

The Spirit's Work in Preaching

A high-altitude mountain landscape, likely Mount Everest, covered in snow and ice. The sun is bright and high in the clear blue sky, creating a lens flare. A cable car tower is visible on the right side of the mountain. In the foreground, there are yellow poles and blue safety netting.

ordained servant

February 2017

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN PREACHING

February 2017

From the Editor

I have never been a huge fan of the testimony the way it is often presented in the evangelical church. Years ago I stopped giving mine in public, when after presenting it in chapel at Covenant College in 1975, I discovered younger students wishing they had had my experience. However, I think testimonies may be an encouragement when the emphasis is on God's grace and its fruit in ministry, as I hope my initiating offering will be. I invite other officers in the OPC to submit their testimonies to God's grace in their lives and ministries for future publication.

Denominational historian John Muether offers the second in a chronological series of Reformed confessions as part of our celebration of the epochal event which sparked the Reformation five hundred years ago, "Reformed Confessions: The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)."

Danny Olinger draws us closer to the life of Geerhardus Vos with his fifth installment of the biography, "Geerhardus Vos: New Beginnings at Princeton." This is where his influence on our church's history began to have a direct link.

In our feature article Jeffrey Waddington charts the close connection between preaching and the Spirit's work in "The Preaching of the Word of God *Is* the Word of God: The Holy Spirit's Use of Preaching in Regeneration, Sanctification, and Illumination." No technique or human effort can replace this invisible heavenly power.

Darryl Hart considers the thesis of Peter Leithart's *The End of Protestantism* in his review article, "Is This Really the End?" Hart challenges universal abstractions in favor of local church realities.

Bryan Estelle reviews Meredith G. Kline's posthumous offering, edited by Kline's grandson, Jonathan G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*. It should be a great help to expository preachers, locating Kline's unique and penetrating exegetical insights in the chronology of the text.

Ryan McGraw reviews David Garner's *Sons in the Son*, a comprehensive and stimulating survey of the neglected Reformed doctrine of adoption.

Finally, don't miss Thomas Nashe's poem, "In Time of Plague [Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss]." Nashe was the subject of Marshall McLuhan's doctoral thesis at Cambridge University.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

CONTENTS

ServantThoughts

- Gregory Reynolds, “Testimony: A Journey in Reformed Ministry”

ServantHistory

- John Muether, “Reformed Confessions: The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)”
- Danny Olinger, “Geerhardus Vos: New Beginnings at Princeton”

ServantWord

- Jeffrey Waddington, “The Preaching of the Word of God *Is* the Word of God: The Holy Spirit’s Use of Preaching in Regeneration, Sanctification, and Illumination”

ServantReading

- Darryl Hart, “Is This Really the End?” review article on Peter Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*
- Bryan Estelle, review of Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*
- Ryan McGraw, review of David Garner, *Sons in the Son*

ServantPoetry

- Thomas Nashe, “In Time of Plague [Adieu, farewell, earth’s bliss]”

FROM THE ARCHIVES “HOLY SPIRIT”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-22.pdf

- “The Divine Voice.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 17 (2008): 144–46.
- “*Especially* the Preaching of the Word’.” (Larry Wilson) 9:2 (Apr. 2000): 30–34. [reprinted 15 (2006): 46–51]
- “God Still Speaks: The Power of Orality.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 17 (2008): 25–31.
- “Hearing the Word in the Modern World.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 19 (2010): 16–21.
- “The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World.” (Robert Letham) 22 (2013): 32–45.
- “The Voice from the Pulpit: John Calvin and Preaching.” (Steven Doe) 17 (2008): 60–66.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Testimony: A Journey in Reformed Ministry¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

As a child of the turbulent sixties I came to the Reformed faith via a circuitous route. Raised in a liberal Congregational church in New England, I took readily to the rebel spirit of the counterculture I discovered in architectural school in Boston in 1967. Long before the personal computer and the Internet, I was influenced by radio, TV, and the electric excitement of Rock and Roll. I think of us baby boomers as a technological crossover generation, because we caught the tail end of literary education. In my lifetime the electronic environment has gone from prevalent to ubiquitous.

The Lord used my Baptist mother's and uncle's influences and prayers to turn me to Christianity after I had exhausted a variety of forms of Eastern mysticism. After completing my exploration of Eastern sacred texts with the I Ching, I began reading the Bible. This made me realize that there was nothing like the grace of God in the Gospel. Much to my joy I discovered that the Christ of Scripture deals concretely with sin and death in a way that Buddhism and Hinduism do not. I had never really understood how good the Good News is until then.

After spending time studying with Francis Schaeffer and Os Guinness at L'Abri Fellowship, and finishing my undergraduate work at Covenant College, the Reformed faith took firm hold of my soul. The encouragement of my pastor and several professors, combined with a strong desire to communicate the Word of God to others, moved me to attend Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and enter the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1980 as the organizing pastor of a mission in New Rochelle, New York.

I soon learned that many of my favorite professors from Westminster in Philadelphia were leaving to start a new Westminster in California, led by Robert Strimple, Robert Godfrey, and others. Later that decade I ended up on a small three-man committee to study the possible revision of our denominational magazine, *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Jay Adams, one of the trio, convinced me that the new seminary's Doctor of Ministry, which he had designed, was just what I needed to improve my preaching. I was hooked.

Having spent much of the early part of my training and first decade in ministry immersing myself in the Puritan and Reformed tradition, I thought I was on solid footing to re-evaluate the nature of modernity and how it affects preaching. It seemed to me that many preachers were intimidated by the vaunted sophistication and superiority of electronic media; thus willing to compromise the simple means prescribed in the Bible to communicate God's Word to his people and the world. In January of 1990 I spent my

¹ Adapted from an article in *Westminster Seminary California Update*, Spring 2012: 20–21.

orientation month in Escondido taking classes with Edmund Clowney, Jay Adams, Robert Godfrey, Dennis Johnson, Joey Pipa, and Joel Nederhood. The spiritual and intellectual environment was thoroughly stimulating, and in light of difficulties in the church I was pastoring, it did me a world of good. It was a time of true renewal.

Most encouraging and life-altering was Dr. Joel Nederhood's intensive course, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age." He focused on television—it was still the most pervasive medium—the Internet had not yet become a force in popular culture. And so he challenged me to think about the total environment in which we preach, and then about preaching itself, and how preaching relates to the challenge of electronic media. No one in the Reformed or evangelical world had come to understand the importance of McLuhan and Postman as Nederhood had. His report on the use of television as a medium to communicate the gospel for the Christian Reformed Church impressed me as a uniquely useful model for thoughtful evaluation of an electronic medium. Almost everyone, Christian and non-Christian, naively thought of all technologies as neutral tools. I think this is still largely the case, although there are signs of a new awareness among Christians. The effect of various media on the message and the messenger seemed rarely to be considered. I was convinced of the enormous value of Nederhood's assessment and have spent the last three decades developing the insights he spawned. By the time I completed the final phase of the doctoral program, I had moved to New Hampshire and had helped plant an OPC church in Manchester.

The final phase of the doctoral program, a decade after orientation, was only two weeks long, but no less stimulating than the first. By then the faculty had changed somewhat, and I enjoyed courses from Phillip Ryken and Peter Jones, and some great fellowship with director of the doctoral program, Ian Duguid, as well as James Dennison. Thankfully, the August California sun proved hotter than the questions of the examination committee, and my thesis was approved. All that remained was returning to graduate the following May. Meanwhile, Wipf and Stock published my project in the form of the book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (2001). Jay Adams's requirement that we produce something useful for the church was a valuable prod to this volume.

The Marshall McLuhan I had once believed to be the guru of the new media turned out to be a profound critic of media and a conservative Roman Catholic. He owned neither a TV nor an automobile—about as unlike a sixties hippie as one could imagine. What deceived me was the fact that while McLuhan detested the basic tenor of modernity, especially as it expressed itself in electronic media, he believed that his mission was to get people to pay attention to the media environment in order to navigate it wisely. His was a descriptive rather than a prescriptive project. Neil Postman, on the other hand, added a strongly prescriptive dimension to McLuhan's insights. Through my research in Westminster's doctoral program, a whole new world of interest emerged. For example, I joined, the then nascent (1997), Media Ecology Association of which Marshall's son Eric and many other media scholars are members, interviewed Neil Postman the author of the ground-breaking book Dr. Nederhood had us read, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), and best of all my love for preaching the Word of God was rekindled.

My research in homiletics and media gave me a new sense of confidence in the regular task of pastoral preaching. I concluded that, despite modern assessments of the inadequacy of preaching, because it is God's chosen medium for communicating his

Word, it must be central to the ministry and worship of the church. This reinforced what I already believed. Beyond this fundamental encouragement, I came to a new understanding of the relationship between written and oral communication. I realized that one fault among us Reformed preachers has been the failure to translate our excellent academic training in the theological disciplines into effective pulpit speech. This insight has enabled me to become more direct and applicatory in my own exposition of Scripture.

As a member of the OPC's Committee on Christian Education I have enjoyed using some of the things I have learned through my initial research in WSC's doctoral program to bear on OPC ministry, especially the oversight of the denominational website, and editing our journal for church officers, *Ordained Servant*. One of my passions is to get Christians, especially preachers, to ask critical questions about their stewardship of electronic media. The probing—an especially McLuhanesque exercise—can be painful, as I am forced to engage in it myself, but I believe it is essential for Christian maturity in ministry. Observe the media environment and act accordingly. McLuhan used Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom" to illustrate this point. Every medium, and the totality of the media environment, affects, for good or ill, our relationships with God, others, the church, and God's world; and they affect the way we perceive each of these.

I am grateful for my training at both Westminsters; the intellectual and theological integrity of Machen and the old Princeton lives on. There is no dichotomy between spiritual and intellectual development.

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

ServantHistory

Reformed Confessions: The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)

by John R. Muether

Protestants began to divide in the 1520s over sacramental theology, as southern Germans and the Swiss questioned Martin Luther's teaching on the corporal presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Meanwhile Charles V (recently crowned the Holy Roman Emperor) was campaigning against French and papal forces from the south and bracing against Ottoman threats from the east. Hoping to establish a religious settlement that would promote political unity, he summoned a Diet at Augsburg.

Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito quickly composed a confessional statement on behalf of four cities, Constance, Memmingen, Lindau, and Strasbourg; thus it became known as the Tetrapolitan Confession. Delegates from Strasbourg presented it to the Emperor at the Diet in July 1530 "to show our obedience to thy wish that we should explain our opinion concerning the reformation of religion." The confession's twenty-three chapters begin with the formal principle of the Reformation, the authority of the Word of God, enjoining "preachers to teach from the pulpit nothing else than is either contained in the Holy Scriptures or hath sure ground therein," following the pattern "of the most holy fathers, bishops and princes." (This is the first of four references to the "holy fathers" of the church, as the confession is eager to demonstrate the antiquity of its claims.) The confession proceeds to follow the general structure of the Augsburg Confession and it "breathes the same spirit of moderation," according to Philip Schaff,¹ while condemning Roman Catholic practices such as meats (ch. 9), monkery (ch. 12), and the Mass (ch. 19).

Naturally, the attention of the Diet was directed toward Article 18 on the Lord's Supper. Bucer and Capito sought consensus language amid the growing antagonisms between Zwinglians and Lutherans. The original version, composed by Wolfgang Capito, declared that "Christ the Lord is truly in the Supper and gives his true body truly to eat and his blood truly to drink, but especially to the spirit, through faith." When this last clause offended Lutherans at Augsburg, delegates from Strasbourg removed it in the interest of concord. The final version declares the true presence of Christ without specifying the manner of presence. (Capito would later insist that despite the change, the confession intended to affirm that spiritual eating was the only beneficial participation in the Supper.)

The Tetrapolitan Confession did not prevail at Augsburg. Lutherans dismissed it as fanatic and Roman Catholics branded it heretical. Even among its sponsoring cities, its confessional status lasted but a year, superseded by more thorough and systematic

¹ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877), 1:527.

statements. Still, we should not miss its significance as a confessional effort to overcome isolation and to unite Reformed cities. James Dennison observes, “The Tetrapolitan Confession is regarded as the first Reformed Confession. It is not Lutheran, though Protestant. It is not Roman Catholic, but Protestant. . . . It marks the inauguration of a distinctive confessional tradition.”²

An Excerpt from Chapter XVIII, “Of the Eucharist”

Concerning this venerable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, all that the evangelists, Paul and the holy fathers, have left in writing, our men, in the best faith, teach, commend, and inculcate. And hence with singular zeal they always publish this goodness of Christ to his people, whereby no less today than at that last Supper, to all those who sincerely have given their names among his disciples and receive this Supper according to his institution, he deigns to give his true body and true blood to be truly eaten and drunk for the food and drink of souls, for their nourishment unto life eternal so that he may live and abide in them, and they in him, to be raised up by him at the last day to new and immortal life . . .

The Sequence of Confessions

Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli (1523)

Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)

First Helvetic Confession (1536)

French Confession of Faith (1559)

Scots Confession (1560)

Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

Canons of the Synod of Dordt (1619)

Westminster Confession & Catechisms (1643)

John R. Muether *serves as a ruling elder at Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Oviedo, Florida, library director at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, and historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.*

² James T. Dennison Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008–14), 1:139.

ServantHistory

Geerhardus Vos: New Beginnings at Princeton

by Danny E. Olinger

On July 3, 1893, Geerhardus Vos wrote Herman Bavinck about his decision to accept Princeton Seminary's offer to join their faculty. Vos told Bavinck that he was sorry to leave the Theological School in Grand Rapids, but he did not see a future at the school due to the poor academic level of the students.¹

Vos was not alone in his judgment regarding the academic standing of the Theological School. J. Van der Mey described the educational deficiencies of the Theological School to Abraham Kuyper. He wrote, "The education under Prof. Boer and Hemkes was in every sense poor. After the graduates became ministers, they felt the lack of sound knowledge, and when they entered their congregations, they tried to improve themselves through continued study."² Van der Mey then credited Vos's efforts in trying to raise the standards at the school and to introduce the students to the teaching of Kuyper himself. Van der May said, "Those who were educated by Geerhardus Vos have come to your side as a consequence of the powerful training they enjoyed under Dr. Vos."³

For Vos personally, his five years of teaching at the Theological School had been a great training ground. Spending twenty-three to twenty-five hours a week lecturing helped develop his pedagogical style. He had also produced a hand-written, five-volume Reformed Dogmatics and a Hellenistic Greek Grammar.⁴

But, a price had been paid in laboring so hard. His health suffered from the work load. As he constantly found himself needing to prepare for his classes, he corresponded less and less with his friends. Henry Dosker, professor at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, reflected the common opinion when he told Bavinck in early 1893 that he had "heard nothing from Vos. He is dry-as-dust and seems to become a bookworm more and more."⁵

¹ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, July 3, 1893, in James T. Dennison Jr., ed., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 175. When Bavinck relayed Vos's reasons for leaving to Kuyper, Kuyper replied that Vos did well to leave Grand Rapids because remaining there would have meant "academic murder." He did not share the same sentiment for Vos becoming Presbyterian, telling Bavinck in doing so Vos had gone too far. See, Letter, Abraham Kuyper to Herman Bavinck, January 24, 1894, in R.H. Breemer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966), 81, 291.

² Letter, J. Van der Mey to Abraham Kuyper, February 18, 1896, in George Harinck, "Geerhardus Vos as an Introducer of Kuyper in America," in *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 250.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., et al., 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014–2016).

⁵ Letter, Henry E. Dosker to Herman Bavinck, February 25, 1893, in George Harinck, "Geerhardus Vos as Introducer of Kuyper," 258.

What Dosker perhaps did not realize was that Vos had more than one motive for turning into a “bookworm.” Given the inadequacy of the Theological School’s library, which held less than one thousand volumes, Vos often found himself at the Grand Rapids Public Library after the school day had ended. Whether it was through the constant repetition of his checking out books, we do not know, but a friendship developed between Vos and the librarian at the circulation desk, Catherine Smith.

Catherine Smith

Catherine was born on August 11, 1865, in a small village near Lima, Ohio, to Henry and Mary Ann Smith. Henry Smith was a school teacher and the family lived for the most part in and around Chicago. After Henry died of tuberculosis in 1880, Mary Ann moved Catherine and her two younger sisters to Grand Rapids. Fifteen-year-old Catherine started attending the South Congregational Church of Grand Rapids and joined as a member in June 1880.⁶ She then attended Grand Rapids High School and graduated with high honors. Bernardus Vos later testified to his mother’s academic ability. He possessed her high school geometry notebook “done with ruler, compass and drawing pen, every line perfect, no mistakes in the entire notebook.”⁷

In 1886 Catherine was hired as an elementary school teacher at the Madison Avenue School in Grand Rapids. Six years later, she started working as a librarian at the Grand Rapids Public Library. According to Bernardus Vos, this is where his parents met.

My father met my mother in an unusual way. After his return to Grand Rapids from Strassburg in 1888 he became a member of the faculty of [the Theological School in Grand Rapids]. In the years that followed he frequently was found in the Grand Rapids Public Library. My mother was at the time doing volunteer work at the circulation desk of the library, and this how they met.⁸

That Geerhardus struck up a friendship with Catherine and wanted to marry her had to be a surprise to his parents. Catherine was neither Dutch nor a member of the Christian Reformed Church. Marianne Vos Radius believed that “there was perhaps a slight disappointment” for her grandparents that her father had fallen for her mother. “They fell in love, but his parents were never happy about an English girl who couldn’t speak Dutch and who was a Methodist. She became a very good Presbyterian and insisted on us learning the Shorter Catechism, but she didn’t know Dutch.”⁹

The language issue was a particular hardship in the relationship between Catherine and her future mother-in-law Aaltje Vos. Marianne commented, “My grandmother spoke only Dutch; she never learned to speak English. My mother never learned to speak Dutch.

⁶ Dennison, *Letters*, 41.

⁷ Letter, Bernardus Vos to Roger Nicole, July 3, 1967, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Upon his retirement from Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida, Mr. Nicole gave John Muether, historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, this letter.

⁸ Ibid. Marianne Vos Radius’s recollection of how her parents first met matched that of her brother. She stated that her mother “was reference librarian at the library downtown and he met her there naturally enough.” Interview, Marianne Vos Radius by Charles G. Dennison, February 27, 1992, at the Raybrook Assisted Living Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

⁹ Ibid.

There was never any communication between them at all. My grandfather was a sweeter person than my grandmother was.”¹⁰

There was also the question of just how well Geerhardus and Catherine knew each other before he headed off to Princeton without her in September 1893. Bernardus Vos, somewhat embarrassingly, noted that just a few months before his parents’ wedding on September 7, 1894, his father seemed “at that time to have been unaware that my mother’s first name was properly spelled ‘Catherine.’” The reason for Bernardus’s conjecture was due to “Katharine F. Smith” appearing in his father’s own handwriting on his father’s copy of his May 8, 1894, Inaugural Address.”¹¹

Plans on Teaching Reformed Biblical Theology

With the move to Princeton, Vos had some free time to develop his classes. Unlike the twenty-three to twenty-five hours per week he spent lecturing at the Theological School, his initial workload at Princeton was a mere four hours a week of classroom instruction.¹² With the extra time, Vos wrote three letters to Herman Bavinck spelling out his plans for teaching Reformed biblical theology.

In his first letter to Bavinck, Vos told his friend that he had reflected long on what his approach in the classroom towards biblical theology should be. He wanted to 1) do justice to the unity and the historical development of revelation; 2) do justice to the theoretical and practical character of revelation; and 3) deduce the principle of how to deal with the subject from the Scriptures. He then told Bavinck, “I have come to the conclusion that the covenant idea fulfills the requirements the best of all and so I think I will start from that. At the same time I remain grounded on Reformed theology.”¹³

Vos realized that not all in the Reformed camp were as positive on the relationship between the Reformed faith and covenant theology. “When Dr. Kuyper says that Cocceius, by bringing the covenant idea itself into prominence, already inflicted losses on the claims of Reformed principles, I cannot go along with that view.”¹⁴

After the brief comment about his disagreement with Kuyper, Vos returned to three more elements that he saw as essential to the teaching of Reformed biblical theology; 1) Revelation reflected the relationship between the archetypical covenant in eternity, which is absolute and unchangeable, and the covenant gifts that historically follow; 2) The covenant idea contained word and deed revelation; 3) The covenant idea shows that development proceeds in an organic manner in Scripture. Vos finished, “You can sense how I think about all this in rough outline. Therefore I would greatly appreciate your opinion. The circumstances have just inspired my interest in the covenant idea. I would like to view it, as earlier dogmatic, now also historical.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Letter, Bernardus Vos to Roger Nicole, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

¹² Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, October 20, 1893, in Dennison, *Letters*, 179.

¹³ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, July 3, 1893, in Dennison, *Letters*, 176.

