

## IN DEFENSE OF PROOF-TEXTING

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### I. THE INDICTMENT: PROOF-TEXTING IN THE DOCK

Proof-texting has been maligned as of late, charged in the court of theological inquiry. Many biblical scholars snicker and jeer its employment, while many systematic theologians avoid guilt by association.

In this context, we wish to mount an argument in defense of proof-texting. In so doing, we claim neither to defend all that goes under the name of proof-texting, nor to dismiss its critics' charges. Rather we argue that proof-texting is not necessarily problematic. What is more, historically it has served a wonderful function as a sign of disciplinary symbiosis amongst theology and exegesis.<sup>1</sup> We believe that a revived and renewed practice of proof-texting may well serve as a sign of lively interaction between biblical commentary and Christian doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

Two preliminary matters should be considered. Insofar as we discuss “proof-texting” or “proof texts,” we employ a term in need of definition. Traditionally, “proof texts” (*dicta probanta*) were parenthetical references or footnote/endnote references to biblical passages that undergird some doctrinal claim made, whether in a dogmatics textbook, a catechism, or a confession of faith.

Second, we should consider the way in which “proofs” were perceived to function in theology. What system of “warrant” underlies the practice of proof-texting? The assumption behind proof-texting, at least in classical Protestant theology, was not that the meaning of a cited proof-text should be self-evident to the reader apart from the hard work of grammatical, historical, literary, and theological exegesis. Modern criticisms notwithstanding, classical Protestant theologians were not naïve realists.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the assumption was that theology is a sacred science, whose “first principles” are revealed by God alone

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<sup>1</sup> It is somewhat anachronistic to speak of disciplines of theology and exegesis when dealing with the classical theological tradition of the Western churches (say, in the time of Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin). Disciplines as such were a later development within university culture. But there were different literary genres written by theologian-exegetes, and dogmatics and commentary were clearly distinct genres.

<sup>2</sup> For an earlier analysis of the perils and promise of “proof-texting,” see Daniel J. Treier, “Proof text,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 622–24.

<sup>3</sup> Carl R. Trueman, “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” *WTJ* 65 (2003) 311–25, esp. pp. 314–15.

and therefore that constructive theological argumentation must proceed on the basis of God's revealed truth, particularly as that revealed truth is communicated through individual passages of Holy Scripture, often understood as *sedes doctrinae*.<sup>4</sup>

1. *The prosecution's case.* Our suggestion is counter-intuitive for many or most readers, we imagine, and we wish to acknowledge the plethora of charges brought against proof-texting as of late. Proof-texting has been charged with three errors.

The first charge brought against the defendant is that *proof texts fail to honor the specific contexts of biblical texts*. In his essay "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," Ralph P. Martin expresses dismay at what he calls the "dogmatic approach" to reading the Bible.<sup>5</sup> It does not honor the genre, historical setting, or literary texture of biblical texts. In Martin's words, this approach "sees it [the NT] as an arsenal of proof-texts to be arranged, without much regard given to their literary form, historical context, theological purpose, or even their best translation into modern English, to form a network of probative evidence."<sup>6</sup> As the old adage has it, "a text without a context is a pretext for a proof text." The dogmatic approach of proof-texting misunderstands the way meaning is conveyed: "the meaning of Scripture is atomized by being regarded as contained in key-words or key-phrases or isolated single verses treated without respect to their neighbouring context." By construing meaning as linked to discrete words or phrases, "little attention is paid to the teaching of the passage or book in which the individual texts appear."<sup>7</sup>

Martin sees a number of problems with this approach. First, "it misuses the text of Scripture by appealing to a truncated part (a verse) instead of the larger, more intelligible unit (a paragraph or longer section, according to the writer's purpose)." Second, "it cannot escape the charge of subjectivism when isolated verses are chosen because of their apparent suitability to 'prove a point.'"<sup>8</sup> Third, "it is forgetful of God's providence in conveying his word to men not in fragmented or situation-less dicta, but in the total context of the historical milieu of an ancient people (Israel, the early church) and through the medium of a set of languages which make use of non-prescriptive modes of expression." He suggests that "failure to recall this last point turns the New Testament into a legal code or a set of cold facts, like a telephone directory."<sup>9</sup> Consider this approach indicted.

The second charge brought against the defendant is that *proof texts too easily suggest that doctrinal language is the biblical language with no sensi-*

<sup>4</sup> An early statement regarding this understanding of the Bible's role in theological science may be found in Clement of Alexandria, *Str* 7.16.95. See also Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 518.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph P. Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. Howard Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 220–21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 220.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

tivity for the horizon of the interpreter or the hermeneutical task involved in working with the biblical language. In his essay "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," Kevin Vanhoozer considers the claims of Wayne Grudem's ETS presidential address.<sup>10</sup> In that address, entitled "Do We Act as If We Really Believe that 'the Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, Is the Word of God Written?'" Grudem suggests that the way forward for evangelical theology is to pursue "whole Bible exegesis."<sup>11</sup> What does Grudem mean by "whole Bible exegesis"? He does not define it precisely, though he gives examples (e.g. Craig Blomberg's *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* and *Surprised by the Voice of God*, and D. A. Carson's *The Gagging of God*). The closest definition to what such books do, in Grudem's words, comes earlier in the article: "Not just what one verse says, or one book, but the whole of the Bible, interpreted and applied rightly to the Church today."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately Grudem offers little help here in explaining what makes for right or proper interpretation and application, beyond his insistence that it take in the full panorama of biblical teaching (being not just NT or OT study, but "whole Bible" study).

