

## ***Must Biblical and Systematic Theology Remain Apart? Reflection on Paul van Imschoot***

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*Biblical and systematic theology stand in tension as fields of study that are constructively related in theory but strictly segregated in practice. In the first place, the nature of biblical theology seems to mandate that the concerns of systematic theology exert no conscious influence upon the work of biblical theologians. Furthermore, as a rule, biblical theologies—especially those firmly grounded in the OT—only tangentially influence the work of systematians. Thus endures a stubborn, seemingly intractable impasse in academic theology. Those who nonetheless seek a voice for biblical theology in the broader world of Christian theological reflection have an unlikely ally in Paul van Imschoot, a nearly forgotten pre-Vatican II Catholic biblical theologian. Van Imschoot’s productive labors transgress received assumptions on the relationship between biblical and systematic theology and beckon present theologians to return to the grounding of Scripture for the formation of doctrine.*

KEYWORDS: *biblical theology, systematic theology, OT theology, pneumatology, Paul van Imschoot*

### INTRODUCTION

According to theologians as disparate as Paul Tillich on one hand and Millard Erickson on the other, biblical theology is one of the primary sources of Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> Yet even a cursory review of bibliographies in volumes of dogmatics reveals that theory and practice stand

1. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–1963), 1:34–36; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 12. Other significant hermeneutical influences in theological formation include historical theology, philosophy, and the writing theologian’s own situation in life. See Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 347–57.

at odds. Citation of whole-Bible biblical theologies and single Testament theologies—especially OT theologies—is typically quite sparse.<sup>2</sup> For their part, biblical theologians seem to agree that their work should provide “raw materials” for the construction of dogmatics, but as a rule they defer actual interdisciplinary work to dogmaticians.<sup>3</sup> Thus lingers the “sterile impasse” between Bible and theology that Childs discerned more than two decades ago, and large-scale bridging of the two disciplines essentially stands rooted in the realm of theory but unrealized in fact.<sup>4</sup>

In response to this unsatisfactory state of affairs, the present study assays the relevance of Paul van Imschoot: a scholar whose work intentionally straddled the biblical-theological divide, but whose writings have heretofore stimulated little sustained critical reflection. In order to read van Imschoot’s work within the context of biblical and theological studies in the twentieth century, this essay first surveys the life setting out of which his theology emerged. Then a review of reception of van Imschoot’s work introduces the issue of his methodology, a central point of contention among his critics. Next, van Imschoot’s pneumatology attracts special focus, for his many treatments of pneumatological issues permit readers to discern a thoroughly developed complex of thought that can inform a Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, the present study draws upon its preceding analysis to suggest a way forward in the

2. Regarding the citation of OT theologies, Erickson’s relatively robust appropriation of biblical-theological scholarship is a rule-proving exception; he cites Eichrodt (pp. 240, 298, 467, 469, 869), Oehler (pp. 525, 735, 869), von Rad (p. 520), and Vriezen (p. 298). In contrast, Tillich cites neither OT nor NT theologies. Vivid evidence of the estrangement of biblical and systematic theology appears in Arthur J. Keefer, “The Use of the Book of Proverbs in Systematic Theology,” *BTB* 46 (2016): 35–44.

3. Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 882–84; Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (trans. S. Neujien; Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 119. Hamilton’s recent whole-Bible biblical theology affirms the value of systematic theology, but does not address how theological ideas transfer from the Bible into doctrine. See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

4. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), xvi. A recent work by a biblical scholar and a systematic theologian may signal a new openness to cross-disciplinary collaboration. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

ongoing negotiation of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology.

PAUL VAN IMSCHOOT, CANON-THEOLOGIAN OF GHENT

Paul Emile Armand Joseph van Imschoot was born on September 17, 1889 in Ghent, Belgium in the home of his parents Marie Joséphine Anna Bourdon and Emile-Frédéric van Imschoot, a medical doctor and professor of surgery at the University of Ghent.<sup>5</sup> He remained in Ghent through his secondary education at the Jesuit-administered Collège Sainte-Barbe (present-day Sint-Barbaracollege), where in his final year he served as prefect of the school's Congregation of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>6</sup> Following graduation, van Imschoot studied at the Ghent diocese's minor seminary for a year before attending the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Residing at the Pontifical Belgian College, he earned a philosophy doctorate in 1910, received priestly ordination in 1912, and completed his S.T.D. in 1914.<sup>7</sup>

World War I interrupted van Imschoot's further studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.<sup>8</sup> He taught at a boys' secondary school in German-occupied Eeklo from April 1916 until the end of the war. Then in 1919 he returned to Ghent as professor of exegesis at the major seminary, where he began his prolific writing career that featured over seventy contributions in Latin and French to the diocesan journal *Collationes Gandavenses*. His crowning achievement during his professorship was authoring more than 130 articles in Dutch for the *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*, a collaboration between the Catholic seminary

5. Stadsarchief Gent, Paul van Imschoot birth certificate, document number 3442; Université de Gand, *Programme de cours, année académique 1889–1890* (Ghent: C. Annot-Braeckman, 1889), 8. Van Imschoot was born at Rue des foulons (present-day Voldersstraat) 16.

6. Xavier Dusausoit, "Les collèges jésuites et la société belge du XIXe siècle (1831–1914): Échanges, influences et interactions," (PhD diss., Catholic University of Louvain, 2005), 1106.

7. Johan Ickx, *De alumni van het Belgisch Pauselijk College te Rome, 1844–1994 = Les anciens étudiants du Collège Pontifical Belge à Romem, 1844–1994* (Rome: Pontifical Belgian College, 1994), 325; Luc Schokkaert, ed., *Biografisch repertorium van de priesters van het bisdom Gent, 1802–1997* (2 vols.; Leuven: KADOC, 1997), 2:534. Information from Ickx and Schokkaert provides the framework for van Imschoot's biography in the present study. Unfortunately van Imschoot's doctoral dissertations are no longer extant.

8. Untitled funeral notice for Paul van Imschoot, *ETL* 44 (1968): 666–67.

faculties of the Netherlands and Flanders.<sup>9</sup> Van Imschoot's essays are notable for their thorough coverage of theologically significant topics, and his article on Jesus Christ also appeared in an expanded version as a stand-alone book.<sup>10</sup> He became titular canon of St. Bavo's Cathedral in 1941 and theologian of the Ghent diocese in 1943.

After twenty-nine years of seminary teaching, van Imschoot retired in 1948 and became spiritual director of an order of nuns who administered Maison St. Pierre, a secondary school for girls (present-day Sint-Pietersinstituut). Despite moving away from the seminary and its library, van Imschoot continued writing and was among the early members of the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense, an annual meeting of Catholic biblical scholars. At the society's second meeting in 1950, he described his plan and method for an OT theology that was "at the point of being achieved."<sup>11</sup> In 1953 van Imschoot served as the society's president and inaugurated its meeting with his address, "The Holy Spirit: Principle of Biblical Piety."<sup>12</sup> The following year he became a permanent member of the Colloquium's Committee as a former president, and the first volume of his OT theology appeared in publication. The second volume appeared two years later.<sup>13</sup> Then for the Colloquium's most ambitious undertaking since its founding, van Imschoot presided over the

9. Adrianus van den Born et al., eds., *Bijbelsch Woordenboek* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1941).