¹⁴ Ibid. In his article “The Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant,” Vos argued against the view that covenant theology in the Reformed faith proceeded primarily from the Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). Vos demonstrated that the older theologians, particularly in England, manifested the covenant doctrine in Reformed theology. See, Geerhardus Vos, “The Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 234–241.

¹⁵ Ibid.

After the semester had started, Vos made sure that Bavinck had not misunderstood him. He wrote:

Naturally it was not my intention to take the covenant idea as a guiding principle in Biblical Theology to the exclusion of Revelation. It also gives the latter priority. Biblical Theology is for me History of Revelation. But beneath that I place the covenant concept, because God has revealed himself in the covenant.¹⁶

In February 1894 Vos expressed his final thoughts to Bavinck on how he wanted to teach biblical theology. He repeated his contention from the previous letter that he wanted to treat biblical theology as the history of revelation. He knew that such an approach would be a departure from the traditional way in which biblical theology was taught. Most followed “the well-known path of Oehler in starting with the doctrine of God in the Mosaic period and then moving to the doctrine of man.”¹⁷ Vos wanted to start with what he believed stood central to revelation, the doctrine of the covenant. By starting with the doctrine of the covenant, he explained to Bavinck, there would be the added benefit of showing the students that doctrine and history are inseparable in Scripture.

During the same period when Vos was writing Bavinck, Vos also expressed his view of the relationship of biblical theology to historic doctrine and Scripture when he reviewed E.H. van Leeuwen’s *Prolegomena van Bijbelsche Godgeleerdheid* (Prolegomena of Biblical Theology) in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*. Vos declared that biblical theology should “attempt to show how the church, being guided by the Spirit, in its historical development of the truth has remained in closer contact with the Word than have the critical theories of the present day.”¹⁸ He concluded, “On our estimate of the Scriptures, and more particularly on our estimate of their inspiration, the right of Biblical Theology to form a separate science depends.”¹⁹

The combination of what Vos wrote to Bavinck and his review of van Leeuwen’s *Prolegomena* previewed in miniature many of the themes Vos was going to emphasize in teaching Reformed biblical theology at Princeton.

1. Biblical theology is the history of special revelation.
2. Biblical theology rightly conceived cannot operate outside of an orthodox view of Scripture.
3. Biblical theology recognizes that Scripture has the right to determine its own method of approach.
4. Biblical theology understands that special revelation is historical; justice must be done to both its unity and diversity.
5. Biblical theology understands that special revelation is organic; the older contains the seeds of the newer.

¹⁶ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, November 21, 1893, in Dennison, *Letters*, 181.

¹⁷ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, February 1, 1894, in Dennison, *Letters*, 183. Gustav F. Oehler (1812–1872) was the author of *Theology of the Old Testament*.

¹⁸ Geerhardus Vos, Review of E.H. van Leeuwen’s *Prolegomena van Bijbelsche Godgeleerdheid* in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 4 (1893): 143.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

6. Biblical theology does not separate redemptive deed and revelatory word; revelation interprets redemption.
7. Biblical theology does not separate the theoretical and practical character of special revelation.
8. Biblical theology is covenantal.
- 9.

What Vos did not include in either the letters to Bavinck or the review was that biblical theology was eschatological—a view that would inform his teaching at Princeton. As shown in his 1891 address, “The Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant,” Vos had already come to the conviction that the Scripture taught a particular philosophy of history. Namely, that the goal put before man at the creation, full communion with the living God forever, forfeited in Adam’s sin, had been achieved for believers through the person and work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. At Princeton, he would add to this the belief that Scripture taught that it was the Holy Spirit’s intention to bring those who the Father had chosen and Christ had died for to the realm of the Spirit, the heavenly Jerusalem above. Christ’s resurrection from the dead, by which he was declared to be the Son of God in power, and the subsequent down payment of the Spirit, were unto this end.²⁰

In light of the above principles and more that Vos incorporated in his teaching at Princeton, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has persuasively argued that Vos “is the father of a Reformed biblical theology.”²¹ Gaffin stated that although attention was certainly given to the historical progress of revelation by Reformed theologians,

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.²²

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

On Tuesday, May 8, 1894, at noon, in the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton, Vos publicly expressed his views on Reformed biblical theology for the first time. The occasion was his formal installation as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. In his address that day, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and a Theological Discipline,” Vos humbly acknowledged the great responsibility before him. Biblical theology at Princeton had been entrusted to his special care and keeping.

In explaining the nature of biblical theology, Vos declared that the only legitimate object of theology was God. But, God was the object of theology only so far as he had supernaturally revealed himself in Scripture. Biblical theology sought to examine how God had revealed himself in Scripture as parts and products of a divine work, applying

²⁰ These themes would be at the heart of Vos’s 1912 article, “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit,” and his 1930 book, *The Pauline Eschatology*.

²¹ Gaffin, “Introduction,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, xiv.

²² *Ibid.*, xiv–xv.

“no other method of grouping and arranging these contents than is given in the divine economy of revelation itself.”²³

Such an approach to biblical theology taught that a leading characteristic of supernatural revelation was its historical progress. God had not communicated the knowledge of the truth as it appeared in the calm light of eternity. Rather, God’s revelation of the knowledge of the truth was interwoven with and conditioned by the supernatural redeeming activity of God in history.

The second ground for the historical character of revelation was its eminently practical aspect. In Vos’s judgment, the importance of this practical aspect of revelation found expression in the doctrine of the covenant. “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.”²⁴

Having established the historical and practical nature of revelation, Vos explained the importance of recognizing revelation’s organic character. On the one hand, biblical theology aimed to maintain the perfection of revealed truth; on the other hand, it sought to show that this 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.”²⁵ At center of this organic process stood Jesus Christ. “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.”²⁶

The groundwork laid, Vos put forth what he believed to be a proper definition of the theological discipline that he had been appointed to teach. “Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity.”²⁷

Vos realized, however, that not everything passing under the name of biblical theology fit this definition. Modern theologians appealed to the historical principle of biblical theology to neutralize the revelation-principle. That is, they divided Scripture between that which was thought to be conditioned by the subjectivity of the authors and that which was thought to be eternal truth. The result of such a division was the denial of the philosophy of history which the Bible itself outlined. According to Vos, the value and legitimacy of biblical theology as a theological discipline ultimately rested on the right of biblical theology to reject philosophies of history that proceeded from speculation and the right to adopt the philosophy of history put forth by the Scripture itself.

Vos then detailed in four points the revelation-based biblical theology he sought to teach at Princeton.

1. Biblical theology must be based upon the oracles of God, and not the speculation of man.

Whosoever weakens or subjectivizes this fundamental idea of revelation, strikes a blow at the very heart of Theology and Supernatural Christianity, nay, of Theism

²³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 11.

²⁶ Ibid., 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

itself. Every type of Biblical Theology bent upon ignoring or minimizing this supreme, central idea, is a most dangerous product.²⁸

2. Biblical theology must proceed knowing that the reality of revelation is the supreme factor by the historic factor is kept under control. The historical character of the truth is subordinate, not antithetical, to the revealed character of the truth.

3. Biblical theology must stand on the truthfulness of the Scriptures as whole. Scripture includes a great variety of historical aspects, but there are no inconsistencies or contradictions in the Word of God.

4. Most importantly, biblical theology must recognize that the inspired Scriptures contain a divine philosophy of the history of redemption and of revelation in general outlines. Vos said, "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."²⁹

In the concluding section of his talk, Vos said that he had not forgotten that he was called to Princeton to help prepare men for the gospel ministry. He then expressed what he saw as the advantages of teaching biblical theology to aspiring pastors with four more points.

1. Biblical theology exhibits to students the organic structure of the Word of God. It helps students understand that the various parts of Scripture do not stand in isolation, but "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 unifying principle the Spirit of God's living truth."³⁰

2. Biblical theology provides the most effective antidote against destructive critical views. "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."³¹ The best way to show this is to place over against the critical theories the organic history of revelation in the Bible, which is the very thing biblical theology endeavors to do.

3. Biblical theology gives new life and freshness to old truth. The treasure-chambers of Scripture are historical, God having embodied the contents of revelation "not in a dogmatic system, but in a book of history."³² A biblical theology that possesses a spirit of humble faith in exploring Scripture will enrich the student in coming to the wealth of living truth.

4. Biblical theology when rightly conceived is of the greatest value for the study of systematic theology. In the end, "Dogmatics is the crown which grows out of all the work that biblical theology can accomplish."³³

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Ibid., 20.

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 23.

³³ Ibid., 24.

Presbyterianism and Marriage

The end of his first year teaching at Princeton proved to be an eventful one for Vos. Not only did he deliver his inaugural address in May, but two weeks earlier on April 24, at the Second Presbyterian Church in Princeton, he was ordained by the Presbytery of New Brunswick as a gospel minister in the Presbyterian Church in the USA.

After the school year ended, Vos returned to Grand Rapids for the summer and married Catherine Smith on September 7. When the newlyweds arrived at Princeton for the start of the 1894–1895 school year, they had to make do living in two rooms in the home of a Princeton widow.³⁴ The house located on 52 Mercer Street, which the seminary promised to provide for them, was not ready. Part of the delay was due to the paving of Mercer Street and installation of electricity.³⁵

Finally, in May 1895 Geerhardus and Catherine settled into their new home, conveniently across the street from the seminary and the library, and closest of all to Miller Chapel at its pre-1933 location next to Alexander Hall. The first social visitors they received were Princeton University professor Woodrow Wilson and his wife Ellen.³⁶ The Wilsons and Voses would remain friends throughout the next two decades. When Johannes was born in 1903, the Wilsons gave the Voses as a baby present a silver porringer engraved with Johannes's name and date of birth, accompanied by a business-sized calling card bearing the name, "Mrs. Woodrow Wilson."³⁷ On the night nine years later when it was announced that Woodrow Wilson had won the general election to become the twenty-eighth president of the United States, Geerhardus told little Johannes, "Let's go see the new president." They walked hand-in-hand down the block to the Wilson home and congratulated Wilson who was greeting the well-wishers gathered in his front yard.³⁸

Although Vos was friends with Woodrow Wilson, his closest friend was his Princeton colleague Benjamin Warfield. The two men established a daily routine when school was in session that they would continue for nearly thirty years until Warfield's death in 1921. They would walk together up and down Mercer Street talking as they went.³⁹ In faculty meetings at Princeton Seminary, Warfield would be the vocal leader, Vos the quiet supporter, but the two were rarely on the opposite side of any issue.