To really grasp what is involved in interpreting and applying the whole of the Bible to issues today, we must look to Grudem's own *Systematic Theology* for some methodological clarity. He offers a directive and then suggests three steps to achieve that goal. First the directive: "We should study systematic theology by collecting and understanding all the relevant passages of Scripture on any given topic."<sup>13</sup> Second, he offers the three steps: "1. Find all the relevant verses . . . 2. read, make notes on, and try to summarize the points made in the relevant verses. 3. the teachings of the various verses should be summarized into one or more points that the Bible affirms about that subject."<sup>14</sup> He does note that some verses may be pertinent even though they do not use particular words keyed to that topic, but the overwhelming push is to base systematic theology upon word studies. The theologian finds verses with words and phrases related to that topic across the biblical canon by using a good concordance. Then they try to state each verse's or section's teaching. Finally, they try to boil down these many summaries into a description of the whole Bible's message. In the end, you have a doctrinal statement capped off with parenthetical references to texts that it summarizes.

In reply, Vanhoozer says this minimizes the Bible's deployment in theology, downplaying the systematic links between various topics of theology. In dealing with issues not directly addressed in Scripture, he asks, "[I]s it really the

<sup>10</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (ed. John G. Stackhouse; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 62–63.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, "Do We Act as If We Really Believe that 'the Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, Is the Word of God Written?'" *JETS* 43 (2000) 5–26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

case that one can come to an appropriately theological understanding of birth control and gun control (to cite two of Grudem's dozen or so pressing problems) by exegeting the relevant portions of Scripture? Studying biblical words and concepts takes us only so far."<sup>15</sup> In other words, Grudem's approach does not honor the difference between biblical language and contemporary theological and ethical debates—it seems to elide any hermeneutical distance entirely.<sup>16</sup> Vanhoozer notes that we cannot overlook this difference: "It is one thing to know how a biblical author spoke or thought about a particular issue in the context of ancient Israel or the early church, quite another to relate those words and thoughts about a particular issue to the message of the Bible as a whole and to the significance of the Bible's teaching for us today."<sup>17</sup>

More recently, Vanhoozer has stated that proof-texting flattens the biblical witness by overlooking the differences in genre and literary style.<sup>18</sup> In his words, "to force every biblical sentence into the same mold in a kind of 'one size fits all' hermeneutic is to read roughshod over the diverse literary genres of Scripture."<sup>19</sup> Vanhoozer also mentions that proof-texting is not helpful in weighing biblical evidence for theological arguments: "Proof-texting assumes a uniform propositional revelation spread evenly throughout Scripture: one verse, one vote. Not only does this approach risk decontextualizing biblical discourse, it also leaves unclear just how the texts cited in support actually lend their support to the point in question."<sup>20</sup> Surely employment of narrative texts and biblical theological themes that permeate whole books or even collections of books (e.g. exile in the Minor Prophets) should play into a number of doctrines—yet these cannot always easily be referenced via word study or strict citation. In addition, poetic texts, parables, and Pauline letters all communicate in their own way, and it would be reductionistic to reduce them all to doctrinal verbiage. Such translation mistakes biblical language for contemporary dogmatics, when in fact they are distinct domains of discourse (and, yes, even Paul is not writing dogmatics *per se*).

<sup>15</sup> Vanhoozer, "Voice and the Actor" 62.

<sup>16</sup> It is also worth noting that this approach fails to distinguish between topics that the Bible directly and repeatedly speaks about (e.g. justification) and topics that the Bible speaks about only indirectly (e.g. gun control). The distinction is important to make because it determines the relative importance of general revelation for thinking about a particular topic and it determines the way in which the Bible may be employed when addressing a particular topic (i.e. Does the Bible speak explicitly and at length *to* this topic, or does it sketch the lineaments of a worldview *through which* we may look at what general revelation reveals about this topic?).

<sup>17</sup> Vanhoozer, "Voice and the Actor" 62–63.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005) 270–72. We should mention that Vanhoozer himself practices, exemplifies even, the kind of proof-texting that we call for (e.g. see n. 60 or all the parenthetical Scripture references in *The Drama of Doctrine*). But he consistently uses the term "proof-texting" to refer to a misuse of the Bible. We think it can be applied in a more laudatory manner.

<sup>19</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine* 270–71; cf. D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 94–95.

<sup>20</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine* 271.