10. E. de Cooman, "De bijbel en het Christelijk leven," *Streven* 10 (1942): 186–90, esp. 188–89; Paul van Imschoot, *Jesus Christus* (Roermond: Romen, 1941). Since van Imschoot's preferred language was French, it is possible that the later French edition of this book is actually the original. See Paul van Imschoot, *Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1944).

11. "Journées bibliques de Louvain," *ETL* 26 (1950): 552–54. Due to citation of works in multiple languages, English translations of quotations such as "sur le point d'être achevée" appear in the body of the present article for readability.

12. "Dies Studiorum Biblicorum Lovanienses," *Bib* 34 (1953): 558; untitled note, *ETL* 29 (1953): 699. The subject of van Imschoot's address was "Le St-Esprit, principe de la piété biblique." Though the Colloquium did not publish documents from the 1953 meeting, similarity of title suggests that this work appeared in publication as Paul van Imschoot, "L'Esprit de Yahweh, source de la piété dans l'Ancien Testament," *BVC* 6 (1954): 17–30.

13. Frans Neiryck, "Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense 1-50," in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J. M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), xxxiii–xlvi; Paul van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* (2 vols.; Paris: Desclée, 1954–1956).

biblical theology section of the International Catholic Bible Congress, convened in the Vatican pavilion at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.<sup>14</sup>

In the foreword to *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* volume 1, van Imschoot alluded to working in unspecified “particularly disadvantageous and trying conditions.”<sup>15</sup> Then at some point after finishing the second volume, at the height of his notoriety, van Imschoot abruptly ceased writing. Some surveys of his work imply that death prevented the completion of the projected third part of his theology, but the definitive cause of the end of van Imschoot's writing career remains a mystery. Van Imschoot would continue serving at Maison St. Pierre for five years after the International Catholic Bible Congress and then live for five further years. Despite suffering from gradual degradation of his physical and mental faculties, van Imschoot maintained a regular regimen of scholarly reflection until his final months, eventually passing away on May 25, 1968.<sup>16</sup>

#### RECEPTION OF PAUL VAN IMSCHOOT'S WORK

Fellow Catholics lauded van Imschoot's contributions to scholarship during his lifetime. In an address at the major seminary of Ghent in 1958, Joseph Coppens called van Imschoot and his successor Henri van den Bussche the two-candle “biblical candelabra” of the seminary.<sup>17</sup> The following year, Luis Alonso-Schökel wrote that van Imschoot's *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* was the only available work that supplied the fruits of OT exegesis to doctrinal theologians.<sup>18</sup> In 1965

14. J. Coppens, A. Descamps, and E. Massaux, eds., *Sacra Pagina: Miscellanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de Re Biblica* (BETL 12–13; 2 vols.; Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1959); Roger Aubert, untitled note, *RHE* 52/4 (1957): 1022–23.

15. Van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1:viii, “conditions particulièrement désavantageuses, voire pénibles.” These conditions need not imply physical pain, as in the English translation of volume 1. See Paul van Imschoot, *Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. 1: God* (trans. Kathryn Sullivan and Fidelis Buck; New York: Desclée, 1965), xii.

16. Paul van den Berghe, “In Memoriam Monseigneur Paul van Imschoot,” *CBG* 14 (1968): 270–71; Stadsarchief Gent, Paul van Imschoot death certificate, document number 1669.

17. J. Coppens, “Réception des Congressistes à Gand et à Bruges le 28 août 1958,” in *Sacra Pagina*, 1:52–61, esp. 52–54.

18. Luis Alonso-Schökel, “Argument d'écriture et théologie biblique dans l'enseignement théologique,” *NRT* 81 (1959): 337–54, esp. 354.



Pope Paul VI made van Imschoot a member of the papal household, designating him a Monsignor in recognition of his services to the Church.<sup>19</sup> Five years after van Imschoot's death, Harrington claimed that "The outstanding Roman Catholic *Theology of the Old Testament* is that of P. van Imschoot."<sup>20</sup> However during the ensuing four decades until the present, with few exceptions such as that of a lone master's thesis by a Catholic author in 1998, reference in academic works to van Imschoot has been largely "terse, stereotypical, and infrequent."<sup>21</sup>

At least three causes may account for scholarly neglect of van Imschoot's contributions to theology. First, researchers may bypass van Imschoot due to the fact that he never completed his *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, thus some aspects of OT theology remain untreated therein. For example, Hubbard and Stachurski consider van Imschoot's view on messianism unrecoverable since it would have appeared in the unfinished portion of his theology under the rubrics of salvation and judgment.<sup>22</sup>

Another historical impediment to scholarly interaction with van Imschoot is that he was a Catholic author writing in a field defined and dominated by Protestants. Non-Catholic biblical scholars typically paid little attention to their Catholic counterparts in the early to mid-twentieth century, believing that confessional strictures constrained Catholics from producing true research.<sup>23</sup> Emblematic of Protestant concern was an annual "Oath against Modernism" that van Imschoot and his colleagues swore, that they would "firmly embrace and accept all and each of the things defined, affirmed, and declared by the inerrant Magisterium of the

19. See *AAS* 58 (1966): 535.

20. Wilfrid J. Harrington, *The Path of Biblical Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 81.

21. Michael R. Stachurski, "The Old Testament as Christian Scripture: Three Catholic Perspectives," (Th.M. thesis, University of Otago, 1998), 12.

22. David Allen Hubbard, "Paul van Imschoot, *Theology of the Old Testament*" in *Contemporary Old Testament Theologians* (ed. Robert B. Laurin; Valley Forge: Judson, 1970), 191–215, esp. 209–10; Stachurski, "Old Testament," 61. In fact, van Imschoot composed lengthy entries on the Messiah and messianic expectation for the *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*. See van den Born, et al., s.v. "Messias," cols. 1060–68, and "Messiaansche verwachting," cols. 1054–60.

23. Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29.

Church, mainly in those points of doctrine directly opposed to the errors of our time.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite such required conformity to certain traditional teachings, 1943 marked a watershed in Catholic biblical studies. The papal encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* granted unprecedented freedom to employ the fruits of critical scholarship, permitting Catholic biblical-theological studies to draw much closer to the established Protestant model.<sup>25</sup> Van Imschoot specifically noted the “pressing invitation” the encyclical extended toward work such as his, and the second edition of the *Bijbelsch Woordenboek* editorialized that although critical methods had already experienced a degree of use among Catholics, the encyclical provided official approval and reassurance “for which [professional exegetes] cannot be grateful enough to the Holy See.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, even two decades following *Divino afflante Spiritu*, prominent voices in biblical scholarship still assigned van Imschoot’s OT theology the distinctive and limiting label “for Catholics.”<sup>27</sup>

24. Norbert Trippen, “Antimodernisteneid,” in *LTK* (ed. W. Kasper et al.; 3rd ed.; 11 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001), 1:761; C. J. T. Talar, “Swearing against Modernism: *Sacrorum Antistitum* (September 1, 1910),” *TS* 71 (2010): 545–66. The official oath is from Pope Pius X, “Motu proprio *Sacrorum Antistitum*,” *AAS* 2 (1910): 655–80, esp. 669–72, and an English translation appears in Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 223–25. For an overview of Catholic reaction to theological modernism with respect to Old Testament studies, see Gerald P. Fogarty, “The Catholic Church and Historical Criticism of the Old Testament” in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation* (ed. Magne Sæbø; 3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2014), III/1:244–61.