Princeton Seminary itself numbered around 250 students, a 40 percent increase from Vos's student days a decade earlier. The increase in the student body meant that the seminary in the early 1890s had to move from away from oral examinations before a committee of the directors to written examinations reviewed by the directors. However, by Vos's first year teaching in 1893–1894, the written examination had also become unmanageable for the directors and they requested a review of only those examinations

³⁴ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, December 22, 1894, in Dennison, *Letters*, 187.

³⁵ David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 2, *The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 173.

³⁶ Letter, Bernardus Vos to Roger Nicole, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

³⁷ The porringer, a small bowl with a decorative handle, is now the possession of Johannes's son, Raymond Vos. Email correspondence, Raymond Vos to Danny Olinger, December 12, 2016.

³⁸ Interview, Mrs. Johannes (Marian) Vos, nee Milligan, by Charles Dennison, January 28, 1993, in Beaver Falls, PA, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

³⁹ Interview, Marianne Radius, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

which the faculty considered unsatisfactory.⁴⁰ The students upon completion of the three-year program would receive a certificate signed by the professors. In Vos's third year, the legislature of the state of New Jersey approved Princeton's awarding of a bachelor of divinity degree.⁴¹

Reviews

In his first two years teaching at Princeton, Vos wasted little time in letting his name become more well-known in Presbyterian circles as he authored eight reviews that appeared in Warfield's *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*. It was apparent from the books reviewed that Vos was reading up on the subjects that he would be teaching from Old and New Testament theology to the kingdom of God. It was also apparent in the content of the reviews that Vos was no friend of the displacement, replacement, or compromise of the Word of God. Among the more significant were reviews of Hermann Schultz's *Old Testament Theology* and Willibald Beyschlag's *New Testament Theology*.

Schultz's *Old Testament Theology*, by then in its fourth edition, was advertised as holding a *via media* between conservatives and critics. Vos disagreed. Schultz's views, such as a late origin of the Pentateuch and his naturalistic understanding of the development of Israel's religion, were decidedly critical and belonged to the advanced school. "But all at once," Vos observed, "and apparently unconnected with these premises, the idea of revelation is introduced."⁴² Vos commented, "It is certainly not unfair to ask on which side the influence of a work will lie, in which two such discordant elements are combined."⁴³ Vos concluded, "The apparent conservatism of Schultz's work, therefore, is something accessory, not being due to what he obtains from a careful review of the facts in accordance with his own critical canons, but largely to certain philosophical ideals imported from without."⁴⁴

According to Vos, Beyschlag had written a beautiful book, one "that was a delight to read" as several passages captivated "like poetry."⁴⁵ In particular, Beyschlag had captured the art of handling and grouping his material "so as to make a historical movement pass before us as in living reality."⁴⁶

But, Vos also showed the emptiness of Beyschlag's claim to occupy a middle position between "the two camps of advanced criticism and what in Germany is called the conservative school."⁴⁷ Vos agreed with Beyschlag that the advanced, modern critics lacked sobriety and modesty in dealing with the text and that their interest with destructive theorizing was often solely to replace the traditional interpretation. Still, Beyschlag himself did not take the slightest pains to conceal his departures from orthodox Protestant doctrine. Beyschlag taught that the biblical writers "knew of no Trinity, of no divine nature of Christ in the metaphysical sense, of no personal Holy

⁴⁰ Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 174.

⁴¹ Ibid. Calhoun notes that the Princeton seminary graduates would also receive a preacher's suit provided by the ladies of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City.

⁴² Review of Hermann Schultz's *Old Testament Theology* by Geerhardus Vos in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894): 132.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Review of Willibald Beyschlag's *New Testament Theology* by Geerhardus Vos in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 6 (1895): 757.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Spirit, of no vicarious satisfaction, and consequently of no justification on the ground of imputed righteousness.”⁴⁸ Further, he used what he believed was an imperfect Bible as a grounds of attack on the teaching of orthodox doctrine.

Vos applauded Beyschlag’s conclusion that Paul taught that Christ’s death has not merely a justifying but also a sanctifying effect, and that these two effects proceed from Christ’s death in organic unity. Beyschlag’s great failure, however, was his adherence to the moral influence theology. This led him to the erroneous conclusion that the twofold effect in its organic unity was irreconcilable with the doctrine of vicarious atonement. Vos wrote:

In Romans 8:3, a passage of which Beyschlag makes much, the judgment of sin in the flesh is not simply the killing of sin, but the *judicial* killing of it, and Paul has evidently chosen this very term *κατακρίνειν* to indicate the organic unity of the two sides of Christ’s work: the breaking of guilt and the breaking of the power of corruption, in such a way that the latter proceeds from the former. Beyschlag overlooks the peculiar choice of the term and the judicial element implied in it, limits the sense of the expression to the sanctifying effect of Christ’s death, and thus makes it appear as if in Paul’s mind justification depended on sanctification. Paul’s view in this and other passages evidently is, that the cancelling of our guilt in Christ’s death is the objective cause of the subjective breaking of the power of sin within us. In other words, our dying with Christ proceeds logically from Christ’s dying for us, and herein lies the organic unity of the two acts of salvation.⁴⁹

Charles Augustus Briggs

Although it was clear from the reviews that Vos was engaging critical thought in Europe, it was also evident from his letters to Kuyper and Bavinck that he was keeping even closer attention on the events surrounding Charles Augustus Briggs. A ministerial member of the Presbyterian Church, Briggs was Vos’s counterpart in biblical theology at Union Seminary in New York City. He was also undoubtedly the figure that William Green had in mind in urging Vos to come to Princeton to stop the rising tide of historical criticism in the Presbyterian Church. From the early 1880s onward, Briggs had sparred with Benjamin Warfield, who would become Briggs’s co-editor of *The Presbyterian Review* in 1888, and the faculty of Princeton over the doctrine of Scripture and historical-critical methodology.⁵⁰

In 1890 Union Seminary created a chair in biblical theology and appointed Briggs as its first occupant. On January 20, 1891, Briggs used the occasion of his inaugural address, “The Authority of Holy Scriptures,” to declare that he planned to use biblical theology to modernize the outdated views of the Presbyterian Church regarding Scripture. For nearly two hours, Briggs argued the historical-critical method applied to Scripture promised a reinvigoration of the faith, a reawakening of the church’s spirit from dead orthodoxy. The

⁴⁸ Ibid., 758.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 759–60.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Briggs’s opposition to Princeton and his subsequent trial in the Presbyterian Church for doctrinal error, see James H. Moorhead’s *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 246–51; David B. Calhoun’s *Princeton Seminary*, 2:131–36; and Lefferts A. Loetscher’s *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 48–62.

Bible was an error-filled book, and those who argued otherwise were nothing more than Reformed scholastics.

For Briggs's audience, there could be no doubt that the "Reformed scholastics" who held to a "dead orthodoxy" were the men at Princeton Seminary. The stage was thus set for the upcoming 1891 General Assembly where Briggs's appointment needed approval.⁵¹ The assembly indicated at its start which side it favored with the election of one of Briggs's main opponents, Princeton's William Henry Green, as moderator. From the chair, Green appointed Francis L. Patton, the conservative president of the College of New Jersey, to serve as the chairman of the standing committee on theological seminaries tasked with making a recommendation regarding Briggs's appointment. The Patton-led standing committee recommended a veto, and the assembly agreed with the recommendation and did not approve the appointment of Briggs.

Angered by the decision, Union Seminary declared independency from the Presbyterian Church. Briggs, however, retained his ministerial credentials in the Presbytery of New York. Charges were brought against him at the presbytery level, but Briggs was acquitted. The decision was appealed to the 1893 General Assembly, which found him guilty and suspended him from the gospel ministry. Briggs then left the Presbyterian Church and joined the Episcopal Church.

Vos wrote Bavinck on October 20, 1893, that enthusiasm around Princeton for the critical views of Scripture had cooled down after Briggs had been found guilty. In Vos's judgment, Princeton was growing stronger in defending Calvinism. "I have to say that the Calvinistic sympathies in Princeton are much stronger than they were during my stay as a student here. Particularly Warfield is very decided but others also feel his influence."⁵²

Four months later, Vos wrote Abraham Kuyper that while Princeton continued to exert a good influence in the Presbyterian Church, he was not encouraged about the outlook for the churches at large. In particular, he lamented what had become of church discipline. "In the churches at large things look miserable. Church discipline is fallen very much into disuse and what is more the realization that it must be exerted dutifully has been lost."⁵³ To illustrate his point, Vos raised the discipline of Briggs. "Even in an extreme case as that of Dr. Briggs, it was very difficult to move into action. They allow opinions to be expressed and spread unhindered. Opinions which, without any doubt, not only assail the Reformed doctrine but also the army of Christianity."⁵⁴

A month later in writing to Bavinck, Vos raised the same themes that he had with Kuyper. In fact, so similar were the remarks at points that it appeared that he had a copy of his letter to Kuyper to draw from. Regarding the outlook for the future, he said, "I am not sure if we are making much progress. The German theology and criticism is imported with full zeal, and the worst is that that practice of doctrinal discipline in almost all American churches has gotten almost totally lost."⁵⁵ He again turned to Briggs to prove

⁵¹ Explaining how general assembly approval for Union professors came to be needed, Moorhead writes, "Prior to the reunion of 1870, Union, although a *de facto* New School institution, had remained independent of formal ecclesiastical control. At the time of the reunion, the board of directors as a gesture of good faith agreed to submit future faculty appointments to the General Assembly for approval or rejection." Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 249.

⁵² Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, October 20, 1893, in Dennison, *Letters*, 179.

⁵³ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Abraham Kuyper, February 26, 1894, in Dennison, *Letters*, 184.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, March 28, 1894, in Dennison, *Letters*, 185–86.

his point. “Even in an extreme case as that of Briggs, it required the greatest effort to take action. Now that Briggs is suspended, no one wants to do anything else and the accomplices of Briggs are left unhindered.”⁵⁶

What Vos added for Bavinck, and withheld from Kuyper who Vos knew refused to take sides between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church, was a rebuke of the Reformed Church in America. John De Witt, a ministerial member of the Reformed Church in America and a professor at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, had supported Briggs in the controversy. “It appears that that Reformed Church will not do anything about John De Witt, who fully took sides with Briggs.”⁵⁷

Two years later, Vos publicly engaged Brigg’s views in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* with a joint review of Brigg’s books, *The Messiah of the Gospels* and *the Messiah of the Apostles*. Vos noted that Briggs was not backing down from his attack on historic Christianity despite his well-known trial.

