

# Can the Bible be Theology?

## – A dialogue with Geerhardus Vos

See back.

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### Introduction

Some religious philosopher of science<sup>1</sup> once remarked that Darwin made atheism intellectually respectful. What Darwin did for atheism, Geerhardus Vos did for a Calvinistic flavor of Biblical Theology, at least for our Institution at Westminster Theological Seminary. No other individual has become such a figurehead for representing the shape and direction of its theological studies. Vos, remarkably, never taught at the institution. Neither was his chair at Princeton ever replicated for the sake of a separate program of “Biblical Theology”. But whatever such symbols the institution may lack of his official presence is made up by the integration of his thought in the coursework. The two pillars of his thought being Paul’s two-age construction of eschatology and his view of redemptive history as revelatory process, provide not only the supporting structures for theological studies, but reach out as a magnetic field to pull together all theological studies around what God has done and revealed in history for our salvation. Hermeneutically speaking, Vos is the eyes of the institution of which claims the Bible as its lens.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Vos remains admired and respected by its faculty and students as their theological grandfather.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkin, says Google. "Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." (from *The Blind Watchmaker*).

<sup>2</sup> That would imply, not surprisingly, that Van Til is the mind.

<sup>3</sup> That metaphor suggests, of course, the position of *father* figures belongs to the likes of Machen, Murray, and Van Til.

– probably great-grandfather by now!

The world of text communication theory, however, has changed dramatically since Vos.<sup>4</sup> And for those of us who receive him through the synthesizing mediation of such a great cloud of witnesses,<sup>5</sup> we may be hard pressed to find the seams which reveal the paradigm shifts in thought that have occurred. Part of this reason, I believe, is due to the fact that Vos's dominant metaphor of "progressive organic unity" for the discipline of Biblical Theology encompasses, balances, and ties together so many central theological convictions as well as accounts for the diversity of revelation phenomena we find in the Bible. His method and model represents not just a conservative polemic against modern criticism and modern radicalism but a positive and constructive science dedicated to the glory of God. Any science that focuses attention upon historical actuality of God's redemptive activities culminating in Jesus Christ, any science that seeks to respect the primacy that God's revelation should have over all forms of human subjectivism, any science founded on the biblical philosophy that God's objective revelation and redemption is not merely to meet the needs of man, but for His own glory in bringing a new creation to order, is bound to strike an indelible chord in the hearts of Westminster Confession of Faith Calvinists. Rightfully so.

But in respect to Vos, before we fully absorb him into our contemporary circle of thought, more can be said to do justice to him in his own historical setting and the manner in which his original

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<sup>4</sup> Take for instance the amount of treatment given to linguistic (synchronic) methods vs. historical-criticism in Wilhelm Egger's *How to Read the New Testament: An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical-Critical Methodology*, 1996: Close to 200 pages given to the former, and only 50 given to the latter.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Richard Gaffin being for Vos as Aaron was for Moses, not only in terms of publication and proliferation of his material, but in seminary education; Jim Dennison as chief editor for *Kerux Journal of Biblical Theology and Academic Dean of Northwest Theological Seminary*; his late brother Rev. Charles Dennison, in his labors as church historian of the OPC and pastor. Also notable is their brother Prof. Bill Dennison at Covenant College, Dr. Edmond Clowney, Dr. Meredith Kline, Dr. Graeme Goldsworthy. Online sources dedicated to Vos and his thought include [BiblicalTheology.Org](http://BiblicalTheology.Org), the BT-DISC Yahoo-group, and my own [Two-Age.org](http://Two-Age.org) the content of which is mostly indebted to my friend James Doerfel.

thought differs from our own. In that way, we can appreciate the progress of thought since then, including its epochal advances in recognizing history writing as a communicative textual act. My study has a particular interest in the relationship between Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology, in light of the paradigmatic shifts in communication theory since Vos: from viewing the Bible as recorded history to one of narrated history.<sup>6</sup> We will not attempt, here, to prove the case for a literarily governed world of the Bible. For that I will refer you to chapters 1 & 3 (“Introduction” and “Text or Event”, respectfully) in John Sailhamer’s *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*.<sup>7</sup> Wearing Sailhamer’s hat,<sup>8</sup> I will approach Vos as he represents himself in his two primary sources for defining the notion of Biblical Theology,<sup>9</sup> and there I will ask him the question, “Why can’t the Bible be Theology?” For starters, we will inquire of Vos concerning the relationship between the Bible and redemptive revelation: Does the Bible function as redemptive revelation for us today? Then we will evaluate Vos’s hesitation to view the Bible as theology in light of a number of his features in Biblical Theology that seem to push in that direction. Finally, we will return with Vos to the present time and offer a few suggestions on how a redefinition of ‘Biblical Theology’ might address some of the concerns Vos hoped to