25. Pope Pius XII, “Litterae encyclicae *Divino afflante Spiritu*,” *AAS* 35 (1943): 297–325; Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation* (trans. Leo G. Perdue; 4 vols.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009–2010), 4:406; Raymond E. Brown, “Rome and the Freedom of Catholic Biblical Studies,” in *Search the Scriptures: New Testament Studies in Honor of Raymond T. Stamm* (Gettysburg Theological Studies 3; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 129–50, esp. 137.

26. Van Imschoot, *Théologie de l’Ancien Testament*, 1:viii; Adrianus van den Born et al., eds., *Bijbels Woordenboek* (rev. ed.; Roermond: Romen, 1954–1957), s.v. “*Divino afflante Spiritu*,” cols. 348–51, esp. 351—“waarvoor zij de H. Stoel niet dankbaar genoeg kunnen zijn.”

27. John Bright, “Recent Biblical Theologies: VIII. Edmond Jacob’s ‘*Theology of the Old Testament*,’” *ExpTim* 73 (1962): 304–7, esp. 304; Robert C. Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (rev. ed.; New York: Seabury, 1963), 75–76. More nuanced was Hillers’s evaluation of van Imschoot’s theology as “less consciously Roman Catholic” than those of his predecessors. See Delbert R. Hillers, “An Historical Survey of Old Testament Theology Since 1922,” *CTM* 29 (1958): 664–67, esp. 668.

A third reason that van Imschoot's work failed to gain much traction is perhaps most significant: his method of doing theology ran directly counter to the instincts and paradigmatic expectations of his Protestant contemporaries. Accordingly, the following section develops perspective on van Imschoot's contrarian theological method through discussion of the three major, related ways that it deviated from prevailing trends in Protestant biblical theology in the mid-twentieth century. These characteristics include van Imschoot's use of an organizational scheme derived from dogmatics, his rather segmented exposition of individual theological concepts within a Neoscholastic framework, and his chosen means of treating wisdom and history in the explication of OT theology.<sup>28</sup>

#### PAUL VAN IMSCHOOT'S METHODOLOGY

##### *A Dogmatic Structure for Biblical Theology*

The relatively few surveys of biblical theology that mention van Imschoot customarily note his tripartite scheme of God, humanity, and salvation: themes borrowed from systematic theology.<sup>29</sup> Critical evaluations of this plan of organization are overwhelmingly negative. Gerhard Hasel calls the theology-anthropology-soteriology progression an "external structure based upon categories of thought alien to Biblical theology."<sup>30</sup> Others opine that van Imschoot's chosen framework is "too confining," an "alien idiom of didactic exposition," an "outdated dogmatic structure"—strongly implying that arranging biblical theology

28. Also unlike most Protestants, van Imschoot includes the deuterocanonical books of the Catholic Bible within the OT canon. Citation of these works along with other ancient sources is common in biblical scholarship, therefore this is not as great a point of difference with Protestant approaches as one might assume. Note for example C. Marvin Pate et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 25, 105–18.

29. See for example Walther Zimmerli, "Biblische Theologie I: Altes Testament," in *TRE* (ed. Gerhard Krause et al.; 36 vols.; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976–2004), 6:426–55, esp. 439; Henning Graf Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical), History of," in *ABD* (ed. David Noel Freedman et al.; trans. Frederick H. Cryer; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:483–505, esp. 489.

30. Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 158–59.



according to dogmatic themes constitutes a nearly debilitating methodological flaw.<sup>31</sup>

Some degree of rejection likely derives from widespread agreement with Gabler's assertion of the need for strict separation between the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, systematic outlines for OT theologies were commonplace both during and after Gabler's era. A contemporary of Gabler, Bauer organized the very first OT theology according to theology and anthropology, concluding with a lengthy appendix on Christology.<sup>33</sup> The OT theologies of Steudel and Hävernich in the mid-nineteenth century assumed a similar form.<sup>34</sup> Davidson's early twentieth century OT theology unfolded in twelve chapters divided among theology, anthropology, and soteriology.<sup>35</sup> The appearance of Köhler's and Sellin's theologies demonstrated that it was fully possible to appropriate this traditional structure for modern critical scholarship.<sup>36</sup> Yet despite the publication of many more OT theologies since van Imschoot's in 1954–1956, none have utilized an arrangement as clearly derived from systematic theological categories as his. As for the notion that use of systematic theological-philosophical constructs

31. Elmer A. Martens, "The Flowering and Floundering of Old Testament Theology," in *A Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 169–81, esp. 177; Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 34; Sakkie Spangenberg, "Ses dekades Ou Testament-teologie (1952–2012): Van één Spreker tot verskeie menslike sprekers," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68 (2012): Art. #1273, 1–9, esp. 4—"uitgediende dogmatiese struktuur."

32. John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J.P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133–58, esp. 137.

33. Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Theologie des Alten Testaments, oder, Abriss der religiösen Begriffe der alten Hebräer* (Leipzig: Weygand, 1796), vii–xvi.

34. Johann Christian Friedrich Steudel, *Vorlesungen über die Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: G.A. Reimer, 1840), xiii–xiv; Heinrich Andreas Christoph Hävernich, *Vorlesungen über die Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1848), xv–xvi.

35. Andrew Bruce Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (ed. Seward D. F. Salmond; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914). Had Davidson lived to complete his theology himself, he may not have chosen the final arrangement, which he characterized as "too abstract for a subject like ours," (p. 12).

36. Ludwig Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (3rd rev. ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), vii–xi; Ernst Sellin, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2nd rev. ed.; Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1936), vii–viii.

necessarily distorts the presentation of biblical theology, apparently this concept has now achieved the status of conventional wisdom. However, two aspects of this assertion merit critical reconsideration: first, the idea that organizational structures derived from outside of the biblical text are inappropriate for use in biblical theology, and second, the charge of distortion itself.

First, it is necessary to observe that every biblical theology manifests a structure that is liable to criticism for its artificiality or “externality.” The diverse constellation of existing approaches to biblical theology attests that no broadly accepted organizing method arises organically from the biblical text. Each chosen system naturally highlights biblical materials that cohere with its own points of emphasis and sidelines perspectives within the canon that do not, even systems that treat the theology of biblical books one after another. This readily observable selectivity of stress is inherently idiosyncratic, ideological, and “external” to the biblical text. Since all organizational strategies for biblical theologies are external impositions, rejection of the use of dogmatic categories on the basis of their externality is not logically tenable.