Dr. Briggs goes on to remark: “The Christian Church of Western Europe, under the influence of the Augustinian theology, has been looking backward and downward instead of upward and forward. In the doctrine of God it has been grubbing in the eternal decree. In the doctrine of man it has been dissecting the corpse of the first Adam and searching for the germs of the disease of original sin which slew him and all our race. Accordingly, religion has been sad, gloomy and sour. In the doctrine of Christ it has been living in Passion week, following the stations of the cross, and bowing in penitence before the crucifix.”⁵⁸

Vos for his part, however, was also not backing down. After listing Brigg’s criticism, Vos commented,

Such wholesale condemnation of historic Christianity we have long been accustomed to from certain quarters where the contempt of so-called tradition is equaled by the lack of historic information, but in the case of a scholar and student of history like Dr. Briggs it is inexcusable.⁵⁹

In his dismantling of Briggs’s position, Vos openly questioned Briggs’s ability as a biblical-theologian. Briggs, in his extreme dread of systematizing, had systematized the biblical contents according to his own principles, which had the result of sacrificing the final aim of all biblical-theological discussion. Briggs was unable to connect the lines of thought of the biblical writers.

Vos next took Briggs to task for claiming a view of inspiration that did not include the historical accuracy of the text. Briggs had argued that the chronology at the start of the Gospel of Luke was wrong at points. He also believed the songs at the beginning of that Gospel were put into the mouths of the singers by Christian poets of a later time. In Briggs’s judgment, these factors did not impact the inspiration of the text. What mattered

⁵⁶ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Review of Charles Augustus Briggs’s *The Messiah of the Gospels* and *The Messiah of the Apostles* by Geerhardus Vos in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7, no. 28 (1896): 719.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

was the inspiration experienced by the author of the canonical Luke, making the biblical text appropriate and sufficiently accurate.

Vos responded, “What justifies us in *including* within the responsibility of an inspired writer the appropriateness and sufficient accuracy of a passage for a definite practical purpose, and in *excluding* from it the correctness of the historical situation in which he has placed it?”⁶⁰ Secondly, Vos asked whether inspiration “with no higher results than to make a writing generally appropriate and sufficiently accurate for its purpose”⁶¹ could be said to be supernatural? To pick and choose as Briggs had done and yet maintain that the Scripture was inspired was to run away from the struggle inherent to the faith.

Vos continued to target Briggs the next year in his review of Ph. J. Hoedemaker’s *De Mozaische oorsprong van de wetten in de boeken Exodus, Leviticus en Numeri* (The Mosaic Origin of the Laws in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers). Vos applauded Hoedemaker’s contention that certain so-called “orthodox critics” like Briggs and Wildeboer were not being honest given their presuppositions. They claimed to be employing purely historical arguments and drawing logical inferences from the facts. But, the truth was that a philosophical factor entered at the very beginning of the process where it was determined what was possible and what was not possible through the laws of natural causation. He wrote,

It is not so much men like Kuenen and Wellhausen and their avowed naturalism that [Hoedemaker’s] accusation of a priorism is directed against, but men of the type of Briggs and Wildeboer, *i.e.*, adherents of the modern view who lay claim to being supernaturalists and evangelicals.⁶²

Vos’s lack of respect for Briggs and his methodology hinged on this point. Briggs did not admit to the existence of an antithesis between naturalism and supernaturalism, not merely in the results, but likewise in the principle of investigation. Unlike critics such as Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhausen, with whom Vos thoroughly disagreed with but still respected, Briggs had produced an artificial construction, which failed to harmonize the details of history, to replace the living organism of revelation as contained in the historical Scriptures. In Vos’s judgment, the apologetical duty of revelation-based biblical theology was to expose the inadequacy of such an attempt when compared to the inner-testimony of God’s Word.

The Prophets

In a five-part series that appeared in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, “The Modern Hypothesis and Recent Criticism of the Early Prophets,” Vos turned to an analysis of the modern hypothesis that undergirded Briggs’s hermeneutic. Briggs and other critics believed that an examination of the teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament discredited the antiquated notion of objective supernatural revelation. Vos countered that the views believed to be post-exilic redactions by the critics, and thus untrustworthy, were in most cases identical with the conservative standpoint. To rule out

⁶⁰ Ibid., 720.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Review of Ph. J. Hoedemaker’s *De Mozaische oorsprong van de wetten in de boeken Exodus, Leviticus en Numeri* by Geerhardus Vos in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 8, no. 29 (1897): 107.

the testimony of the traditional position on the prophets, as the critics had done, was a begging of the question on a grand scale. It resembled a judicial process where the desired verdict was used by one party as the test for the admitting and excluding of evidence in the trial itself. Vos concluded that the critics were no longer engaged in demonstrating their hypothesis; they were at work applying their thesis despite the scriptural evidence otherwise.

Although the critics had a priori determined what the message of the prophets must be, Vos urged conservatives to fight against the modern hypothesis displacement of Scripture. It was not merely showing that the disputed teachings were right there, but also that that they cannot be removed without doing harm to the inner organism of prophetic teaching.

At the center of Vos's argument that the critics had done injury to the inner testimony of the prophets was an extended evaluation of the critic's dissection of the book of Isaiah. After the critics gutted the highly developed Messianic ideal of Isaiah, all that was left of the prophet's message was a cold moralism. Previously, Isaiah's teaching soared high above such an ethical construction, but now with the alternations it moved within this construction for no other reason than the critics' a priori idea of what a prophet should be. Vos declared:

The pronounced Universalism, the highly developed Messianic ideal, the sweet rich note of promise so peculiarly alternating with the harsh tones of judgment, the sublime faith in the sacrosanct character of Jerusalem and Zion in the Assyrian crisis, all that has hitherto been counted specifically Isaianic must be given up; and what we keep is a stern preacher of righteousness and national destruction, the chief exponent of that cold, supremely ethical spirit which is supposed to mark the highest development of prophetism.⁶³

Major portions of the prophecy such as Isaiah 2:2–4, 8:22–9:6 and 11:1–9 were declared non-genuine because the portions in question did not agree with the premises of the critical syllogism. In Isaiah 2:2–4 the critics objected to the appearance of the temple, the attraction of the nations, and the longing for peace. Vos noted that it was Jehovah's exaltation, symbolized by the temple mountain, that attracts the nations. Further, if Isaiah did not long for peace, he would have been devoid of pity. The burden of Isaiah's ministry, as summarized in Isaiah 28:12, was to give rest to the weary.

The newer critics, knowing that the older critical exegesis of Isaiah 2 could not be sustained, declared the passage suspect simply by its reference in verse 2 to "many nations." Vos expressed his exasperation in dealing with the ever changing nature of critical thought in its attempt to avoid affirming the orthodox meaning of a text. "All the 'weak, flimsy arguments' advanced to lend some sort of external justification to this proceeding cannot conceal the fact that criticism is here moving in a circle."⁶⁴

In looking at Isaiah 8:22–9:6 and 11:1–9, Vos explained again how the critics and the actual testimony of Isaiah disagreed. The critics, who limited the prophets to ethical

⁶³ Geerhardus Vos, "The Modern Hypothesis and Recent Criticism in the Early Prophets," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 9, no. 35 (1898): 413.

⁶⁴ In using the words, "weak, flimsy arguments" Vos indicated in a footnote that he was using what the esteemed critic Abraham Kuenen thought of Bernhard Stade's declaring Isaiah 2 to be suspicious by the presence of "many nations." Ibid.

aspirations, found the passages to be inconsistent because of the inclusion of the righteousness and judgment attributed to the Messiah's work. Vos believed such an approach stripped the prophet of his central message. Isaiah believed he was the herald and interpreter of the divine plan of a sure eschatological hope, one to be effected by the pouring out of the Spirit from upon high. The Messiah, through the righteousness conferred upon him by the Spirit, and the judgment established by him, was the only one who could bring about a perfect state of affairs. The modern theory, however, had no place in the prophetic consciousness for such an eschatological hope detached from the issues of the present. Instead of recognizing that Isaiah had an inspired philosophy of history which led to a consistency of purpose, the critics created textual confusion and contradiction.⁶⁵

1898 Stone Lectures: Abraham Kuyper

As the decade closed, Vos's attention turned back to his Dutch roots. In 1898 Abraham Kuyper probably stayed with the Vos family during the two weeks from October 10–21 when he was delivering the Stone lectures on "Calvinism" at Miller Chapel.⁶⁶ Princeton had awarded Kuyper the honor two years earlier in 1896, but travel arrangements could not be made that year. In the fall of 1897, Kuyper sent a copy of his handwritten lectures to Vos and a team of Dutch-American translators. With Vos taking the lead, Henry Dosker, J.H. DeVries, A.H. Huizinga, and Nicholas Steffens worked on converting the talks from Dutch into English.⁶⁷ Kuyper worked on his own English translation, which he brought with him, but Vos and DeVries, both Princeton residents, were able to supply Kuyper with the team's completed translation when he arrived in Princeton a week before the lectures began.⁶⁸

Despite the fact that the attendance at Miller Chapel was sparse, less than 50 people at a time,⁶⁹ the lectures were heralded as a tremendous success. Kuyper proclaimed the superiority of Calvinism as a world view for all fields of life, including politics, history,

⁶⁵ Vos's research into the prophecy of Isaiah in the late 1890s also resulted in his excellent standalone article, "Some Doctrinal Features of the Early Prophecies of Isaiah." In the article, Vos painted a picture of Isaiah as theologian. Isaiah was not placed as a stranger in the midst of a mass of unassimilated material, but made at home in a world of truth where he explored on all sides the supreme thought of God's majesty that filled his soul. In this regard, a comparison can be made that Isaiah was the Old Testament Paul, and Paul the New Testament Isaiah. In both there was a deep impression of the sovereign majesty of God, a conviction of the awfulness of the divine justice, a sense of the unworthiness and helplessness of sinful man, a trust in the grace of God and insistence that the work of salvation was God's alone. Both also shared the same eschatological hope. Isaiah prophesized judgment for Israel's sin, but he confidently expected a new beginning after the judgment. At the end of Isaiah 4, the prophetic vision of the new order of things gazes upon the final glory where perfect religion will be realized. In Mount Zion, changed into a sanctuary with the divine presence hovering over it, the worship of God reigns supreme without interruption of day or night, heat or cold. See, Geerhardus Vos, "Some Doctrinal Features in the Early Prophecies of Isaiah," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 271–88.

⁶⁶ Marianne Radius believed this was the case, although certain details in her account are historically inaccurate. She stated that she was present when Kuyper was staying at their home, but Kuyper's Stone Lectures took place in 1898, eight years before she was born. In all probability, it was Herman Bavinck in 1908 who she remembered personally being at the house. See, Interview, Marianne Radius, Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

⁶⁷ Harinck, "Vos as Introducer of Kuyper," 256.