The third charge brought against the defendant is that *proof texts interact with ecclesiastical history rather than biblical history*. Recent years have seen scholars dismiss traditional readings of certain passages, claiming that their frequent employment in theological literature owes solely to ecclesiastical tradition and not at all to exegetical rigor.<sup>21</sup> For example, a long tradition of theological work in the West has looked to Exod 3:14 as a chief text shaping its doctrine of God, joining with other texts to suggest the holiness, transcendence, simplicity, and eternity of YHWH. God names himself, “I am who I am,” and the Western theological tradition has routinely seen this to reveal a great deal about his character. Not so in much modern biblical studies. Martin Noth took the verse to delay naming of God.<sup>22</sup> In his recent commentary, Terence Fretheim argues against any metaphysical teaching in Exodus 3.<sup>23</sup> According to Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig, “all those who find here notions of ‘being,’ of ‘the-one-who-is,’ of ‘the eternal,’ are all Platonizing . . . God calls himself not ‘the-one-who-is’ but ‘the one-who-is-there,’ i.e. there for you, there for you at this place, present to you, with you or rather coming toward you, toward you to help you.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it almost seems required now for exegetes to comment on the “Platonizing” or “Hellenizing” or downright “eisegetical” tendency to see Exod 3:14 teaching anything about the character of God.<sup>25</sup> Exodus 3:14 has served as a proof-text for “classical theism,” but this says far more about the Hellenizing history of the early church and later traditionalism than it does about what God revealed at the burning bush to his servant Moses.<sup>26</sup>

In a common version of the present charge, and closely related to the first charge as well, critics accuse theologians of dislocating texts from their native literary and historical context in order to classify them according to the categories of dogmatic theology.<sup>27</sup> This anachronistic process, it is charged, inevitably distorts the meaning of Holy Scripture. D. A. Carson is a key representative of this criticism. According to Carson, dogmatic theology’s desire to integrate biblical truth “into a *system*” determined by its own (often ahistorical and/or confessional) categories is more likely to distort or miss the meaning of God’s multi-faceted word than the discipline of biblical theology, which is intrinsically more attentive to the distinctive historical and literary

<sup>21</sup> Martin, “Approaches to New Testament Exegesis” 221.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 44–45.

<sup>23</sup> Terence Fretheim, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 62–63.

<sup>24</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, “A Letter to Martin Goldner,” in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994) 191.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 140; Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 78–79; George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 23.

<sup>26</sup> For further analysis of these charges and a rebuttal, see Michael Allen, “Exodus 3 after the Hellenization Thesis,” *JTI* 3 (2009) 179–96; idem, “Exodus 3,” in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Essays* (ed. Michael Allen; London: T & T Clark, forthcoming 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 11.

shape of the text and to its particular illocutionary emphases.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, for reasons such as this, some have recently wondered whether biblical theology might be capable of doing everything that systematic theology attempts to do—only better.

These charges amount to some major concerns: proof-texting is dogmatic cherry-picking, an exegetical use of the Bible, or ecclesiastical imposition on ancient literature.

2. *The cross-examination of evidence.* We must acknowledge that the critics are on to something. All is not well in the house of systematic theology. With regard to the Bible in theology, we can speak of sins of omission and of commission.

a. *Regarding sins of omission.* Many note that the discipline has enjoyed a renaissance or revival in the last twenty to thirty years, especially in England. Whereas the 1960s were marked by “death of God theology” and the 1970s were known for the “myth of God incarnate,” the last decade has been shaped by “Radical Orthodoxy.”<sup>29</sup> Things sound more promising. While there are many blessings to note, no doubt, we must observe that the growth of English systematic theology has not been stamped by and large by consistent exegetical concern. The major lights of this time period—Colin Gunton, John Webster, Rowan Williams, Bruce McCormack—have not (as of yet) engaged in lengthy commentary of the biblical text.<sup>30</sup>

Many systematic theologians have gained an appreciation for the importance of reading the Bible theologically, so much so that “theological interpretation of Scripture” is a growing academic discipline with its own journal, book series, dictionary, and so forth. Monographs seem to pour out with hermeneutical reflection on how to read the Bible. Yet one still looks in vain for books on various doctrinal topics that really tackle the task of theological exegesis at length. Furthermore, so many theological articles focus solely on relating to cultural theory, philosophical trends, or some realm of historical theology (with the Fathers, Puritans, and the post-Reformation era being among the most frequent sources these days). Above all, however, theologians focus on discussion of methodology—again, in conversation with philosophical, hermeneutical, historical, even sociological resources. Many systematic theologians need to heed the words of ethicist Jeffrey Stout: “preoccupation with method is like clearing your throat: it can go on for only so long before you lose your audience.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology” 94–95, 97, 101.

<sup>29</sup> For those seeking introduction to the “Radical Orthodoxy” movement, see Michael Allen, “Putting Suspenders on the World: Radical Orthodoxy as a Post-Secular Theological Proposal or What Can Evangelicals Learn from Postmodern Christian Platonists,” *Them* 31 (2006) 40–53 (now available online: [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/31.2\\_Allen.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/31.2_Allen.pdf)).