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<sup>6</sup> Please forgive my neglect to incorporate Dr. Richard Gaffin Jr.’s article “*Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology*” *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 Spr 1976, p 281-299. I am also aware that a fellow Westminster student Tim Black has also critically explored this area with respect to Vos. This no doubt seems like a huge oversight. Rather it is a huge *undersight*. My hope was to read these articles after I was confident enough I understood Vos on his own terms. Unfortunately, the more familiar I became with Vos, the more unfamiliar he became to me. So I must leave them due to time factors, not to mention the fear that having read the articles, I would no longer have a paper to write!

<sup>7</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction To Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that I adopt everything Sailhamer teaches (e.g. denial of *sensus plenior*). But it is obvious to me that Sailhamer’s distinctions explain the current trend of biblical studies, more so than Vos’s methodology (at least for a so-called ‘first-reading’ of the text).

<sup>9</sup> Here, I refer to his Princeton Inaugural Address: “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (ed. Jr. Richard B. Gaffin; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1980), 3-24. and the Introduction of his *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 3-18.

address by his science, including implications for relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology.

### ***Dialoguing with Vos over the nature of the Bible***

**Q.** *Is the Bible redemptive revelation?*

Approaching Vos with this question yields no clear and direct answer in his introduction materials defining Biblical Theology.<sup>10</sup> To be fair, the focus of Vos's subject matter is to define Biblical Theology as "the study of the *process* of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible" and to treat "the revelation as a *divine activity*, not as the finished *product* of that activity."<sup>11</sup> One could argue that no direct answer is given to this question, because such belongs to the definition of *Systematic* Theology. Even so, one cannot help but think Vos's theologically driven science of the History of Special Revelation is lacking proper recognition of the forest for the trees in his theologically conceived botanical garden project.

One reason for Vos's relative silence to claim this relationship is found in his distinction between God's objective redemptive activity, universal in consequence, and subsequent subjective application of it to individuals. Vos reasons that God's revelation is objective, serving its universal purposes in preparing for and subsequently interpreting redemption. Once objective stage of redemption has been accomplished, revelation "runs its course and its voice ceases to speak"; it extends "no further than this...the *completed* oracles of God are thus given to the human race as a whole to be henceforth studied and appropriated."<sup>12</sup> Vos, suggests that to insist upon a continued subjective reception of revelation reduces God's objective revelation to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 8-9.

“questions of private and personal concern.”<sup>13</sup> But if the objective accomplished redemption is subsequently applied subjectively to our lives individually, sweeping us up together in the renewal of creation, why not also a corresponding subjective application of the objective revelation to our minds? Not for personal and private concerns, but so that we might receive a theology true to what God has already revealed.

In answer to this concern, John Murray’s more direct affirmations of Scripture as redemptive revelation is refreshing: “Special revelation as deposited in the Scripture is *redemptive*. It not only provides us with the history of God’s redemptive accomplishments, not only does it interpret for us the meaning of these redemptive events; it itself also an abiding and for us indispensable organ in the fulfillment of God’s redemptive will. Without it we should have no encounter with redemptive revelation and therefore no experience of redemption.”<sup>14</sup> Even here we might be left unsatisfied had not Murray later added, “Inscription does not merely provide us with a record of revelations previously given by other modes; *Scripture is itself revelation*”<sup>15</sup> (emphasis mine). One can almost sense that he is in dialogue with Vos here, filling in a theological and existential gap that seemed to be lacking in Vos’s own presentation of revelation.

**Q. *Is the Bible theology?***

My interest in posing this question to Vos does not arise from a naïve “pie in the sky” view of revelation or critical rationalism that cares more for logical relationships in theology than for historical factuality. Vos is correct when he states that “revelation is so interwoven with

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<sup>13</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray 4: Studies in Theology, Reviews* (05/12/01, n. d., 4.