Second, and more significantly, one should question whether developing a biblical theology according to concepts drawn from systematic theology must result in theological distortion. After all, theologians of all stripes unavoidably decontextualize theological ideas as they “lift” them from biblical texts through interpretation and summarization. This decontextualization is an act of abstraction, stripping away the layers of intertextual connections that powerfully inform the exegesis of biblical text. Next, theologians assemble and organize theological ideas for placement into a scholarly presentation of biblical theology. That is to say, whenever reorganized theological concepts appear within a journal article or book rather than their native biblical context, they experience re-contextualization. Re-contextualization binds together decontextualized and reorganized theological ideas with the theologian’s own subjective ideology. Each step in the threefold process of decontextualization, reorganization, and re-contextualization inherently transforms theological ideas drawn from the biblical text. If “distortion” implies departure from the internal logic of the source of theological ideas, then some degree of distortion is part and parcel of doing theology, for composing any work of biblical theology creatively blends alien elements into its presentation. Therefore, evidence of misrepresentation must accompany claims that a certain biblical theology

distorts the theological ideas under its scope of concern, otherwise the charge of distortion by itself carries little meaning.

*Segmented Exposition of Individual Theological Concepts within a Neoscholastic Framework*

Following the deconstruction of much *a priori* dismissal of van Imschoot's theology-anthropology-soteriology approach to biblical theology above, critique of van Imschoot's treatment of individual theological concepts now merits reflection. Hubbard perceived a dearth of interconnection of ideas in van Imschoot's work; his OT theology on occasion reads as if it were a compilation of theological encyclopedia entries rather than a unified work of theology.<sup>37</sup> What some readers identify as unevenness of presentation and the lack of a discernible plot-line likely stems from two causes. First, van Imschoot's preparation of a broad collection of articles for the *Bijbelsch Woordenboek* showcased his in-depth thinking on discrete issues but did not require nesting those concepts within broader systems of thought. Later, when van Imschoot marshaled a lifetime of scholarly output in order to assemble his OT theology, his chosen organizational scheme did not summon the fresh creation of thematic unity.

More importantly, the second cause of perceived uneven, segmented presentation derives from van Imschoot attending primarily to the concerns of his immediate audience rather than the world of biblical scholarship at large. A son of Catholic Flanders, Paul van Imschoot's upbringing, education, liturgical ministry, teaching, and scholarship each took place within the context of the Roman Catholic Church. All of his publications issued from Catholic presses. Except for brief periods away from his home city, van Imschoot consistently lived within five kilometers of the major seminary of Ghent and Saint Bavo's Cathedral, the seat of the Ghent diocese. Thus, it is unsurprising that some readers have sensed traces of Neoscholastic Thomism within *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, for van Imschoot's generation of Catholic theologians received firm grounding in Thomas Aquinas's philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Following the pattern of *Summa Theologiae*, the first volume of van Imschoot's theology leads with God as the first cause or "principle" of all things, followed by "God and the World," "Revelation," and finally

37. Hubbard, "Paul van Imschoot," 202; Harrington, *Path*, 85–86.

38. John H. Hayes and Frederick C. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 228; Fergus Kerr, "A Different World: Neoscholasticism and its Discontents," *IJST* 8 (2006): 128–48, esp. 129.

“God and His People”: essentially a movement from the general to the particular.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, Eichrodt’s OT theology focuses first upon the particular relationship between God and people through covenant. Then the nature of the special covenant relationship carries discussion forward to more general theological topics such as “God and the World” and “God and Man.”<sup>40</sup> Also opposite to the approach of van Imschoot, Barth’s development of thought in the first two parts of *Church Dogmatics* starts from the particular, “The Doctrine of the Word of God,” before moving to the general, “The Doctrine of God.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Barth’s theology denied the helpfulness of all but the most indirect influence of philosophy, and Barth’s life setting demanded inclusion of ethics in his theology.<sup>42</sup> Yet van Imschoot’s decidedly Catholic approach to theology not only mandated philosophical undergirding, but also relieved him of the work of the moral theologian in drawing out ethical implications and applications.<sup>43</sup> Thus from a Protestant perspective, van Imschoot turned on their heads the metanarratives and even some of the fundamental assumptions of the leading voices in mid-twentieth century biblical and systematic theology.

### *The Place of Wisdom and History in OT Theology*

Since the significant biblical theme of wisdom does not cohere well with dogmatic categories, one may suppose that biblical theologies organized according to such categories are not likely to grant wisdom literature as

39. Compare Étienne Gilson, *Le thomisme; introduction à la philosophie de Saint Thomas D’Aquin* (6th rev. ed.; Paris: J. Vrin, 1965), 31–32, 168; Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology* (trans. Paul Philibert; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 137.

40. Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (3 vols.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1933–1939).

41. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1977).

42. Harald Hegstad, “Karl Barth,” in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern* (ed. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013), 65–76.

43. Johannes Lindblom, “Vad innebär en »teologisk» syn på Gamla Testamentet?” *STK* 37 (1961): 73–91, esp. 78–79.

independent and distinct a voice as that with which wisdom speaks within the biblical canon. Apart from consideration of the way van Imschoot himself discusses wisdom, as a general principle this critique appears valid. However, failure to accord wisdom literature a theological standing corresponding to its prominence in the canon is hardly a weakness specific to biblical theologies that employ a dogmatically influenced outline.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the theology-anthropology-soteriology outline is basic and flexible enough to accommodate exposition of most any material.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, van Imschoot's coverage of topics is sufficiently comprehensive that Harrington criticizes him not for omissions, but instead for "unevenness," asserting that van Imschoot devotes too little attention to the attributes and word of God and too much to angels and demons, the concept of hypostasis, and the cult.<sup>46</sup>

Alongside wisdom, the proper treatment of the dynamic of history is perennially a vexed issue within the discipline of OT theology. Regarding the state of the question in the early to mid-twentieth century, Eißfeldt asserted that history and theology belong on two utterly separate planes.<sup>47</sup> Eichrodt contrastingly insisted that OT theology "has its place entirely within empirical-historical OT scholarship."<sup>48</sup> Adherents of Eichrodt's "cross-section" or thematic approach to OT theology thus labored to anchor their thinking in history to a greater or lesser degree, and the activity of God within history was famously a chief concern of the "Biblical Theology Movement."<sup>49</sup>

44. Charles H. H. Scobie, "The Place of Wisdom in Biblical Theology," *BTB* 14 (1984): 43–48, esp. 43–44; John F. Priest, "Where is Wisdom to Be Placed?" *JBR* 31 (1963): 275–82.

45. James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 39–40.

46. Harrington, *Path*, 83–85. Even though Harrington is Catholic and his book bore a *nihil obstat* and an *imprimi potest*, he wrote after Vatican II from a perspective closer to that of classic Protestant biblical theology than van Imschoot's.