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted, though, that John Webster is currently working on a commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and has prepared a number of shorter exegetical articles.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988) 163.

This tendency has not simply occurred outside the realm of evangelical theology. Indeed, Wayne Grudem has noted this temerity to engage the Bible in his assessment of contemporary evangelical theology. “For reasons I do not fully understand, within our lifetimes it seems to me a change has occurred whereby NT and OT studies seem to the outsider to be so specialized that very few scholars outside those disciplines feel competent to interpret the Bible in any published article. They suffer from what we might call ‘exegetophobia.’”<sup>32</sup> He made this assessment after surveying years of journal articles and noting a trend whereby evangelical theologians interacted with secular sources and historical theology much more frequently than any biblical texts. We note his assessment simply to point out that evangelical theologians frequently fall into the same sin of omission that has plagued many other theological traditions—a disuse of explicit biblical argumentation in writings on Christian doctrine.

b. *Regarding sins of commission.* When they do engage the Bible, many systematic theologians have been guilty of misuse. There are narrow and wide examples of misuse.

We can consider a narrow misuse, that is, how one particular issue can be approached wrongly because of misunderstanding about how biblical passages lead to Christian doctrine. For example, John Feinberg, Robert Reymond, and Wayne Grudem express disagreement with the traditional doctrine of the “eternal generation” of the Son.

If you analyze their arguments against eternal generation, they simply amount to exegesis of one key word.<sup>33</sup> Grudem is clear: “the controversy over the term ‘only begotten’ was unnecessary because it was based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Greek word *monogenēs* (used of Jesus in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:19).”<sup>34</sup> Recent linguistic study has argued against the classical rendering of the word—“only begotten”—in favor of a newer translation: “one of a kind.” Thus Jesus is called a unique son in these verses—not the singly begotten son. This parallels the usage of the term in Heb 11:17, wherein Isaac is *monogenēs* of Abraham (surely not his *only* son, for Ishmael was already on the scene). Grudem expresses frustration that the phrases “begotten of the Father before all worlds” and “begotten, not made” appear in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The notion of “eternal begetting” is not necessarily contrary to the Bible, he says, but it is surely not required by the Bible. Indeed, he goes further: “nothing in Scripture would indicate that we should affirm it.”<sup>35</sup>

The approach exemplified by Grudem suggests that doctrines must be mandated by particular words or phrases. When a proof-text—that is, a particular word seen to have dogmatic import—is no longer found to fill the role, the

<sup>32</sup> Grudem, “Do We Act As If” 11.

<sup>33</sup> Unlike Reymond and Grudem, Feinberg also expresses some analytic concern for the idea of what could be conveyed logically by the doctrine of eternal generation—his argument, thus, is more wide ranging and less reductive (*No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* [Foundations of Evangelical Theology; Wheaton: Crossway, 2001] 489).

<sup>34</sup> Grudem, “Appendix 6: The *Monogenēs* Controversy: ‘Only’ or ‘Only Begotten?’” in *Systematic Theology* 1233.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 1234.

doctrine falls. In this framework, as Kevin Vanhoozer has shown, meaning is identified with terms and clauses as opposed to broader levels of communicative action. What is more, this kind of methodology fails to note that certain doctrines may derive from the conjoining of several biblical ideas rather than from explicit biblical warrant. In this case, patristic writers based the notion of eternal generation on the NT's (especially Johannine) presentation of the consistent pattern that characterizes the Father-Son relationship, a pattern exhibited in their common life *ad intra* and in their common work *ad extra*, as well as on other biblical analogies used to describe the Father-Son relationship (e.g. God-Word [John 1:1], Glory-Radiance [Heb 1:3], etc.).<sup>36</sup> As another example, the so-called "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*) was developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to express the eternal roots of the plan of salvation in the common life of the Trinity, something of a conjoining of the doctrines of election and Trinity.<sup>37</sup> Though there is no single text that stipulates the existence of such a covenant, various texts imply the reality to which this covenantal language points.

We may also see wider misuse, wherein a whole theology can be justified by misleading standards about the use of the Bible in theology. Reviews of various theology texts can make much of mere references to texts, as if the quantity of references in and of itself demonstrates the biblical caliber of the theology. Such reviews frequently run free of analysis of the nature of such biblical reference, the contextual sensitivity of it, the way it makes good use of secondary scholarship (both classical and modern), and so forth.

Taking both errors of commission into account and acknowledging the frequent sin of omission, systematic theologians have much to which they must plead guilty as charged. Indeed the poor use of the Bible by theologians makes it far too easy for other charges to be brought against any and all "proof-texting" in theology. We think this unfortunate, yet understandable. The burden of proof has shifted upon those, like ourselves, who would suggest that proof-texting is a valid practice.