<sup>15</sup> John Murray, *Studies in Theology, Reviews*, 19.

redemption, that unless allowed to consider the latter, it would be suspended in the air.”<sup>16</sup> The question, however, naturally arises when one seeks to discover how Vos’s Biblical Theology relates to the Bible’s own theology; whether or in what manner Vos’s conception of history derives from the Bible’s own normative view of it. I am aware that Vos is firm, for well-intended apologetical reasons (but unnecessarily so, in my opinion), that the “Word of God is no Theology,” any more than the stars have their own astronomy. As is any object of science, the Word of God provides *the material* for scientific investigation, performed outside the Biblical period. The Word of God is “infinitely higher than Theology, a world of spiritual realities, into which all true theologians are led by the Spirit of the living God.”<sup>17</sup> Only as theology is equated with the *completed* objective historic revelation as fully deposited in the Bible, including the beginnings of scientific theological reflection in the Apostle Paul can Vos accept that the Bible contains its own Theology.<sup>18</sup>

However unwittingly, Vos opened the door for the conception of the Bible as theology (that is inherently theological) by recognizing a few basic things concerning his science of theology:

- 1) Vos claims that theology has a unique position as the queen of the sciences: in order to know the God of infinite perfections, God, not man, must initiate that knowledge by disclosing his nature to finite man. Theology is not firstly the work of man, but of God revealing Himself.<sup>19</sup> If, therefore, as Vos seems warranted to adopt his motto from

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<sup>16</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps what we have is two perspectives on the same reality. Vos’s conception of revelation, as I remember Charles Dennison repeating over and over, is one that we must *enter into*. Special Redemptive Revelation is not something we receive (subjectively) today outside of the World of the Bible. We must enter *its world* to partake of its realities. Murray’s conception has the Bible’s World speaking forth to us in this world.

<sup>18</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 21.

<sup>19</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 4-5.

Aquinas, “Theology is taught by God, teaches God, and leads us to God,”<sup>20</sup> how can we not also affirm with equal gusto: “The Bible is taught by God, teaches God, and leads us to God”?

- 2) Vos proposes his science to study and thereby exhibit the profound unity of revelation in terms of a progressive organic development “an internal expansion, an organic unfolding from within...so [covenant] dispensation grows out of dispensation”<sup>21</sup> In light of the organic nature of this revelation, it would seem strange that the individual agents of inspiration were not conscious of “the elements of truth presented to them”<sup>22</sup> and joint witnesses of their organic relationship to prior revelation, including the peculiarities of their received contributions and particular emphases. Inspiration that does not embrace subjective recognition of revealed theology, tends towards a more mechanistic view of revelation rather than the sovereignly adaptive (incarnational) nature Vos promotes elsewhere: “The truth having inherently many sides, and God having access to and control of all intended organs of revelation, shaped each one of these [agents for inspiration] for the precise purpose to be served. The Gospel having a precise, doctrinal structure, the doctrinally-gifted Paul was the fit organ for expressing this, because his gifts had been conferred and cultivated [by God] in advance with a view to it.”<sup>23</sup>
  
- 3) Developing this principle further in various places, Vos claims “the Bible gives us in certain cases a philosophy of its own organism” especially as inspiration extends “to the

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<sup>20</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 11.

<sup>22</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 8.

historical teaching of Paul” which Vos views to be normative for the discipline of biblical theology.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, any Biblical Theology that does not rest itself upon the “the truthfulness of the Scriptures as a whole,”<sup>25</sup> Vos maintains, has not the historical organism that can sustain valuable historical investigation, nor the inspired organizational philosophy and outlines by which such investigation can exhibit truth, both of facts and teaching content.<sup>26</sup> This to me, suggestions that the historical organism of Scripture communicates theology based upon a divinely given philosophy, guiding not simply its interpretation, but its written composition, not only for books individually, but communicating truth by the very canonical arrangement of those compositions.

- 4) Vos, admits that “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” God uses speech to reveal the meaning of redemptive acts, not only subsequent to those acts, but also in prophetic anticipation.<sup>27</sup> If this is true, then no less is the speech used to record historical facts revelatory in character, not to mention the final speech form of Scripture through which “God speaks to us today”<sup>28</sup> who are part of the universal church community founded on Christ.
  
- 5) Vos anticipates that “Biblical Theology imparts new life and freshness to the truth by showing it to us its original historic setting.”<sup>29</sup> The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a

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<sup>24</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 13-4.

<sup>25</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 20.

<sup>26</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 18.

<sup>28</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction To Old Testament Theology*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> By “historical setting”, I think Vos means a historical period marked by covenantal revelatory activity.



historical book full of dramatic interest.” The paradigm shift from viewing the Bible as “recorded history” to “narrated history” embraces dramatic interest and its relationship to truth-telling and factuality.