⁶⁸ Jan De Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography*, trans. Dagmare Houniet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 241.

⁶⁹ James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 262.

science, art, religion, and the future. On Saturday, October 22, the day after the conclusion of the lecture series, Princeton University conferred upon Kuyper an honorary Doctorate of Laws. Kuyper was aglow that the ceremony took place in Nassau Hall, named in honor of the House of Orange, with ex-President and Presbyterian Grover Cleveland in attendance.⁷⁰

In many ways Kuyper's appearance in Princeton marked the high point of Vos's role as Kuyper's advocate for a "positive Calvinism" in America. George Harinck writes,

Seen from the Dutch side, it was a success that Vos introduced Kuyper in one of the centers of American religion of the turn of the century. The mood of this success is reflected in Kuyper's self-confident Stone lectures, presenting a radiant Neo-Calvinism, glorified in the United States.⁷¹

The Americans were charmed, but Harinck did not believe that was the case for Vos, whom Harinck believed doubted the possibilities for Neo-Calvinism in the new world.⁷²

Although Vos joined the General Dutch Alliance that Kuyper established, even serving as the secretary of the New York City branch,⁷³ the close correspondence in letters that the two men had enjoyed since the mid-1880s reached an end after the Stone lectures. Vos was becoming more Presbyterian; Kuyper was becoming more enamored with politics. Less than three years after his triumph at Princeton, Kuyper's Antirevolutionary Party swept the 1901 general elections in the Netherlands. For the next four years, he served as prime minister of the Netherlands.

Vos concentrated on his own writings, no longer spending the countless hours translating Kuyper (or Bavinck's) Dutch works into English. Vos's writings also reflected an increased focus upon biblical-theological themes (such as the kingdom of God) and less of a focus upon the themes raised by Kuyper's Neo-Calvinism. If the life and thought of the nineteenth-century Vos was dominated by his Dutch Reformed upbringing, in the twentieth-century, his friendships and the focus of his scholarly works would be connected to Princeton, Presbyterianism, and Reformed biblical theology.

Danny E. Olinger *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.*

⁷⁰ Ibid., 264.

⁷¹ Harinck, "Vos as Introducer," 257.

⁷² Charles Dennison also believed that Vos was not as positive as some were with Kuyper's program of Neo-Calvinism, particularly as Vos began to write on the eschatological aspects of Paul's theology. Kuyper's focus was on this creation, Vos's focus was increasingly on new creation. In Dennison's words, "For Kuyper, you expound on meaning by expounding creation. For Vos, you expound on meaning by expounding re-creation." Vos's emphasis was not a denial of the importance of creation, but an understanding that creation was to the end of consummation. Comments to author, January 2, 1994, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania.

⁷³ Dennison, *Letters*, 43.

Servant Word

The Preaching of the Word of God *Is* the Word of God: The Holy Spirit's Use of Preaching in Regeneration, Sanctification, and Illumination

by Jeffrey C. Waddington

INTRODUCTION

Reformer Heinrich Bullinger said that the preaching of the Word of God *is itself* the Word of God.¹ This sentiment has been a hallmark of Reformed theology regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the message of sacred Scripture in corporate public worship in the work of regeneration, sanctification, and especially illumination. While we recognize that the Holy Spirit can work without *means*,² he *normally* uses means. That is, there is an *intellectual* element to the work of the Holy Spirit in the initial work of regeneration as well as the further work of progressive sanctification and illumination that needs to be remembered in this day and age when so many think of the work of the Holy Spirit in mystical (i.e., *non-intellectual*) terms *alone*.³ All of this is to say that under normal circumstances, the works of regeneration/effectual

¹ It has been formally codified in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), ch. 1. Sam Chan attempts to buttress the traditional Reformed perspective with an appeal to speech-act theory in *Preaching as the Word of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick/Wipf & Stock, 2016). I should note that Bullinger was not idiosyncratic in his view, but reflects the common assessment of Reformers such as Luther and Calvin.

² Westminster Confession of Faith 5.3.

³ See Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) Q&A 31 on effectual calling. Whether regeneration is identical with effectual calling or an element of it, is an interesting question which will need to be pursued on another day. I do, however, want to stress that a concern for the intellectual element of the work of the Holy Spirit in the use of means does not require that one be committed to an intellectualist anthropology. Elsewhere I have argued for a *concurrentist* anthropology or function of the various aspects or powers or faculties of the human soul involving the intellect, will, and emotions. All the capacities of the human soul were created very good by God, are fallen, and restored in the elect. There is an order or taxis to the proper functioning of the powers of the human soul (perhaps analogous to the internal relations of the persons of the Triune Godhead. See Cornelius Van Til's comments to this effect in his *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, William Edgar, ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 34–36, but this taxis does not require *subordination* of one power to another. Western philosophy and theology is littered with debates between intellectualists and voluntarists and neither are correct. For more on this see my *The Unified Operations of the Human Soul: Jonathan Edwards' Theological Anthropology and Apologetic* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications/Wipf & Stock, 2015), 148–86. A recent work that rightly stresses the intellectual aspect of Christian discipleship is Vern S. Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

calling, sanctification, and illumination involve the means of the *external preached* Word in coordination with the inscrutable *internal work* of the Holy Spirit.⁴

My goal in this article is to first walk us through some of the *biblical seedbeds* of this Reformed confession that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. This will be followed by a brief consideration of the formulation of the doctrine in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). Finally, we will consider the contemporary ramifications of holding, confessing, and carrying out this doctrinal commitment in practical terms in public corporate worship.

THE BIBLICAL SEEDBEDS

There are many places we could turn to in our consideration of whether there is in fact a biblical basis for the Reformed confidence that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. But I will focus on three texts from the New Testament: Luke 10:16, Romans 10:14–17, and 1 Peter 1:22–25. In each case we find that *the Word is integral* to the new birth, further growth, and development of Christian disciples, and that this Word comes through the *medium* of human preaching. In this public proclamation of the Word of God, the proclamation itself is the Word of God. Another way to summarize what we will find is to note that the Holy Spirit ordinarily uses the public proclamation of the Word in the drawing of sinners to himself and in the building up of the saints and that *there is nothing more powerful or efficacious* towards these ends.

In Luke 10 Jesus begins his long trek toward Jerusalem and the events of passion week. The time is coming when he will give himself up once for all for the sins of his own. The time is growing short and so he dispatches seventy (or seventy-two) disciples to go into the various towns and villages ahead of him as a sort of advance team. They are to proclaim the message of the kingdom and to heal the sick. All of this mirrors the evangelistic campaign that Jesus sent the twelve disciples on earlier in the gospel with similar results. In the earlier account and in this one Jesus expects a mixed response to the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. In this later account Jesus issues stern rebukes to several communities to which the disciples will go. In that denunciation Jesus states that “the one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). Jesus reveals here that the proclamation of the gospel *by his disciples* is tantamount to *his own* proclamation and that acceptance or rejection of his disciples’ message is the acceptance or rejection of him and God the Father.

In Romans 10:14–17 the apostle Paul reminds us that people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ *by means of* the preached Word.

⁴ This is what we mean when we say that God uses the “ordinary” means of grace: the Word, sacraments and prayer, per WSC Q&As 88–107. The biblical texts that we will shortly examine remind us that the Word that is used is the *spoken* or preached Word. This does not discount the personal silent reading of the Word, but that God has indicated he will bless (i.e., work through or with) the public oral reading and preaching of the Word to bring sinners to himself and to edify the saints. The Reformed Scholastics would refer to these as the *principium cognoscendi externum et internum* or the external and internal foundation of knowing.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe *in* him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*⁵

It seems clear here that the calling on the name of Christ unto salvation requires the sending of messengers who convey or herald a message which is then heard and believed and then embraced and concluded with the calling on the Lord. Faith, Paul says, comes through hearing the Word of Christ. Note that in verse 14 where I have italicized the word “in” that this “in” is not in the Greek text but is typically inserted in English translations. The text should read “And how are they *to believe him* of whom they have never heard?” Jesus, Paul tells us, is speaking through the proclamation of the gospel. Let the late John Murray draw the proper conclusion: “A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by the sent messengers. The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation.”⁶ We see here the necessity of the preached Word *in order to* the saving of souls (and presumably the feeding of the souls of saints). And we also see that in the public proclamation of the Word of God that Jesus *is himself* speaking. That is, if I may be so bold to state the obvious, to preach the Word of God is the Word of God itself since Jesus speaks in the act of proclamation himself.⁷

In 1 Peter 1:22–25 Peter reminds the recipients of his letter and us as well, that they (and we) have been born again by means of the imperishable seed planted in them and that that seed is the “living and abiding” Word of God which was preached to them.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” *And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*⁸

Peter notes that Christians are Christians by virtue of their having believed the imperishable seed that is the living and abiding Word of God preached to them. New life began in these saints by the proclamation of the Word of God. This new life began and continues in Christians since the Word of God is *living and abiding*.

These texts are seedbeds of the doctrine that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. We can draw these conclusions from what we have seen here: (1) When the duly recognized and appointed heralds of the gospel proclaim that gospel the

⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:58.

⁷ Paul’s citation of Isaiah 52:7 reminds us that the authoritative proclamation of the Word of God is a *joyful* task indeed.

⁸ Emphasis mine.

response that proclamation engenders is tantamount to an acceptance or rejection of Jesus and the Father. (2) The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is disseminated by means of external oral proclamation. (3) In the proclamation of the Word of God/gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus himself is speaking. (4) The new birth involves believing the living and abiding Word of God which has been publicly proclaimed. (5) This same new birth involves the implanting of the imperishable Word which in turn is believed on. (6) Since this imperishable seed is the living and abiding Word of God, it continues to bear fruit in the ongoing life of all those who believe it. All of this demonstrates the biblical provenance of the Reformed dictum that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God.

THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION

This Swiss confession from 1566 codifies the insight of Heinrich Bullinger noted at the beginning of this article. I will highlight the appropriate portions from chapter one of the confession:

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good.

Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written ‘No man shall teach his neighbor; for all men shall know me’ (Jer. 31:34), and ‘He that watereth, or he that planteth, is nothing, but God that giveth the increase’ (1 Cor. 3:7). For albeit ‘No man can come to Christ, unless he be drawn by the Heavenly Father’ (John 6:44), and be inwardly lightened by the Holy Spirit, yet we know undoubtedly that it is the will of God that his word should be preached even outwardly. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, ‘He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do’ (Acts 10:6).