47. Otto Eißfeldt, "Israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte und alttestamentliche Theologie," *ZAW* 44 (1926): 1–12.

48. Walther Eichrodt, "Hat die alttestamentliche Theologie noch selbständige Bedeutung innerhalb der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft?" *ZAW* 47 (1929): 83–91, esp. 89—"nach durchaus ihren Platz innerhalb der empirisch-historischen ATlichen Wissenschaft."

49. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 39–44. Though the "Biblical Theology Movement" itself is long past, history retains a significant and necessary role in all constructive models of theology. See Leo G. Perdue,



Though it appeared amid a groundswell of desire for biblical theologies that would grant history a more prominent place than in previous approaches, van Imschoot's theology limits the theological significance of history to its role as the backdrop of progressive revelation.<sup>50</sup> In marked contrast, much more closely aligned with the mid-twentieth century zeitgeist was von Rad's tradition history-based OT theology. Von Rad's first volume seized the attention of biblical scholarship when it appeared in 1957, and his theology decisively shifted and drove forward the currents of OT studies for years thereafter.<sup>51</sup> Especially in light of the great and lasting influence of von Rad's nearly contemporaneous theology, neglect or benign indifference toward van Imschoot's work is all the more apparent.

Indeed, organized according to dogmatic categories, cast in the venerable philosophical mold of Neoscholastic Thomism with little narrative continuity, and out of step with works that highlighted the roles of wisdom and history, van Imschoot's theology likely would have appeared retrograde and unimaginative to Protestant theologians in his day. Yet now, despite the many factors that detracted from a warm reception for *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* among Protestant biblical scholars at the time of its publication, six decades of historical distance allows more dispassionate review of van Imschoot's work. Therefore, as an illustration of the productivity of his theological method, the following section examines the focal point of a great deal of van Imschoot's scholarly reflection throughout life: the specific theme of pneumatology.

#### PAUL VAN IMSCHOOT'S PNEUMATOLOGY

##### *Spirit in the OT*

For van Imschoot, primitive notions encoded in the word רוח provided the foundation for biblical conceptions of pneumatology. "Spirit" is essentially air in motion, such as the wind, which ancient Hebrews may

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*Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 340–45.

50. Van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1:1–5.

51. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2 vols.; Munich: Kaiser, 1957–1960).

have conceived as YHWH's "breath." Passages depicting the action of the divine "breath" or "spirit" are similar to those that describe the work of YHWH's "arm" or "hand," though the actions of the "Spirit" are more durable. Van Imschoot observed that רוח typically exhibits feminine subject-verb agreement, thus placing רוח in the class of impersonal forces rather than personal beings.<sup>52</sup> Further, most of the verbs associated with רוח, such as "rushing upon" and "filling," evoke the effects of a powerful wind or liquid rather than the activities of a personal entity.<sup>53</sup>

In accord with the basic understanding of רוח as the "breath" of God, the ancient Hebrews saw the Spirit as the source of life. God would "blow in" the breath of life (נשמת חיים), in order to animate living beings (נפש חיה). During life, ancient Hebrews observed the effect of strong emotions upon one's own breathing and concluded that רוח was the seat of emotions, drawing the Spirit into association with the heart (לב). At the end of life people and animals would return to dust, and God would take back the רוח. Therefore רוח did not serve as a means of postmortem continuation of existence akin to an immortal soul.<sup>54</sup> In this way, OT texts depict רוח as the source of life, and certain poetic texts also portray the Spirit of YHWH involved in the act of creation and working within it.

The Spirit was not only a wellspring of life for all people but also a source of psychic phenomena in the lives of a select few. The Spirit of YHWH enabled extraordinary, short-lived, powerful acts by judges (such as Samson), kings (such as Saul), and prophets (such as Hosea, who referred to the one who prophesies ecstatically as a "man of the Spirit"). Spirit-induced psychic phenomena were often violent and could even be

52. Van Imschoot noted an exception in 1 Kgs 22:21–22 (paralleled in 2 Chr 18:20–21), where a masculine verb describes the action of רוח. "Humanness" (or personhood) is one of the primary semantic influences upon the assignment of grammatical gender in languages. Though grammatical gender need not imply "maleness" or "femaleness," it is possible that both the typical feminine and the exceptional masculine use of רוח carry semantic significance. See Marcin Kilariski, *Nominal Classification: A History of its Study from the Classical Period to the Present* (SHLS 121; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013), 11–27; Geoffrey Turner, "'Wisdom' and the Gender Fallacy," *ExpTim* 121 (2009): 121–25. Not relevant to this discussion are uses of רוח as "wind" or instances of רוח in the construct state, such as the pronoun-like רוח with pronominal suffix.

53. The framework of this section derives from a synthesis of van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1:51–54, 183–200; 2:28–35 and van den Born et al., *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*, s.v. "Geest," cols. 470–74, and "Heilige Geest," cols. 474–85. See also Paul van Imschoot, "L'action de l'esprit de Jahvé dans l'A.T.," *RSPT* 23 (1934): 553–87, esp. 553–54, 562, 575, 587.

54. Paul van Imschoot, "L'Esprit de Jahvé, source de vie dans l'Ancien Testament," *RB* 44 (1935): 481–501, esp. 482–87.

contagious, as when they manifested in Saul's messengers and Saul himself in 1 Sam 19:20–24.<sup>55</sup> The early notion of temporary effects of the Spirit eventually gave way to the concept that the Spirit permanently invested power in certain people such as Moses, Elisha, and David for the sake of their respective offices.

The prophets retained the idea of the Spirit's permanent rather than transitory activity, but began to focus upon the Spirit's work in the sphere of morality rather than the psychic realm. Under the Sinai covenant, the Spirit was a moral power that God used to accomplish his purposes, including fulfilling covenant promises. The Spirit was guide and protector of Israel, as well as conveyor of YHWH's orders. However, Israel failed to abide by the stipulations of the Sinai covenant and suffered exile as a result. Therefore the prophets looked to the future, when YHWH would faithfully save a remnant and establish a new covenant with them to bring about a complete religious and moral reform.<sup>56</sup>

The Spirit would in fact be the hallmark of this new covenant, resting permanently upon the Servant, the Prophet, and the messianic king, endowing superhuman intellectual gifts, wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, extraordinary moral qualities, and the knowledge and fear of YHWH. The Spirit would also grant strength in the exercise of judicial and military power to those who would carry out the orders of the king. Further, God would pour out the Spirit on the land, transforming treeless deserts into orchards. Above all, the messianic age would also witness God pouring out the Spirit upon all people to establish justice and peace. The Spirit would turn the people's "hearts of stone" into "hearts of flesh" to wash away the guilt of sin, to enable the people to live out God's commands faithfully, and to "know" God.<sup>57</sup>

55. Paul van Imschoot, "Vetus Testamentum: De libris prophetis," (unpublished class notes, 1942–1943), 50.

56. Paul van Imschoot, "L'esprit de Jahvé, principe de vie morale dans l'Ancien Testament," *ETL* 16 (1939): 457–67.

57. Van Imschoot, "L'Esprit de Yahweh, source de la piété dans l'Ancien Testament," 17–30; Paul van Imschoot, "L'Alliance dans l'Ancien Testament," *NRT* 74 (1952): 785–805, esp. 802–4.