My two questions for Vos arise from the conviction and confession that all of Scripture is textually communicated revelation. On the one hand, the history recorded in the Bible provides for us, as Vos suggests, the “framework on which the whole structure of revelation rests,”<sup>30</sup> and “the central joints and ligaments of the entire body of redemptive revelation [from which] the whole receives its significance and colouring,”<sup>31</sup> On other hand, we must equally affirm the history as recorded *is subservient* to authoritative function of Scripture’s textual didactic purposes. Thus, the whole of Scripture is “teaching content” which references historical fact as its *raison d’etre* and basic framework. Its history is narrated at every point to reveal the theological meaning of the real-history it represents. As Sailhamer puts it, “The task of biblical theology is to allow the fixed reality of the narrative world to shape and inform our understanding of the real world, not the other way around.”<sup>32</sup> Vos holds to this principle in an analogous sense (i.e. redemptive historical setting as revelatory medium) when he maintains that “the historical character is not in any way antithetical to, but throughout subordinated to, its revealed character...the reality of revelation should be the supreme factor by which the historic factor is kept under control.”<sup>33</sup> The same should hold true for that same revelation deposited in written Scriptural form.

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<sup>30</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 22.

<sup>31</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction To Old Testament Theology*, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 19.

Vos's definition of biblical theology falls short of such an affirmation relating Scriptural text and the nature of access it provides to the events it records for us, because its primary use of the Bible is to study "the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which *lie back* of even the first committal to writing of any Biblical document, and which for a long time continued to run alongside of the inscripturation of revealed material."<sup>34</sup> Vos conceives of exegetical theology as divided into two parts, one dealing with the formation of Scripture, and "the other of the actual revelation *lying back* of this process... [inscripturation] serves no other purpose than to perpetuate and transmit the record of God's self-disclosure to the human race as a whole."<sup>35</sup> But Vos's complete methodological use of the Bible, in a sense, as an infallible source or direct "window" into the revelation activity of God, stems not simply from, as Sailhamer suggests, a "text naïveté"<sup>36</sup> and "curious lack of awareness of the way in which texts and events have meaning."<sup>37</sup> While it is true that Vos seems to confuse God's hand crafted stain glass window for a clear window through which he can view events depicted in living color, there is nothing curious about Vos's lack of awareness of the relationship between text and event, given his historical context. The radicals who were becoming more conscious of this distinction in his day, were also doing so in a ways destructive to the faith, and that danger still exists today. In Vos's own view this relationship between revelation and Scripture was a main feature in his apologetics for the truthfulness and absolute objectivity of revelation. This apologetic agenda is especially evident when he discusses inspiration and inscripturation, which is now our final consideration.

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<sup>34</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 6.

<sup>36</sup> Sailhamer at this point has a curious lack of awareness his own historical situatedness which should only give one a sense of humility. Rather, Vos's naïveté should be enviable. There is a world of difference between a person who can play the *notes* on the page and another who plays *music* by ear.

<sup>37</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction To Old Testament Theology*, 67.

When it comes to the notion of inspiration Vos believes in the joint-occurrence of objective (*ab-extra*) and subjective (*ab-intra*) revelation.<sup>38</sup> However, the primacy that Vos gives to the objective nature of revelation, seems at times to limit its subjective human appropriation, rather than providing the theological grounds for making the most of its human “incarnational” form that Vos argues for in other places. The reason for this emphasis is due to the distortions of true theism in many practicing “Biblical Theology” in his day: variations on the themes of Deism, Pantheism, Rationalism and Positivism. Especially disconcerting to Vos are the pantheistic approaches that seem to make man’s subjective thinking the determining factor for the final content of Scripture, rather than God’s objective, absolute, personal, and intelligent revelation. This is why Vos resists embracing the notion of the Bible as (inspired) theology. For Vos, “Biblical Theology furnishes a special argument from design for the reality of Supernaturalism.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the Bible as the historical organism of the inspired Scriptures, must contain more than human thoughts and words but “a world of spiritual realities.”<sup>40</sup> For example, when discussing the two modes of inspiration Vos gives greater priority to the ‘ab extra’ mode of dictation, than any form of ‘ab intra’ which Vos includes as characteristic of Psalmic material in the Psalms and “here and there” in the prophets.” Vos warns, “We must, however, be on our guard against the modern tendency to reduce all revelation in the Scriptures to this category of the *ab intra*. That is usually intended to deprive revelation of its infallibility.”<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, Vos sternly warns, “Biblical Theology must insist upon claiming for its object not the thoughts and reflections and speculations of man, but the *oracles of God*.”

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<sup>38</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," 21.

<sup>41</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 12.

