in His self-disclosure entirely dispensed with the use of this instrument. Nor does this view leave any place for prophecy. The prophetic word is frequently a divine word preceding the divine act. Although, as we have seen, the progress of revelation is clearly conditioned by the actual realization of God's plan of redemption, yet this by no means implies that the saving deeds of God always necessarily go before, and the revelations which cast light on them always follow. In many cases the revealing word comes as an anticipation of the approaching events, as a flash of lightning preceding the thunder of God's judgments. As Amos strikingly expresses it: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (3:7).

The supernatural factor, however, is reduced to still smaller proportions and entirely deprived of its objectivity by a third group of writers on Biblical Theology. According to these, supernatural revelation does not involve the communication of divine thoughts to man in any direct manner either by words or by actions. Revelation consists in this, that the divine Spirit, by an unconscious process, stirs the depths of man's heart so as to cause the springing up therein afterward of certain religious thoughts and feelings, which are as truly human as they are a revelation of God, and are, therefore, only relatively true. It is owing to the influence of the Ritschlian or Neo-Kantian school of Theology that this view has gained new prevalence of late. The people of Israel are held to have possessed a creative religious genius, just as the Greek nation was endowed with a creative genius in the sphere of art. And, although the productions of this genius are ascribed to the impulse of the divine Spirit, yet this Spirit and His working are represented in such a manner that their distinction from the natural processes of the human mind becomes a mere assumption, exercising no influence whatever on the interpretation of the phenomenal side of Israel's religion. Writers of this class deal as freely with the facts and teachings of the Bible as the most extreme anti-supernaturalists. But with their evolutionistic treatment of the phenomena they combine the hypothesis of this mystical influence of the Spirit, which they are pleased to call revelation. It is needless to say that revelation of this kind must remain forever inaccessible to objective proof or verification. Whatever can pretend to be scientific in this theory lacks all rapport with the idea of the Supernatural, and whatever there lingers in it of diluted Supernaturalism lacks all scientific character.

I have endeavored to sketch with a few strokes those principles and tendencies by which the study of Biblical Theology is almost exclusively controlled at the present time, because they seem to me to indicate the points which ought to receive special emphasis in the construction of our science on a truly Scriptural and theological basis. The first of these is *the objective character of revelation*. Biblical Theology must insist upon claiming for its object not the thoughts and reflections and speculations of man, but the oracles of God. Whosoever weakens or subjectivizes this fundamental idea of revelation, strikes a blow at the very heart of Theology and Supernatural Christianity, nay, of Theism itself. Every type of Biblical Theology bent upon ignoring or minimizing this supreme, central idea, is a most dangerous product. It is an indisputable fact that all modern views of revelation which are deficient in recognizing its objective character, fit far better into a pantheistic than into a theistic theory of the universe. If God be the unconscious background of the world, it is altogether natural that His truth and light should in a mysterious manner loom up from the unexplorable regions that underlie human consciousness, that in His very act of revealing Himself He should be conditioned and entangled and obstructed by man. If, on the other hand, God be conscious and personal, the inference is that in His self-disclosure He will assert and maintain His personality, so as to place His divine thoughts before us with the stamp of divinity upon them, in a truly objective manner. By making revelation, both as to its form and contents, a special object of study, Biblical Theology may be expected to contribute something toward upholding this important conception in its true objectivity, toward more sharply defining it and guarding it from confusion with all heterogeneous ideas.