<sup>36</sup> In a recent paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Keith Johnson demonstrated that Augustine's doctrine of eternal generation does not rest simply on his interpretation of *monogenēs*. For Augustine, the doctrine rests on the various ways in which the NT portrays the Father-Son relationship, including (1) the "sender-sent one" relationship (e.g. John 4:34; 5:23–24; 5:30–47; 6:38–44; 6:57; 7:16; 7:28–29; 7:33; 8:16–18; 8:26–29; 8:42; 9:4; 12:44–50; 13:16; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 16:28; 17:3; 17:18; 20:21); (2) the relationship between the Father as "giver" and the Son as "receiver," a relationship that obtains both in God's immanent life and in his external works (e.g. John 5:19; 5:22; 5:26; 5:27; 5:36; 10:18; 17:2, 17:8; 17:11; 17:22; 18:11); (3) the ordered unity of the Father and the Son in their works (e.g. John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6); (4) analogies between the Spirit's relationship to the Father (and the Son) and the Son's relationship to the Father (e.g. John 15:26; 16:13–14). See Keith Johnson, "What Would Augustine Say to Evangelicals Who Reject the Eternal Generation of the Son?" (November 17, 2010). On patristic use of biblical analogies to explicate the Father-Son relationship, see Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: T & T Clark, 1995) 120–21.

<sup>37</sup> Richard A. Muller, "Toward the Pactum Salutis: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *MATJ* 18 (2008) 11–65; Carl Trueman, "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess or an Exercise in Doctrinal Development," *IJST* 11 (2009) 378–97.

II. IS THE EVIDENCE BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT  
OR IS THERE ANOTHER EXPLANATION?

Before discussing two models that might aid in recovering a positive understanding and use of proof-texts, we should take note of one important fact: *All of the charges brought against the use of proof-texts in Christian theology could be lodged against the Bible's own use of the Bible.* With respect to the first charge: 2 Cor 6:16–18 cites and/or alludes to a litany of OT passages (including Lev 26:12; Isa 52:11; 2 Sam 7:14) in support of the claim that “we are the temple of the living God,” but gives no indication of the distinct literary and historical contexts within which those passages are found. With respect to the second charge: Gal 3:14 equates “the blessing of Abraham”—presumably the blessings of Gen 12:3 and 15:6, which are cited in Gal 3:6 and 3:8—with “the promised Spirit.” However, the Book of Genesis does not record any explicit promise regarding the Spirit’s coming, a promise more clearly enunciated in much later prophetic texts (e.g. Joel 2:28; Isa 44:3; 59:21). Here, then, we have an example of a text being used in a doctrinally more specific sense than its original context, taken by itself, allows. With respect to the third charge: Hebrews 1 collects a series of OT texts, primarily from the Psalms, as witness to a single doctrinal theme, the Messiah’s divine sonship. However, the deity of God’s Son does not seem to be the main theological focus, if it is a focus at all, in any of these texts. Is the author of Hebrews allowing his own doctrinal interest, namely, establishing the deity of God’s Son, to drive his collection and probative use of Scripture?

The reason for noting these examples is not to dismiss Scripture’s use of Scripture. Nor is it to suggest that the apostles should be given a free hermeneutical pass when it comes to the use of proof-texts because of their status as God’s inspired spokespersons. The reason for drawing attention to these examples is to point out something now widely acknowledged by evangelical biblical scholars: namely, that the use of Scripture by Scripture cannot be understood on the basis of citation techniques alone. To the contrary, if we are to appreciate the way Scripture uses Scripture to prove a doctrinal point, then we must appreciate the larger hermeneutical frameworks within which citations are employed, the original (historical and literary) contexts within which proof-texts are found, and we must also possess a certain canonical sensitivity to how biblical motifs and themes unfold in the history of redemption, and, perhaps most importantly, how Christ is understood to be the climax of that unfolding historical development.<sup>38</sup> When such factors are acknowledged, the use of the OT in the NT is much less open to the charge of arbitrary apologetics and appears to exhibit a more coherent hermeneutical procedure than initial appearances would have led us to appreciate.

What is the lesson to be drawn from this point? Simply this: We must not confuse citation techniques (e.g. proof-texting) with hermeneutical method, whether we are considering Scripture’s use of Scripture or theology’s use of

<sup>38</sup> A helpful collection of essays in support of this perspective, which also includes opposing views, may be found in G. K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

Scripture. When it comes to the function of a proof-text in a given theological argument, we should be willing to consider whether or not a particular usage of a text might make more sense to us if we considered the underlying hermeneutical rationale and the broader exegetical context which determined that particular usage. Our belief is that, if we did so, we would in many instances come out with a different appreciation of the function of proof-texts in Christian theology than contemporary criticisms will admit. Our plea, then, is for consistency: let us lend the same patient and charitable attempt to understanding theology's use of Scripture proofs that we lend to understanding Scripture's use of Scripture's proofs. And let us not commit the fallacy of confusing a method of citation with a hermeneutical procedure. Indeed, if there is an immediate lesson to be drawn, it is this: proof-texting (as a citation technique) has biblical precedent and therefore should not be too hastily dismissed.