For he that illuminates inwardly by giving men the Holy Spirit, the self-same, by way of commandment, said unto his disciples, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). And so Paul preached the Word outwardly to Lydia, a purple-seller among the Philippians; but the Lord inwardly opened the woman’s heart (Acts 16:14). And the same Paul, upon an elegant gradation fitly placed in the tenth chapter to the Romans, at last infers, “Therefore faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:14–17).

We know, in the mean time, that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, which is a thing appertaining to his power; but we

*speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.*⁹

First, the Word of God preached is the Word of God and none else ought to be expected. When it is preached it is received by the faithful for what it is, the very Word of God. *Note this is not said merely of the public reading or recitation of the biblical text which is to be expounded but of the whole preaching event.*

Second, it is the Word of God preached that is efficacious and not the character of the preacher. Even if the preacher should be wicked the Word of God still is the Word of God and the preaching is the Word of God.

Third, the *outward or external exposition* of the Word of God is *not made irrelevant or superfluous by the necessity of the internal work* of the Holy Spirit. *The Holy Spirit is the source of both the external Word and the internal enlightenment of the mind and renewal of the will, to use the language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.*

We see here that the Holy Spirit has “tied” himself to his own Word. While it is true that the Holy Spirit can work apart from the Word, he ordinarily works in and through the Word he himself inspired the human writers to set down. This theological grammar is not unique to the Second Helvetic Confession but is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q & A 89:

Q: How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A: The Spirit of God maketh the reading, *but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.*¹⁰

Here we see that the Holy Spirit makes the preaching of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners (i.e., illumination/regeneration and/or effectual calling) and of building up the saints in holiness and comfort through faith (illumination/sanctification). There is a *careful wedding* of the external Word inspired by the Holy Spirit and the internal correction of the intellect, will, and emotions by the Holy Spirit according to their proper order and manner/function.

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE AND APPLICATION

What do we make of this traditional Reformed doctrine? Is it in fact the case that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God in and of itself? Are we saddled with an archaic notion of the importance of preaching? I would argue that we are not saddled with an archaic notion if by archaic we mean untrue. The age of a doctrinal formulation speaks not one whit directly to its truth value and practical usefulness. Our brief consideration of three biblical texts should make us sufficiently aware of the fact that to say that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God was not the mere personal opinion of Heinrich Bullinger or the Westminster Divines but actually captures the warp and woof of the fabric of the biblical witness to itself. We could considerably

⁹ Phillip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper, 1882), 3:832–33.

¹⁰ Emphasis mine.

expand the foundation of this doctrine if I had the time and space. This is not merely an archaic leftover that needs to be quickly abandoned. On the contrary it is a doctrine we need to recall, reaffirm, and put into immediate practice if we do not so embrace it already.

Bullinger and the other Reformers understood that the Word of God was the *viva vox Dei* and the public proclamation of the Word partook of that very *living voice of God*. Have we lost faith in the power of the Word of God? Do we, instead, invest manmade stratagems with divine efficacy? While we rightly recognize that the Holy Spirit must illuminate the minds of both saints and sinners so that they would rightly receive, understand, and apply God's Word, that does not negate the necessity of the external Word. That Word, at the bare minimum, supplies the grist for the spiritual mill that the human soul becomes through the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. We grievously err when and if we pit the internal work of the Holy Spirit (the so-called *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*) against his external work of producing and sustaining and using the Scriptures and in his use of the public proclamation of that same Word.

While it is true that God can work apart from the means of his Word (his *potentia absoluta* or absolute power), under ordinary circumstances he uses the reading, but especially the public preaching of the Word as the means of bringing sinners to faith in Christ and saints to a deeper faith (the *potentia ordinata* or ordained power). God both brings about the new birth (regeneration and/or effectual calling) and the further growth in grace (illumination and sanctification) by means of the preaching of his Word. The Word is not optional. Its public proclamation is not optional. The new birth is not optional. Growth in grace is not optional.

CONCLUSION

The preaching of God's Word is itself God's Word. Jesus addresses us in the public proclamation of his very own Word. God uses means. He used human authors to write the Bible. He used human heralds to proclaim the gospel in the days of the early New Testament church. He uses human heralds now. The Holy Spirit is at work in his Word *now*. Not just back "then." Every time a duly gifted and appointed minister steps into the pulpit and expounds the Scriptures, Jesus is addressing his people through him. The preaching of the Word of God *is itself* the Word of God. There is no hope without it.¹¹

Jeffrey C. Waddington, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is stated supply of Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania.

¹¹ I have not said as much, but I have assumed throughout this essay that the minister has done his due diligence in preparation for the public proclamation of the Word of God. So, to be technical, the long form of my thesis would then be, Assuming the minister has properly prepared his sermon, the public proclamation of that portion of the Word of God he is expounding is itself the Word of God. I trust my readers know that the minister *is to* both diligently prepare for his preaching and at one and the same time, *he is not to* rely upon that preparation in the sense of expecting that the mere human preparation of a sermon is sufficient to convince and convert sinners or build them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. That is God the Holy Spirit's work.

ServantReading

Is This Really the End?

A Review Article

by Darryl G. Hart

The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church, by Peter Leithart.
Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016, ix + 225 pages, \$21.99.

In his new book on church unity, Peter Leithart adds to the burden of the local church. For starters, an average pastor has two sermons to prepare, meets with sick church members, comforts those grieving the death of loved ones, and counsels couples preparing for marriage. Your ordinary church member has a full-time job, family responsibilities, goes out to the weekly Bible study, and sometimes socializes with other church members. And now both church members and pastors will hear from Leithart in *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* that they are not doing enough. The church is divided, he complains, and Christians need to do more to overcome fragmentation.

What Leithart does not seem to notice is that local congregations are not necessarily united, nor are the denominations to which they belong. Not every church member shows up at the evening service. Some do not attend the Bible study. Others do not sign up to bring meals to families with new-born babies. And these believers attend churches that do not always support denominational activities, either by hosting missionaries on furlough, giving to denominational programs, or encouraging children away at college to attend a congregation of like faith and practice. In other words, Christians are divided not only between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, or between Protestants and Roman Catholics, or among the diversity of Protestant denominations and independent churches. Believers are divided in the ordinary parts of their lives. They do not live together. They do not dine together. Sometimes they do not even see another church member for an entire week. Is this situation fundamentally a betrayal of Christ's plea for his followers to be united? Is it simply the way life is? Or should we think about church unity in a way that adjusts to these circumstances even if members of a local congregation sometimes appear to have less in common than the local chapter of Veterans of Foreign Wars?

Leithart believes unity is important because the Bible teaches it. Oneness is a large theme in Christian theology, aside from Christ's own call for his believers to be one. God is one even in the diversity of the Trinity. Salvation is about the creation of a single (one) humanity that follows the one true God. God's plan in salvation, Leithart argues, is "to unify all tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples in Christ" (14). So too Paul calls Christians to unity of "mind, spirit, and confession" in Ephesians 4 (15). For Leithart this means that "invisible unity is not biblical unity." "Visible division," in fact, "is incompatible with the

New Testament's portrayal of the church" (21). At the same time, Leithart argues that ecclesiastical divisions have hurt the church's proclamation of the gospel. "Nothing has so weakened our witness as tragic divisions," he asserts. "Nothing has made the gospel so implausible, if not preposterous" (166). That sort of all-or-nothing phrasing punctuates the book and makes Leithart read like so many critics of a divided church—the well-meaning believers who love everybody against their critics who lack charity and harbor parochialism (or worse). This explains a lengthy part of the book about the liabilities of denominationalism and how these loyalties have prevented Western Christians from recognizing the vitality of the global church (indigenous churches in Asia, Africa, and South America).

What Leithart ignores is the actual division that existed in the New Testament, the substantial controversies between Judaizers and Paul, or among parties in the church at Corinth. Nor do we have a good conception in the New Testament of an organizational structure, such as Paul telling Timothy to send church planting reports to the elders at Ephesus. Leithart also fails to address the competition that occurred between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism after the Reformation and how this rivalry was partly responsible for the spread of Christian witness around the world. Sure, division has problems, but unity of the kind that Leithart idealizes remains abstract, almost impossible to conceive because it never existed.

To his credit, Leithart does conclude the book with some suggestions for pastors and church members at the local level. For instance, pastors should seek to observe the Lord's Supper weekly as a way of embodying the unity of the church. He also recommends that pastors participate in (or start if need be) a local association of pastors. Overtime, Leithart wonders if such fellowship and cooperation could lead to a church of, say, Birmingham, Alabama, rather than having ten different congregations in that city with attachments to different denominations. But what about the unity of the church between Mobile, Alabama, and Birmingham? Leithart is silent about such regionalism. For church members Leithart recommends participating in local charity or political organizations with Christians from other churches, as well as cooperation on missions trips, not to mention prayers for unity. Again, most of these suggestions result (perhaps) in unity at the level of a city or town. What it means for a county, state, or nation is another question.

The problem of achieving unity at local, national, and international dimensions is precisely where this book fails. Leithart does not sufficiently attend to the way that denominations and ecumenical organizations facilitate church unity at levels that go beyond the resources of a local congregation or churches in a specific community. What if denominations are an effective way of marshaling unity at the national level? And what if the ecumenicity committees of denominations are fairly effective at establishing fraternity with churches in other parts of the world? What local congregation in North America has the resources and which officers have the time to travel to Uganda to establish ecumenical ties with congregations there?

That question, in fact, points to the largest problem in Leithart's book—namely, to act as if existing social and political structures are simply background noise to biblical exegesis or theological argument on behalf of unity. In his own discussion of denominationalism and its inherent weaknesses, Leithart gives away his argument with the following admission, namely, that discussions of ecumenism or church polity "trade

in abstractions” (57). Theologians, he complains, “treat the church as a self-standing entity, without any significant connection to the other institutions and social structures that surround it.” Without considering whether Leithart himself has done this, he goes on to concede:

Every church—Presbyterian, episcopal, or congregational—is part of an ecclesial meta-structure linked to a complex net of political, legal, economic, media, and other institutions. That network of nonchurch institutions affects the way that churches relate to one another and the way churches are internally organized. We cannot do justice to questions about denominationalism and Reformational Catholicism without paying attention to meta-governmental structures. (57)

The downside of this important and poignant observation is that denominationalism is precisely the sort of ecclesiology to emerge in modern liberal societies where ecclesiastical establishments no longer exist and liberal democratic governments protect freedom of religion. In the Roman Empire before Constantine, the dominant ecclesiology yielded important urban centers with bishops who gave coherence to church life. After Constantine, church and state became engaged in a delicate set of negotiations between the emperor’s official religion and the church’s spiritual mission. After the Reformation yet another form of ecclesiology emerged, one that scaled back Christendom from the general affirmations of Christian Europe to national expressions of Christian identity (what some historians call confessionalization). And after 1789 when modern governments began to disentangle church and state, another form of ecclesiology emerged. The point of noting these different iterations of ecclesiology is to recognize that believers and church officers have always heard and practiced Christ’s call for unity in the context of what Leithart calls meta-governmental structures. In which case, for Leithart’s call for unity to make sense, he doesn’t need vague advice about local congregations but a policy paper for political, business, and political structures that will make church unity plausible and possible. Without that, Leithart’s argument is as abstract as the ecclesiology he faults.