The second point to be emphasized in our treatment of Biblical Theology is that the historical character of the truth is not in any way antithetical to, but throughout subordinated to, its revealed character. Scriptural truth is not absolute, notwithstanding its historic setting; but the historic setting has been employed by God for the very purpose of revealing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is not the duty of Biblical Theology to seek first the historic features of the Scriptural ideas, and to think that the absolute character of the truth as revealed of God is something secondary to be added thereunto. The reality of revelation should be the supreme factor by which the historic factor is kept under control. With the greatest variety of historical aspects, there can, nevertheless, be no inconsistencies or contradictions in the Word of God. The student of Biblical Theology is not to hunt for little systems in the Bible that shall be mutually exclusive, or to boast of his skill in detecting such as a mark of high scholarship. What has been remarked above, in regard to the place of individuality in the plan of revelation, may be applied with equal justice to the historic phases through which the progressive delivery of the

truth has passed. God has done for the historic unfolding of His word as a whole what He has done for the reproduction of its specific types and aspects through the forming and training of individuals. As He knew Jeremiah and Paul from the womb, so He knew Israel and prepared Israel for its task. The history of this nation is not a common history; it is *sacred* history in the highest sense of having been specially designed by God to become the human receptacle for the truth from above.

In the third place, Biblical Theology should plant itself squarely upon the truthfulness of the Scriptures as a whole. Revelation proper announces and records the saving deeds of God, but a mere announcement and record is not sufficient to furnish a complete history of redemption, to produce a living image of the new order of things as it is gradually called into existence. No true history can be made by a mere chronicling of events. Only by placing the bare record of the facts in the light of the principles which shape them, and the inner nexus which holds them together, is the work of the chronicler transformed into history. For this reason God has not given us His own interpretation of the great realities of redemption in the form of a chronicle, but in the form of the historical organism of the inspired Scriptures. The direct revelations of God form by far the smaller part of the contents of the Bible. These are but the scattered diamonds woven into the garment of the truth. This garment itself is identical with the Scriptural contents as a whole. And as a whole it has been prepared by the hand of God. The Bible contains, besides the simple record of direct revelations, the further interpretation of these immediate disclosures of God by inspired prophets and apostles. Above all, it contains, if I may so call it, a divine philosophy of the history of redemption and of revelation in general outlines. And whosoever is convinced in his heart of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and reads his Bible as the Word of God, cannot, as a student of Biblical Theology, allow himself to reject this divine philosophy and substitute for it another of his own making. Our Theology will be Biblical in the full sense, only when it not merely derives its material from the Bible, but also accepts at the hands of the Bible the order in which this material is to be grouped and located. I for one am not ashamed to say that the teachings of Paul concerning the historic organism of the Old Testament economy possess for me greater authority than the reconstructions of the same by modern scholars, however great their learning and critical acumen.

Finally, in designating our science as *Biblical Theology*, we should not fail to enter a protest against the wrong inferences that may be easily drawn from the use of this name. The name retains somewhat of the flavor of the Rationalism which first adopted it. It almost unavoidably creates an impression as if in the Bible we had the beginning of the process that later gave us the works of Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and

Calvin. Hence some do not hesitate to define Biblical Theology as the History of Dogmatics for Biblical times. To us this sounds as strange and illogical as if one should compare the stars of the firmament and their history with the work and history of astronomy. As the heavens contain the material for astronomy and the crust of the earth for geology, so the mighty creation of the Word of God furnishes the material for Theology in this scientific sense, but *is* no Theology. It is something infinitely higher than Theology, a world of spiritual realities, into which all true theologians are led by the Spirit of the living God. Only if we take the term Theology in its more primitive and simple meaning, as the practical, historic knowledge of God imparted by revelation and deposited in the Bible, can we justify the use of the now commonly accepted name of our science. As for the scientific elaboration of this God-given material, this must be held to lie beyond the Biblical period. It could only spring up after revelation and the formation of the Scriptures had been completed. The utmost that can be conceded would be that in the Apostolic teaching of the New Testament the first signs of the beginning of this process are discernible. But even that which the Apostles teach is in no sense primarily to be viewed under the aspect of Theology. It is the inspired Word of God before all other things. No theologian would dare say of his work what Paul said to the Galatians: "But though we or an angel from heaven preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (1:8).<sup>2</sup>

In the foregoing I have endeavored to describe to you the nature and functions of Biblical Theology as a member in the organism of our scientific knowledge of God. I have not forgotten, however, that you have called me to teach this science for the eminently practical purpose of training young men for the ministry of the Gospel. Consequently, I shall not have acquitted myself of my task on this occasion unless you will permit me to point out briefly what are the advantages to be expected from the pursuit of this study in a more practical way.