Significantly, van Imschoot wrote that this future regeneration of God's people represents the very pinnacle of OT theology.<sup>58</sup>

After the time of the prophets, the Spirit became a mentor figure that actively supported the practice of discipline, virtue, and godliness. Thus the roles of Spirit and wisdom coalesced, especially in the Book of Wisdom, which seems to draw from Isaiah's theology of the Spirit to describe the role of divine wisdom in the lives of many.<sup>59</sup> Despite broadening the scope of the Spirit's present work to include "the wise," late texts still placed the inner transformation of all the people in the future messianic age.

One can summarize van Imschoot's presentation of OT pneumatology as follows. First appeared the basic conception of רוח as "breath" or "wind," which also constituted an important substratum of all subsequent Hebrew thinking on the Spirit. Before the prophets, the Spirit was a psychic power that operated temporarily in the lives of certain extraordinary individuals, and eventually worked permanently in order to empower the work of leaders. In the prophets, the Spirit became a moral force acting to fulfill YHWH's covenantal promises. In wisdom literature and other late works, the Spirit became a mentor to the wise. Finally, the Spirit would be the moral force that regenerates the hearts of the people to live rightly in the age of the Messiah.

Van Imschoot pointedly defended this progression of thought against a specific alternative view of theological development, one that instead posited a primal notion of רוח as a demonic entity that would cast people into temporary states of ecstasy. Following upon its conceptual origin in animism, the רוח then developed into a supernatural fluid that could pour into a prophet, permanently endowing him as a "man of the Spirit." Following the triumph of monotheism reflected in Isaiah, the Spirit became a designation for the immortality, majesty, and perfection of God. Ezekiel then transferred the divine Spirit to humans as source of the moral life. After the time of Ezekiel, the Hebrews viewed the Spirit as a divine hypostasis guiding and instructing the chosen people.

Certainly this alternative notion that culminated in a hypostatic view of the Spirit argued from the same texts and thus bore marks of commonality with van Imschoot's OT pneumatology. However, van

58. "Hier bereikt de leer van het O.T. haar toppunt." See van den Born et al., s.v. "Heilige Geest," col. 477. For an extended treatment of the Spirit and the new covenant see Paul van Imschoot, "L'esprit de Jahvé et l'alliance nouvelle dans l'Ancien Testament," *ETL* 13 (1936): 201–20.

59. Paul van Imschoot, "Sagesse et esprit dans l'Ancien Testament," *RB* 47 (1938): 23–49, esp. 37, 43, 46.

Imschoot's presentation not only built upon a completely different conceptual foundation, but also ended with the Spirit of YHWH as a personified *force* rather than a personalized *hypostasis*. As Harrington noted, van Imschoot treated the concept of hypostasis at considerable length, so to him this was no insignificant matter. Indeed, van Imschoot vigorously argued against even the slightest degree of hypostasization of the Spirit in the OT.<sup>60</sup> Though supposing a kind of halfway personhood seemingly proved useful to some theologians for developing theologies of the Spirit, van Imschoot charged such writers with being "much too impressed" by the Logos of Philo, the Trinitarian doctrine of the NT, and parallels in ancient religions.<sup>61</sup> Van Imschoot countered that poetic personification of the spirit, wisdom, word, name, and face of God was commonplace in the OT, but it neither encroached upon nor eroded thoroughgoing Jewish monotheism.

If one were only to read van Imschoot's works on the OT, it might appear that his pneumatology would serve only to discourage a systematic theologian from appropriating the witness of the OT for the construction of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. After all, van Imschoot stressed the completely impersonal nature of the Spirit in Jewish thinking: hardly an identification of the Spirit of YHWH with dogmatists' Third Person of the Trinity.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this is one reason why studies in pneumatology from the past half-century, whether drawing upon the OT or NT or more limited biblical corpuses, typically cite van Imschoot only sparingly.<sup>63</sup>

60. Van Imschoot (*Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1:228 n. 2) cited Heinisch as a scholar who considered the Spirit a hypostasis in a limited "religious" sense, which one can find in Paul Heinisch, *Personifikationen und Hypostasen im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1921), 20–21. The fact that Heinisch had authored the most widely-read Catholic OT theology before van Imschoot's heightens the significance of this critique. See Paul Heinisch, *Theologie des Alten Testamentes* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1940).

61. Van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 1:235—" . . . trop impressionnés soit . . ."

62. Van Imschoot allowed that, at best, one could view OT literary personification of Spirit as a "still-confused prefiguration" ("préfiguration encore confuse") of NT trinitarian doctrine that would have surprised both the Jewish authors and readers of the OT. See Paul van Imschoot, "La sagesse dans l'A.T. est-elle une hypostase?" *CG* 21 (1934): 3–10, 85–94, esp. 94.

63. For examples from the perspectives of both Testaments see Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson,



*Spirit in the NT*

Though his OT works found a broader readership, Paul van Imschoot was principally a biblical theologian. His *Bijbelsch Woordenboek* entries and several journal articles record his reflections on the Spirit from NT texts and fill out a more holistic pneumatology.<sup>64</sup>

According to van Imschoot, intertestamental Judaism carried forward ideas present in late OT writings and thus served as additional prolegomena for NT pneumatology. In intertestamental Judaism, the Spirit was a divine power that granted visions and insight to the prophets, as well as inspiration to the authors of Scripture. Though the Spirit had been permanently present to provide strength for the practice of virtue, God withdrew the Spirit after the time of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi due to the sins of Israel. Even so, some rabbis proved worthy to receive the Spirit's inspiration. Upon the announcement of Spirit-inspired rabbinic teaching, a heavenly voice or presence of the Shekinah would signify divine approval.

Van Imschoot contended that the OT concept of רוח as “breath” or “wind” remained foundational to the understanding of πνεῦμα in the NT, yet the NT took a more philosophical approach to “spirit.” Accordingly, the NT writers raised the issues of “spirit” (strong, divine power) versus “flesh” (weak, human nature) and “spirit” (God's power to deliver from sin) versus “letter” (regulations that, by themselves, cannot defeat the power of sin). Even so, according to van Imschoot, NT philosophical thinking did not likely reach the point of subdividing the human being into a dichotomous or trichotomous composite. Thus when Paul wrote of σῶμα, ψυχή, and πνεῦμα, it is possible that he reflected the Hebrew parallelism of בשר, נפש, and רוח.<sup>65</sup> Strikingly, van Imschoot wrote that most activities of the Spirit in the NT—just as in the OT—implied the actions of an impersonal force. In concord with the OT image of the רוח,

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1994), 906; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 6; Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes: The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 271; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 21, 25. In contrast, note in-depth interaction with van Imschoot in Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 48–71.

64. The framework for this section derives from van den Born et al., *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*, s.v. “Geest” and “Heilige Geest.”