While the charges are serious and are not without grounds, we suggest that things may not be as they seem. While the burden of proof is upon those who wish to employ proof texts, it can be demonstrated that this is neither necessarily unhealthy nor easily dispensable. Though systematic theologians nowadays may not carry a great deal of credibility with regard to their use of the Bible, we suggest that is neither logically necessary nor traditionally the case. In other words, things might be different and, in fact, things have frequently been different. Perhaps there is another explanation for the role of proof texts in theology, and we believe a wider perspective is needed. By looking beyond our era of hyper-specialization, we can appreciate the way that proof-texting served as a synthetic symbol of the coinherence of what John Webster calls "exegetical reasoning" and "dogmatic reasoning."<sup>39</sup> To that end, we will consider the role of proof texts in the theological work of two theological giants from past centuries: Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.

1. *Thomas Aquinas.* Thomas Aquinas is a hard man to characterize. He helped mediate disputes about the legacy of Aristotle within the arts faculty at the University of Paris, the preeminent educational institution of the day. He wrote four different systems of theology (his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the *Summa Theologiae*, and the *Compendium Theologiae*—the last two were left unfinished). He participated in sizable ecumenical conversations with Eastern Christians on behalf of the papacy. Yet his day job was as *master sacra pagina*, a professor of biblical literature, giving lectures on various biblical books.

Thomas wrote commentaries and collected commentary. He left us commentaries upon Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, John, Romans, Hebrews, and numerous other biblical texts. He collected the available patristic and medieval commentary upon the Synoptic Gospels in his *Catena Aurea*, something of a precursor to today's Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture released by InterVarsity Press.

<sup>39</sup> John Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," *ATR* 90 (2008) 733–51, esp. pp. 749–50.

Thomas did not see his various tasks as separated. While his work on Aristotle or angelology was distinguished from his thinking about Amos, it was never separated intellectually. In fact the work on philosophical theology and the history of doctrine was meant to shape his reading of Scripture. Of the 38,000 citations in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*, over 25,000 references come from Holy Scripture.

What role do these proof-texts play in his theological argument? Thomas believes that *sacra doctrina* must flow from *sacra doctrina*. He bluntly states: “When it comes to the things of God, man should not easily speak of them otherwise than does Sacred Scripture.”<sup>40</sup> Scripture should guide theology.<sup>41</sup> We can see this principle shape the very form of argument in his theological masterpiece. In the question and answer format of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas raises a question, considers various answers from his opponents, lodges a contrary opinion, offers his own perspective, and then replies to each statement by his opponents. It is illuminating to see that the contrary opinions (*sed contra*: “on the other hand”) tend to either quote Scripture or ecclesial authorities (especially Augustine). The decisive role and distinct shape of biblical proof-texts not only points to the Bible’s authority but manifests the way that Thomas makes use of a rich exegetical tradition in making such references. The quotation of a biblical passage in the *Summa* is meant to point the reader to a commentary written by Thomas or to an exegetical tradition of which he and the intelligent reader would be aware.

The *Summa* covers a wider terrain than any one biblical commentary—in fact, it could be characterized as a whole-Bible commentary with its very structure being shaped by what we now call “biblical theology.”<sup>42</sup> The particular biblical commentaries contain more detailed expositions of pertinent passages that are merely referenced offhand or quoted briefly in the *Summa*. For example, he discusses the equality of power of the Father and of the Son in two types of texts (*ST* 1a.42.6 and in his *Commentary on John 5:19*). In the article in the *ST*, Thomas mentions a number of other texts in John’s Gospel (5:20; 5:30; 14:31), and he makes reference to no patristic sources. When you trace those references or quotations to his commentary, however, you see extended analysis of a deep patristic tradition. He presents Hilary of Poitiers’ anti-Arian exegesis, as well as the interpretive approaches of Augustine, Didymus the Blind, and John Chrysostom. Gilles Emery summarizes: “one can see that the *Summa* organizes and summarizes the patristic teaching of the *Catena aurea* which the commentary on St. John (posterior in time) presents in greater detail. The commentary allows one to measure the deep patristic

<sup>40</sup> *Contra errors graecorum* I, i.