First of all, Biblical Theology exhibits to the student of the Word the organic structure of the truth therein contained, and its organic growth as the result of revelation. It shows to him that in the Bible there is an organization finer, more complicated, more exquisite than even the texture of muscles and nerves and brain in the human body; that its various parts are interwoven and correlated in the most subtle manner, each sensitive to the impressions received from all the others, perfect in itself, and yet dependent upon the rest, while in them and through them all throbs as a

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2. In view of the Rationalistic associations connected with the name Biblical Theology, and in view of its being actually used for the propagation of erroneous views, the name History of Revelation would perhaps be better adapted to express the true nature of our science. This name has been lately adopted by Nösgen in his *Geschichte der Neutestamentlichen Offenbarung*.

unifying principle the Spirit of God's living truth. If anything, then, this is adapted to convince the student that what the Bible places before him is not the chance product of the several human minds that have been engaged in its composition, but the workmanship of none other than God Himself. The organic structure of the truth and the organic development of revelation as portrayed in the Bible bear exactly the same relation to Supernaturalism that the argument from design in nature bears to Theism. Both arguments proceed on precisely analogous lines. If the history of revelation actually is the organic history, full of evidences of design, which the Bible makes it out to be, then it must have been shaped in an altogether unique fashion by the revealing activity of God.

In the second place, Biblical Theology is suited to furnish a most effective antidote to the destructive critical views now prevailing. These modern theories, however much may be asserted to the contrary, *disorganize* the Scriptures. Their chief danger lies, not in affirmations concerning matters of minor importance, concerning errors in historical details, but in the most radical claims upsetting the inner organization of the whole body of truth. We have seen that the course of revelation is most closely identified with the history described in the Bible. Of this history of the Bible, this framework on which the whole structure of revelation rests, the newest criticism asserts that it is falsified and unhistorical for the greater part. All the historical writings of the Old Testament in their present state are tendency-writings. Even where they embody older and more reliable documents, the Deuteronomic and Levitical paste, applied to them in and after the exile, has obliterated the historic reality. Now, if it were known among believing Christians to what an extent these theories disorganize the Bible, their chief spell would be broken; and many would repudiate with horror what they now tolerate or view with indifference. There is no other way of showing this than by placing over against the critical theories the organic history of revelation, as the Bible itself constructs it. As soon as this is done, everybody will be able to see at a glance that the two are mutually subversive. This very thing Biblical Theology endeavors to do. It thus meets the critical assaults, not in a negative way by defending point after point of the citadel, whereby no total effect is produced and the critics are always permitted to reply that they attack merely the outworks, not the central position of the faith; but in the most positive manner, by setting forth what the principle of revelation involves according to the Bible, and how one part of it stands or falls together with all the others. The student of Biblical Theology has the satisfaction of knowing that his treatment of Biblical matters is not prescribed for him exclusively by the tactics of his enemies, and that, while most effectually defending the truth, he at the same time is building the temple of divine knowledge on the positive foundation of the faith.

In the third place, I should mention as a desirable fruit of the study of Biblical Theology, the new life and freshness which it gives to the old truth, showing it in all its historic vividness and reality with the dew of the morning of revelation upon its opening leaves. It is certainly not without significance that God has embodied the contents of revelation, not in a dogmatic system, but in a book of history, the parallel to which in dramatic interest and simple eloquence is nowhere to be found. It is this that makes the Scriptures speak and appeal to and touch the hearts and lead the minds of men captive to the truth everywhere. No one will be able to handle the Word of God more effectually than he to whom the treasure-chambers of its historic meaning have been opened up. It is this that brings the divine truth so near to us, makes it as it were bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, that humanizes it in the same sense that the highest revelation in Christ was rendered most human by the incarnation. To this historical character of revelation we owe the fullness and variety which enable the Scriptures to mete out new treasures to all ages without becoming exhausted or even fully explored. A Biblical Theology imbued with the devout spirit of humble faith in the revealed Word of God, will enrich the student with all this wealth of living truth, making him in the highest sense a householder, bringing forth out of his treasures things new and old.