65. Van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, 2:35.

the divine πνεῦμα was first a psychic force, second a moral force, and third a source of life from God.

As a psychic force, the Spirit intervened in human lives in special circumstances, as in the case of Stephen. The Spirit granted prophetic visions and insights, exorcism of demons, spectacular healing, conception of children, miracle-working faith, and spiritual discernment. At Pentecost the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in languages other than their own. Separately, the Spirit also gave the gift of tongues: ecstatic speech for praise, thanksgiving, and prayer that was unintelligible without the gift of interpretation.<sup>66</sup> All of these feats of psychic power were normally temporary. Even so, the NT closely linked the Spirit with certain offices on a more permanent basis. Prophets, teachers, deacons, and the apostles received the Spirit's power to fulfill their mission. Yet the supreme example of perpetual empowerment of the Spirit was the life of Jesus, whom the Spirit directly conceived in Mary.<sup>67</sup>

The NT also highlighted the moral, sanctifying power of πνεῦμα and closely associated Spirit with baptism. John the Baptist's baptism with water anticipated the Kingdom of God, in which the Messiah would baptize with "fire" and with the Spirit. Baptism with "fire" drew upon prophetic imagery of purifying fire, which prepared the way for the moral and religious regeneration of all people.<sup>68</sup> When a celestial voice at Jesus's baptism proclaimed him to be God's beloved son, the concomitant descent of the Spirit upon Jesus meant that God plainly designated Jesus to be the Messiah, the one who would "plunge people into sanctifying divine power" in the messianic age by baptizing them with the Holy Spirit.<sup>69</sup> The baptism of the Spirit marked the institution of the new covenant that Jesus sealed with his blood.<sup>70</sup> This covenant would

66. Paul van Imschoot, "De dono linguarum et glossolalia," *CG* 9 (1922): 65–70; van den Born et al., *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*, s.v. "Talenwonder," cols. 1480–82.

67. Van Imschoot, *Jésus-Christ*, 92.

68. On fire as a purifying agent, see Zech 13:9 and Mal 3:2–3.

69. Paul van Imschoot, "De testimonio Baptistae (Jn 1, 32-34)," *CG* 24 (1937): 93–97; van Imschoot, *Jésus-Christ*, 86–87—"plonger les hommes dans la force divine sanctifiante."

70. Paul van Imschoot, "Baptême d'eau et baptême d'Esprit Saint," *ETL* 13 (1936): 653–56; van Imschoot, "L'Alliance dans l'Ancien Testament," 805.

draw Jew and non-Jew alike to worship “in spirit and truth,” with their inner beings rendered submissive to direct instruction from God.<sup>71</sup>

The NT also expanded upon the OT concept of the Spirit as source of life. Through baptism in the Spirit, the people experienced “rebirth” into an eternal life of freedom from sin and death. The NT depicted Jesus as the giver of the Spirit and closely linked “Christ” and “Spirit.”<sup>72</sup> Thus life “in Christ” or “in the Spirit” meant a godly life in which one would experience unity with Christ and fellow believers. The NT concept of a “spiritual” resurrection body did not connote immateriality, but instead a physical body completely permeated and dominated by the divine Spirit, redeemed from the bondage of decay leading to death.

Communicating an impression of the Spirit as an extension of the power of God, the NT noted the “pouring out” of the Spirit and the Spirit’s “quenching.” Further, the NT related accounts of people baptized “with,” sealed “with,” anointed “with,” and filled “with” the Spirit. While on one hand Paul wrote of the Spirit’s autonomous activity, such as “living” (Rom 8:9), on the other hand he also described the concept of sin as if it also had life (Rom 7:17). The author of Acts in similar fashion frequently personified divine power when relating the activity of the Spirit.

Even so, van Imschoot noted that unlike the OT, the NT taught the personhood of the Spirit both implicitly and explicitly. The letter of the Jerusalem Council relayed what “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,” (Acts 15:28) pointing to the deliberative ability of a personal being. On occasion Paul’s letters likewise depicted the Spirit as a distinct actor, for example “bearing witness with our spirit” (Rom 8:16), calling out “Abba, Father,” (Gal 4:6), and “interceding with unspeakable groanings” (Rom 8:26). Parallelisms in 1 Cor 12:4–6 and 2 Cor 13:14 make it doubtful that Paul would have drawn a mere personification into a position of equal standing with Jesus and God. In Johannine literature, the Holy Spirit was an intercessor who advocated for Christ to the world and stood by the apostles in court. In a sense, the Spirit replaced Christ after his ascension in order to assist the disciples, to testify about Jesus, to refresh their memory of Jesus’s teachings, and to glorify him. Once again raising the issue of grammatical gender, van Imschoot noted that John 16:13 employed the masculine singular demonstrative pronoun

71. Paul van Imschoot, “De adoratione in Spiritu et veritate (Jn 4<sup>22ss</sup>),” *CG* 24 (1937): 265–69.

72. Paul van Imschoot, “De dono Spiritus Sancti apud Jn. 20<sup>22s</sup>,” *CG* 25 (1938): 3–5.

ἐκεῖνος to refer to the Spirit, thus signaling the Spirit's personhood.<sup>73</sup> According to John, the Spirit was a person distinct from Father and Son, present and at work among the faithful. For van Imschoot, affirmation of the personhood of the Spirit reached its climax in Matt 28:19, in the command to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>74</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

### *The Problem of Diversity without Unity in Biblical Theology*

It is the very nature of biblical theology to separate out for finer analysis the many unique theological viewpoints represented within the canon. Yet focus upon theological diversity generates an unavoidable tension, for in order to convey its findings to dogmatics, biblical theology must also explore how these concepts flow together like tributaries into a great river. Nevertheless, one recurring trend in OT studies is to resolve the tension between diversity and unity decisively in favor of diversity, that is to say, to deny underlying unity.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, lack of theological coherence in this approach renders the formation of doctrine from biblical sources an essentially arbitrary exercise.

73. The expected neuter form is ἐκεῖνο. John 16:13 also refers to the Spirit with the masculine singular reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ. When intentional, deviation from expected gender agreement norms communicates a speaker's perspective on the referent. See Kilarski, *Nominal Classification*, 25.

74. Van Imschoot judged that the *Comma Johanneum* of 1 John 5:7–8 had no bearing on trinitarian doctrine due to its absence from the most ancient Greek texts. See van den Born et al., *Bijbelsch Woordenboek*, s.v. "Drieëenheid," cols. 322–26, esp. 325–26. As noted above, despite van Imschoot's vehement rejection of hypostasization of the Spirit in the OT, he discerned testimony to the full personhood of the Spirit in the Matthean, Lukan, Johannine, and Pauline writings. Of course, denial of the Spirit as hypostasis does not necessarily lead to affirmation of the Spirit's personhood. See for example Odette Mainville, "De la rûah hébraïque au pneuma chrétien: Le langage descriptif de l'agir de l'esprit de Dieu," *Théologiques* 2/2 (1994): 21–39, esp. 30, 32, 39.