Whosoever weakens or subjectivizes this fundamental idea of revelation, strikes a blow at the very heart of Theology and Supernatural Christianity, nay, at 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.”<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Vos from his original context fits quite uncomfortably in our contemporary Bible-as-literature context. This is interesting considering the fact that those whom I have known to be most outspoken advocates for Vos have also been the same teachers introducing me to Bible-as-narrative approaches. Perhaps that fact alone is enough to verify that Vos’s projected arguments against viewing the Bible as narrative-theology are insufficient in light of his other theological trajectories in that direction. I am not sure, however, that Vos would be convinced without much argumentation that those who call themselves “Vosian” are adequately representing his defense of the Bible, let alone exhibiting the organic tree of revelation that he proposed for the glory of God. He would see those who claim to use a “Redemptive Historical” *perspective*. He would hear “Redemptive Historical” preaching and probably wonder if his sermon “The Wonderful Tree”<sup>43</sup> qualifies. He would see a number of different proposals for how to construct a historical revelation-tree, including Francis Watson’s “christocentric dialectical interdependence between the Old and New Testaments”<sup>44</sup> or some of Westminster Theological Seminary’s own: “Bible as a mystery story with a surprise ending, that provokes, if not *demand*s, a second reading” or

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<sup>42</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology,” 19.

<sup>43</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Watson, *Text And Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 05/12/01, n. d.), 14.

alternatively “the story of how God finally taught his people his family name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>45</sup>

But whether Vos likes or not, we do want to him to move forward with us. Historical reality needs to be re-affirmed and underlined. As Francis Watson proclaims, “the gospels cease to be gospel if they merely preserve scattered traces of a historical reality qualitatively different from its narrative rendering, or if they merely render an intratextual character whose extratextual existence is a matter of indifference.”<sup>46</sup> This is why at no point in this dialogue do I use the term “story” to describe the Bible, since it still carries this unfortunate connotation of a separation from historical reality.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, we should fully respect the Bible’s own textual mediation of those events.

In his honor, I would like to suggest some ways in which viewing the Bible as ‘narrated theology’ might address a few of the practical concerns of Vos’s Biblical Theology:

1) *Concerning anti-doctrinal tendencies.*

The narrated theology of the Bible, from beginning to end, is told with penetrating wisdom and insight (that could only come from the Spirit of God), the great care, devotion, and cost that God has taken to supply his people in human form with the full knowledge of Himself, so that they might love him with all their mind, heart, soul, and body. Doctrinal theology is not, in the first place, an endeavor that man builds upon the Bible, or tries to produce from its raw materials. It is firstly a redemptive historical gift of God communicated in its final form of the Bible; right doctrine is a communicative

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<sup>45</sup> The first story comes from Prof. Doug Green and the latter from Prof. Sinclair Ferguson.

<sup>46</sup> Francis Watson, *Text And Truth*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Although, it may be insightful to suggest that the Bible tells a story that actually happened.

purpose, not only of overt forms of “teaching content”, but also constitutes the guiding perspective and driving point of narrated history. Our Doctrinal Theology should be a restatement of what the Bible already teaches. The Bible is as much a history book full of dogmatic interest, as it is a dogmatic handbook full of historical dramatic interest. Thus it is imperative that the ‘line’ of Biblical Theology and ‘circle’ of Systematic Theology *create mutual interference*. The line’s duty is to stretch the circle so that it becomes a circular oval. The circle’s duty is to make the line a linear oval.

*Asam!*

2) *Concerning dependency on proof-texts.*

The fundamental doctrines of the faith stand on a higher ground than isolated proof texts. Linguistic contextuality (informed by historical considerations) is determinative for meaning and truth content. Doctrines, such as the deity of Christ for example, should be shown, not only by occasional overt statements, but also in subtle allusions to past narratives in which God is clearly the actor. Contextuality and intertextuality can show that such doctrines operate as functions of the very fabric and solution the text. Attention should also be given to textual boundaries and the very arrangement of books can form a higher communicative discourse level than the books individually. The Psalms for example are divided into five books, encouraging them to be read as Torah. Their macro-arrangement indicates a redemptive historical framework that moves from lament to praise. In the long run, that system will hold the field which can be proven to have been developed *canonically* as the tributaries of Old Testament theology deposit their rich nutrients into the ocean of the New and are therein transformed into sources of life for the community of organisms inhabiting there.

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An interesting success, Eric - a  
great + fascinating figure - sometimes elusive  
in the way he himself thought about his  
understanding of what hikles th. does  
to S.T.

I would have been interested to know more fully  
what you made of S. Dillman's critique.

This is worth following through as you proceed  
in your studies.