<sup>41</sup> For analysis of how Thomas uses the Bible in his theological work, see Wilhelmus Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Publications of the Thomas Institut te Utrecht New Series 6; Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Christopher Baglow, “*Modus et Forma*”: A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios* (AnBib 149; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Baglow, “Sacred Scripture and Sacred Doctrine” 11–14.

roots of the *Summa's* doctrine on the subject of the equality of power of the Father and the Son."<sup>43</sup>

Sometimes he even mentions the exegetical tradition in his quotation. For example, he asks the question: "besides the knowledge we have of God by natural reason is there in this life a deeper knowledge that we have through grace?" (1a.12.13).<sup>44</sup> Three answers are given, each of which boils down to the same answer "no." Then Thomas says: "On the other hand St Paul says, *God has revealed to us through his Spirit*, a wisdom which *none of this world's rulers knew* and a gloss says that this refers to philosophers." The italicized words are biblical quotations from 1 Cor 2:8–10. Thomas not only refers to the biblical text, but he also makes reference to its history of interpretation. He concludes this sentence with a quotation from Jerome's gloss on 1 Corinthians 2, that is, Jerome's commentary upon the text as found within the lines of his Vulgate.<sup>45</sup> Thomas realizes that the gloss is an expansion or interpretation of the specific words of St. Paul—he finds this to be a plausible exegesis of the passage and references its primary or paradigmatic occurrence (in St. Jerome's work). Here a proof-text serves to draw in not only an authoritative biblical passage, but its ecclesial interpretation as exemplified in the tradition. Thomas does not expand on all of the reasons for understanding "this world's rulers" as "philosophers," but he points to an authority who has done so. The quotation and the reference to Jerome serve as a footnote, so that the readers whose interest has been piqued at this point can trace the argument further back into a vibrant interpretive tradition.

2. *John Calvin.* John Calvin is another representative of the healthy relationship between exegesis and doctrine that has characterized much of the theological tradition. The sixteenth-century Genevan Reformer is a particularly instructive example of the positive role that proof-texts might play in theology because of the methodological sophistication he exhibits in distinguishing and relating the genres of biblical commentary and dogmatic theology.

Calvin's programmatic division of labor between exegesis and dogmatics grew in part out of frustration with the commentaries produced by some of his Protestant counterparts. In the dedication of his 1540 Romans commentary to Simon Grynaeus, Calvin faulted Melancthon's approach to commentary writing for focusing too exclusively upon select doctrinal points in the biblical text to the neglect of other textual issues and themes.<sup>46</sup> By failing to follow the discourse and argument of the text closely, and by focusing primarily

<sup>43</sup> Gilles Emery, "Biblical Exegesis and the Speculative Doctrine of the Trinity in St. Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on St. John," in *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia, 2003) 306–7.

<sup>44</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin text and English translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, Vol. 3: *Knowing and Naming God (1a.12–13)* (ed. Herbert McCabe; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

<sup>45</sup> Jerome, *Missale Mixtum: Prefatione, Notis, et Appendicibus* (ed. J. P. Migne; PL 30; Paris: 1862) 752.

<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Calvin's Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 2.

upon issues of specific theological interest, this commentarial approach took the unacceptable risk of distracting readers from the message and intention of the biblical author. In the same dedicatory letter, Calvin also criticized Bullinger and Bucer for the method they employed in writing biblical commentary. Though their commentaries demonstrated greater commitment to tracing the flow of the text than did Melanchthon's, Calvin nonetheless found fault with their approach. In their commentaries, both theologians followed the (long-established) practice of capping the running commentary upon the text with long excurses on doctrinal *loci* which the text had either explicitly or implicitly mentioned.<sup>47</sup> This (to Calvin's mind cumbersome) practice also distracted readers from the rhetorical shape of the biblical text and thus represented a transgression of what he believed was the commentator's chief duty: to unfold with "lucid brevity" the mind of the author.<sup>48</sup>

Calvin's criticism was not that his contemporaries sought to elucidate dogmatic topics from the text of Scripture. For Calvin, like Aquinas before him, Scripture provided the foundation for all legitimate theological inquiry and was given by God to promote (among other things) specifically doctrinal ends. Calvin's criticism concerned the proper divisions which he believed should characterize theological labor. He believed that the work of elaborating upon the doctrinal *loci* revealed in Scripture, and of disputing relevant errors related to those *loci*, did not belong in the genre of biblical commentary because such discussions would distract the reader from the biblical author's particular argument and message. Instead, Calvin believed that the work of dogmatic exposition and disputation belonged in the genre of the *loci communes* ("common places"), a genre devoted to collecting and arranging in an orderly manner the common themes of Holy Scripture. Beginning with the 1539 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin put this genre to great service in his theological program.<sup>49</sup>

While it is important to appreciate the distinction between biblical commentary and *loci communes* in Calvin's theological program, it is more important for present purposes to appreciate their relationship. The collection and orderly arrangement of topics into *loci communes* was a practice common to many academic disciplines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> It was not an exclusively theological genre. What was distinctive about the genre's usage in Protestant theology was its relationship to biblical exegesis.

The *loci communes*, as developed by Calvin and others, was dependent upon biblical exegesis in a number of important ways. Exegesis determined both the specific *topics* that were treated in the *loci communes* and also (in

<sup>47</sup> Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 28–29.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Romans* 1.