Fourthly, Biblical Theology is of the greatest importance and value for the study of Systematic Theology. It were useless to deny that it has been often cultivated in a spirit more or less hostile to the work in which Systematic Theology is engaged. The very name *Biblical* Theology is frequently vaunted so as to imply a protest against the alleged un-Biblical character of Dogmatics. I desire to state most emphatically here, that there is nothing in the nature and aims of Biblical Theology to justify such an implication. For anything pretending to supplant Dogmatics there is no place in the circle of Christian Theology. All attempts to show that the doctrines developed and formulated by the Church have no real foundation in the Bible, stand themselves without the pale of Theology, inasmuch as they imply that Christianity is a purely natural phenomenon, and that the Church has now for nineteen centuries been chasing her own shadow. Dogmatic Theology is, when rightly cultivated, as truly a Biblical and as truly an inductive science as its younger sister. And the latter needs a constructive principle for arranging her facts as well as the former. The only difference is, that in the one case this constructive principle is systematic and logical, whereas in the other case it is purely historical. In other words, Systematic Theology endeavors to construct a circle, Biblical Theology seeks to reproduce a line. I do not mean by the use of this figure, that within Biblical Theology there is no grouping of facts at all. The line of which I speak does not represent a monotonous recital of revelation, and does not resemble a string, even though it be conceived of as a string



of pearls. The line of revelation is like the stem of those trees that grow in rings. Each successive ring has grown out of the preceding one. But out of the sap and vigor that is in this stem there springs a crown with branches and leaves and flowers and fruit. Such is the true relation between Biblical and Systematic Theology. Dogmatics is the crown which grows out of all the work that Biblical Theology can accomplish. And taught in this spirit of Christian willingness to serve, our science cannot fail to benefit Systematic Theology in more than one respect. It will proclaim the fact, too often forgotten and denied in our days, that true religion cannot dispense with a solid basis of objective knowledge of the truth. There is no better means of silencing the supercilious cant that right believing is of small importance in the matter of religion, than by showing what infinite care our Father in heaven has taken to reveal unto us, in the utmost perfection, the *knowledge* of what He is and does for our salvation. Biblical Theology will also demonstrate that the fundamental doctrines of our faith do not rest, as many would fain believe, on an arbitrary exposition of some isolated proof-texts. It will not so much prove these doctrines, as it will do what is far better than proof—make them grow out organically before our eyes from the stem of revelation. Finally, it will contribute to keep Systematic Theology in living contact with that soil of divine realities from which it must draw all its strength and power to develop beyond what it has already attained.

Let us not forget, however, that as of all theology, so of Biblical Theology, the highest aim cannot lie in man, or in anything that serves the creature. Its most excellent practical use is surely this, that it grants us a new vision of the glory of Him who has made all things to the praise of His own wonderful name. As the Uncreated, the Unchangeable, Eternal God, He lives above the sphere of history. He is the Being and never the Becoming One. And, no doubt, when once this veil of time shall be drawn aside, when we shall see face to face, then also the necessity for viewing His knowledge in the glass of history will cease. But since on our behalf and for our salvation He has condescended to work and speak in the form of time, and thus to make His works and His speech partake of that peculiar glory that attaches to all organic growth, let us also seek to know Him as the One *that is, that was, and that is to come*, in order that no note may be lacking in that psalm of praise to be sung by the Church into which all our Theology must issue.