75. See for example Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002). One may find a concise summary of Gerstenberger's manifold models of ancient Israelite religion in Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Pluralism in Theology? An Old Testament Inquiry Part I: *Sojourners We Are: Social Rootings of Biblical Witness*," *Scriptura* 88 (2005): 64–72.

In the midst of a theological program that makes much of the presence of contradictory witnesses in the biblical text, Brueggemann strikes a further blow against the rationale of constructive, cohesive biblical theology. He writes, “I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way.”<sup>76</sup> In the end, if biblical theology neither reads coherent core convictions from biblical texts nor addresses the world beyond the text with any authority beyond that of rhetoric, then biblical theology is not really competent to perform its supposed role as a “bridging discipline” between biblical studies and systematic theology.

*Diversity within Unity in Biblical Theology: Theology “from” the OT*

In contrast to approaches to biblical theology that deny theological consistency and undercut real-world applicability, most recent OT, NT, and whole-Bible theologies accept that the chorus of distinct voices in the canon sing together in rich harmony rather than in cacophonous discord. Furthermore, they assume that a contemporary audience occupies the “seats” in the biblical canon’s “concert hall,” expecting to unfold before them a life-impacting, gripping work of art with a message.<sup>77</sup> Engagement with this “message” of biblical text is a key concern for systematic theology, and the question remains: How may biblical theology best transmit its findings to systematic theology? As for venturing an answer to this question, the present study proposes that the focal point of criticism of Paul van Imschoot’s theological method—its connection with the concerns of systematic theology—is precisely what suggests its relevance. Moreover, against the backdrop of three parting reflections below, the present study endorses synthesis of the fruits of contextually-sensitive exegesis into doctrines as a service that biblical theologians can, and should, perform.

76. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 66. Brueggemann warns repeatedly against theological reductionism in his work, but the ultimate effect of positing a God who is only a literary persona is to make systematic theology a *reductio ad absurdum*. See further Walter Brueggemann, “The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation,” in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (ed. Edward Ball; JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 70–88, esp. 87.

77. As Foster relates in his article, this contemporary and most receptive audience for biblical theology is the church. See Robert L. Foster, “The Christian Canon and the Future of Biblical Theology,” *HBT* 37 (2015): 1–12, esp. 6–7.



First, for all its perceived faults, broad organization according to dogmatic categories indeed provides a ready means of conveying the results of biblical-theological inquiry to the systematic theologian specifically, and onward to the church generally.<sup>78</sup> Now van Imschoot's OT theology is not the only such work to discuss the topic of the Spirit in its own right; for example Preuß reserves space under "Yahweh's Powers of Activity" for treatment of "Yahweh's Spirit."<sup>79</sup> However, the fact that one may easily consult Preuß's table of contents and leaf over to this section is likewise a consequence of his chosen organizational scheme. A different method of organization, such as that of Waltke, may not facilitate the exposition of an explicit OT pneumatology.<sup>80</sup>

Second, van Imschoot's pneumatology provides a test case to evaluate the claim that use of a systematic outline inevitably leads to listening "to the echo of [one's] own voice."<sup>81</sup> In fact, the Spirit section in van Imschoot's OT theology and his many journal articles on the subject manifest extensive interaction with ancient Near Eastern background, grammatical and syntactical issues, biblical content, and the research of scholarly colleagues in several languages. At least in the opinion of his contemporary Peinador, van Imschoot's biblical theology was the product of in-depth exegesis, synthesized into discrete themes. Thus, van Imschoot did not merely recapitulate the doctrinal stances of Neoscholasticism that were in vogue among Catholic theologians during

78. A recent work spanning biblical and systematic theological concerns is Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), which its authors describe as a "biblical doctrine of God," (p. 12). Its chapter on the Spirit (pp. 201–47) provides an apt contrast with van Imschoot's synthesizing theological method. Despite the assertions of the authors, it is likely that the strongly historical-critical orientation of *God of the Living* constrains granting "unconditional priority" in interpretation to "the internal logic of the text," (p. 205 n. 16) and in fact inhibits the systematization of theological concepts.

79. Horst Dietrich Preuß, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1991–1992), 1:183–87.

80. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 64.

81. Max E. Polley, "H. Wheeler Robinson and the Problem of Organizing an Old Testament Theology," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring* (ed. James M. Efird; Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 149–69, esp. 149.

his era.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the tendency for scholars to achieve predetermined outcomes in literary analysis—to discover what they set out to find—is certainly not a phenomenon limited to certain methods of doing biblical theology.

Third, van Imschoot's theology satisfies Stuhlmacher's dictum that biblical theology must demonstrate the firm OT rooting of NT faith.<sup>83</sup> Regarding pneumatology, van Imschoot's depiction of the Spirit as psychic power, moral force, and source of life in the OT constituted the foundation of his NT view of the Spirit. Indeed, the OT distinction between the transitory presence of the Spirit in some people versus the Spirit's enduring empowerment of others may cast light upon both temporary gifting and permanent indwelling of the Spirit after Pentecost.<sup>84</sup> The centrality of the Spirit to the new covenant foretold by the prophets also illuminates NT pneumatology and carries significant implications for Christology and eschatology. Old Testament pneumatology sets the stage for the doctrine of baptism, which must account for the concept of baptism with the Holy Spirit. Tantalizingly, van Imschoot's work on the relationship between wisdom and Spirit may even suggest an as-yet insufficiently explored avenue of wisdom's contribution to biblical and systematic theology.

In light of differing faith commitments as well as advances in linguistics, ongoing recovery of knowledge of the ancient Near East, and ever-greater access to research in the last half-century, no doubt many contemporary exegetes would register dissent with some of van Imschoot's interpretive decisions. Since he did not complete the third volume of his theology, systematic theologians may want more from van Imschoot than the full corpus of his writings can provide. Nonetheless, as review of van Imschoot's theology of the Spirit has shown, he wrote

82. Máximo Peinador, "La integración de la exégesis en la teología: Hacia una auténtica «Teología bíblica»,» in *Sacra Pagina*, 1:158–79, esp. 163–64.

83. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Wie treibt man Biblische Theologie?* (Biblich-Theologische Studien 24; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995), 25.

84. Hamilton affirms the permanent indwelling of the Spirit among post-Pentecost believers in a recent study. This is in pointed contrast to his view that OT believers were regenerate but did not experience the Spirit's indwelling. Hamilton's quest to specify the Spirit's location (dwelling within believers or not) thus maintains a different focus than van Imschoot's investigations on the Spirit's identity and activity. Also, while Hamilton devotes primary attention to the Gospel of John, van Imschoot's pneumatological reflections developed from conceptual grounding in the OT and ranged more evenly through the canon of Scripture. See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006). Hamilton does not interact with van Imschoot.

theology *from* the OT, through the NT, and onward in a form that doctrinal theologians can use. As such, Paul van Imschoot's contribution to theological method is enduring, and it may cast light upon a rarely traveled and largely uncharted path for contemporary biblical theologians to explore.

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