Without such a comprehensive proposal, we are left with the idea of church unity asserted in the Confession of Faith. The first paragraph of chapter twenty-five declares, “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof.” It may be too abstract an idea for Leithart since he wants unity to be not simply invisible but tangible. Yet, this ideal of unity has the advantage of uniting all believers, the living and the dead, from Abraham and Paul to J. Gresham Machen, my parents, and me. That seems like a fairly profound understanding of unity since it encompasses that great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us. Yes, it is abstract. That is the way of mysteries. But it is also amazing to ponder that we are united in Christ with believers who have finished the race and have passed into glory. Maybe it is just me, but that appears a much more profound conception of church unity than working with Methodist neighbors at the local Salvation Army to serve meals to the homeless.

Darryl G. Hart teaches history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, and serves as an elder in Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan.

ServantReading

Genesis: A New Commentary

by Meredith G. Kline

by Bryan M. Estelle

Genesis: A New Commentary, by Meredith G. Kline, edited by Jonathan G. Kline. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016, xx + 154 pages, \$19.95, paper.

Meredith G. Kline, OPC minister and Old Testament scholar, still speaks from the grave. Thankfully this is the case because of the labor of love that his grandson Jonathan G. Kline has performed. While perusing some remaining boxes of Meredith's papers, sermons, and miscellaneous items left behind after Meredith died in 2007, Jonathan discovered a full manuscript of a commentary that Meredith had written on the book of Genesis. Jonathan, an Old Testament scholar in his own right, decided to publish the manuscript after finishing his PhD at Harvard in Hebrew Bible. He did some minor editing, cross referencing to Meredith's other books and articles, and filling in some transliterated Hebrew terms, often pointing out delightful puns from the Hebrew text, a topic in which Jonathan Kline happens to have some expertise. The commentary, without spelling, typographical, or syntactic errors, finally saw the light of day just this last year with a foreword by Michael S. Horton.

The result of this new work is that we now have some of Meredith's most mature and clear thoughts on a biblical book that he spent decades studying. Throughout his career Meredith was known for his exquisite biblical scholarship, although his writing was sometimes challenging to grasp because of his neologisms and self-publishing tendencies during some phases of his career. Nevertheless, Meredith sought to make his ideas very accessible to a wide audience in this commentary and Jonathan's editorial labors have supported that intention. What is especially helpful in the new commentary are the laconic, simple, and lucid summaries. For example, a person unfamiliar with the argument on a biblical theology of circumcision in *By Oath Consigned*, which is an earlier work of Meredith's, could quickly get up to speed if one just reads pages 66–70 of the new commentary, which summarizes the argument in a few short pages.

From this work I learned much, especially in the latter three-fifths of the book. That portion contains material that is very theologically stimulating and, for the most part, may not be found in *Kingdom Prologue*, Meredith's classroom text used for years in the biblical theology courses that he taught at various Seminaries. There are many flashes of insight into how the faith of these patriarchs functioned. Or, for example, the comments on prototypical judgment in the narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah (73). Or his comments on the binding of Isaac. Or, for example, Rachel's disrespectful treatment of Laban's household gods (31:31–35) to demonstrate the sovereignty of God (106). Or why the massacre of the Shechemites was so reprehensible (112). Or how the Joseph narrative

prepares the reader for the exodus event and how suggestive these passages are for the coming Messiah (122–140).

Mostly, for this reviewer, it was just plain enjoyable to hear Meredith's voice again through the pages of this posthumous publication. What better person to help us hear that voice again than a grandson who is also eminently qualified as a Hebrew Bible scholar to grant us such atunement? For pastors who plan to preach or teach through Genesis, or for ruling elders who plan to teach the book of Genesis in a Bible study or Sunday school, this new commentary will be a rich and helpful resource full of insights and foundational principles: There is much grist for the mill. Echoed throughout this commentary is the doctrine of sovereign initiating grace rooted in election. The unconditional act of divine mercy is demonstrated through instrumental faith in the OT patriarchs as well as NT saints as the only grounds for entitlement to heaven. From the beginnings of world history and the subsequent patriarchal age there is only one true and proper merit to earn such heavenly blessings: the active obedience of Christ. It is obvious that this saint and eminent OT scholar and minister, M.G. Kline, stayed faithful to the end.

Bryan Estelle *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.*

ServantReading

Sons in the Son *by David B. Garner*

by Ryan M. McGraw

Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ, by David B. Garner. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2016, 366 pages, \$24.99, paper.

In Ephesians 1:5 the Apostle Paul described adoption as the predestined goal toward which God in Christ is directing his elect. Adoption is the pinnacle of gospel privileges. It is often presented in Scripture as the highest honor of God's people. In spite of this fact, the church has often fallen short of treating adoption in the full scope of its biblical and theological connections. In *Sons in the Son*, David Garner presents a full-orbed biblical and systematic theology of this key doctrine. While his treatment of adoption raises difficult theological questions at points, he makes his readers engage prayerfully with many texts of Scripture while setting forth the glory of gospel adoption to the praise of God's grace. This book is not only worth reading, but it is engaging enough to cause meditation-induced insomnia.

Garner's book is thorough in its scope. He divides his ten chapters into three sections, which treat, in turn, the meaning of the term "adoption" and its history, exegesis of the five New Testament passages in which the Greek term for "adoption" appears, and development of the doctrine of adoption in light of biblical and systematic theology. Garner models well the need for systematic theology to build upon sound exegesis that is sensitive to the flow of redemptive history. His ordering of his treatment of biblical texts and his sensitivity to all three persons in the Trinity throughout make his work exegetically clear and theologically refreshing. Garner argues that adoption is not merely one gospel benefit flowing from union with Christ, but that adoption virtually subsumes and magnifies simultaneously the legal aspects of redemption in justification and its transformative aspects in sanctification (307). Following self-consciously the example of Richard Gaffin, Garner provides a solid model for the proper interdependence among exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. This makes his work an admirable endeavor that helps readers engage thoroughly with the relevant biblical material.

Sons in the Son raises at least two potentially problematic issues. The first and most obvious one is Garner's controversial argument that the primary basis of the adoption of God's elect is Christ's adoption by the Father at his resurrection (chapter 7). He argues that believers cannot receive the adoption as sons unless Christ was first adopted for them (194). This means that Christ is both the natural Son of God by virtue of his divine nature and the adopted son of God in his human nature by virtue of his resurrection. While aware of the potential of being charged with adoptionistic Christological errors and attempting to steer clear of them (179, 191), the author's primary contention is that Christ's eternal Sonship, while vital, has no redemptive characteristics (197).

However, the primary reason why most Christians (Reformed or otherwise) have argued that Christ is the natural Son of God while we are his adopted sons is due to the unity of Christ's person. Contrary to Garner's contention (203), Christ does not need to bear adoption on our behalf any more than he needs to experience the new birth in our place in order for us to be born again. Authors such as John Owen argued that Christ's incarnation was an inexact parallel to and ground for our regeneration. In like manner, the unity of Christ's person seems to demand that we are adopted sons because we are united to Christ as the natural Son. This point requires more interaction than is possible in this review, but readers should note the unconventional Christology involved in this theological construction.

The second problematic issue is Garner's presentation of historic Reformed treatments of adoption. From the classic period of Reformed theology, Garner cites only Calvin and Turretin, while appealing to the Westminster Standards without historical context for the development of adoption in those documents. The result is that he leaves readers primarily with the choice between an order of salvation in which justification is the ground of union with Christ and all other gospel benefits (as with Michael Horton, et al.) or an order in which justification, adoption, and sanctification retain no logical priorities in relation to each other as long as they all evidence union with Christ (302–3). Neither of these options, however, represents a classic Reformed orthodox *ordo salutis*, in which justification, adoption, and sanctification flowed from union with Christ and retained a logical order in relation to each other.

In addition to this, Garner represents Reformed orthodoxy as largely stumbling through the doctrine of adoption without knowing where to place it in the theological system. This fails to take into account substantial treatments of adoption in older Reformed systems of theology, especially from the mid-seventeenth through the early eighteenth centuries. While this does not make such treatments right or wrong, it is hard to justify Garner's dismissal of post-Reformation dogmatics on this subject without adequately exploring the post-Reformation development of the doctrine. It also seems off base to assert that "every aspect of redemption possesses inaugurated and future consummative eschatological realities" (136). While this is true for adoption and sanctification, it is not for other redemptive benefits, such as regeneration and, as most Reformed orthodox authors argued, justification.

David Garner's *Sons in the Son* will make readers think deeply about an oft-neglected topic in Christian theology. While they should be aware that the doctrine of adoption as presented in his work is not the only option available historically, his treatment of the subject is likely the most extensive and thorough one yet produced. The subject matter and the character of this book make it demand our attention, whether we agree with all of the author's arguments or not. This reviewer hopes that reading *Sons in the Son* will both help readers wrestle theologically with the doctrine of adoption and read more deeply in the historic Reformed tradition concerning the application of redemption.

Ryan McGraw is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as an associate professor of systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

ServantPoetry

Thomas Nashe (1567–1601)

In Time of Plague [Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss]

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss;
This world uncertain is;
Fond are life's lustful joys;
Death proves them all but toys;
None from his darts can fly;
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us!

Rich men, trust not in wealth,
Gold cannot buy you health;
Physic himself must fade.
All things to end are made,
The plague full swift goes by;
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us!

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us!

Strength stoops unto the grave,
Worms feed on Hector's brave;
Swords may not fight with fate,
Earth still holds ope her gate.
"Come, come!" the bells do cry.
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us.

Wit with his wantonness
Tasteth death's bitterness;
Hell's executioner
Hath no ears for to hear
What vain art can reply.
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us.

Haste, therefore, each degree,
To welcome destiny;
Heaven is our heritage,
Earth but a player's stage;
Mount we unto the sky.
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us.