<sup>49</sup> See Elsie A. McKee, "Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.* (ed. Elsie A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989) 154–72; and especially Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph S. Freedman, "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141 (1997) 305–64.

loose and varying ways) the *arrangement* of those topics. With respect to topics: the doctrinal themes treated in sixteenth and seventeenth century “common places” were not established by asking “What does the whole Bible say about *x*?” The topics treated in this genre were instead determined by the frequency with which they appeared in Holy Scripture—their status as truly *common* themes of the Bible—and also by the extent to which they were developed in certain foundational texts or *sedes doctrinae*. For Calvin and his contemporaries, the Bible had a discrete message, speaking specifically about certain things and not about others, and it was the job of the *loci communes* to provide a reliable summary of this discrete message. With respect to arrangement: the topics treated in the *loci communes* were often arranged according to the Bible’s unfolding historical economy of salvation,<sup>51</sup> or else according to some other biblically derived order. In Melancthon and Calvin’s cases, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans provided a key, though not exclusive, organizational structure.<sup>52</sup> The ordering principle of the *loci communes* in early Protestant dogmatics was therefore neither “timeless” nor simply “logical,” at least not in the senses that these terms are often used today.<sup>53</sup> The ordering principle in early Protestant examples of this genre reflected the theologian’s intention to re-present in a faithful manner not only the Bible’s distinctive content but also the Bible’s distinctive shape in order to assist readers in understanding the biblical text.<sup>54</sup>

It only remains to be said that, when it comes to Calvin’s *Institutes*, proof-texts functioned as shorthand references to the more extended exegetical bases for doctrinal claims that could be found in his commentaries. As Richard Muller observes: “if one wishes to ascertain the biblical basis of Calvin’s topical discussions and disputations, one *must* read the commentaries.”<sup>55</sup>

We hope to have shown the common understanding of proof texts to be insufficient and to have proposed an alternative theory for how they may function in biblical and theological studies. We considered the way they serve as short-hand references in the works of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, leading readers of their dogmatic works to appropriate interpretive discussions in their commentaries or the commentary tradition they presupposed. For these theologians, proof texts did not subvert exegetical care—they symbolized and represented its necessity. Understanding the way in which doctrines develop out of and beyond the explicit statements in biblical texts is crucial for grasping the kind of claim behind made when one gives a proof text: it does not

<sup>51</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4.1 (London: T & T Clark, 1956) 55.

<sup>52</sup> See Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* chap. 7.

<sup>53</sup> It seems that many contemporary discussions of the differing organizational principles of biblical and systematic theology have confused what Johann Gabler said *should* be the case with what historically *has* been the case. This is an unfortunate (and anachronistic) oversight.

<sup>54</sup> Consider Calvin’s stated intention in writing the *Institutes*: “it has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling. For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 4).

<sup>55</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 108.

necessarily suggest that the doctrine as stated can be found there, but it does claim that the doctrine is rooted there in principle, when viewed in its larger canonical lens and when its implications are fully teased out.

### III. CLOSING ARGUMENTS: TWO PLEAS TO THE JURY, ONE FINAL ANALOGY

What role will proof texts play in biblical and theological studies in the future? The jury should consider two suggestions in assessing the future role, if any, of proof texts. We offer these proposals whereby proof-texts need not be found guilty, but can be rehabilitated and may function as a wonderful sign of disciplinary symbiosis: theology and exegesis working hand in hand and side by side. We suggest some commitments from systematic theologians and others from biblical scholars.

First, systematic theologians must be aware of the burden of proof upon them to show that they are using the Bible well in their theological construction. They should seek to promote a biblically saturated culture amongst fellow evangelical systematic theologians. We think they should realize that suspicion will remain upon them until this has been accomplished to some degree. But they should take cheer and remain hopeful, for history shows that theologians have been remarkable exegetes.

There are two ways in which to promote a biblically saturated culture amongst evangelical systematic theologians. First, engage in writing theological commentary (whether of whole books of the Bible or simply of particular passages in journal articles). Thankfully, a number of avenues for such work have been birthed in recent years: commentary series, a journal, monograph series, and conference sessions focused on theological exegesis, theological commentary, and theological interpretation of Scripture.<sup>56</sup> More theologians should commit to an ongoing practice of doing exegetical work in their lectures, conference addresses, and their personal writing programs. Second, enrich dogmatic arguments with a great deal of exegetical excursions and engagement with works of exegetical and biblical-theological rigor. This is not simply to say that theologians should use the language of the Bible more.<sup>57</sup> One need not restrict oneself to using biblical terminology, but it would be surely strange to avoid using it or to use it less than, say, the jargon modern philosophy or cultural theory.<sup>58</sup> More important than keeping familiar biblical terminology in play in systematic theology is keeping faith with the duty to express the meaning of the Bible, and faithfulness to that calling cannot exist without lengthy, careful attention given to reflection on the shape of the canon and the study of particular verses.

<sup>56</sup> For the lay of the land, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Rusty Reno, "Biblical Theology and Theological Exegesis," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew et al; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 385–405, esp. p. 397.

<sup>58</sup> John Webster has voiced this concern in various places over the years—perhaps most forcefully in a major review, "David F. Ford: *Self and Salvation*," *SJT* 54 (2001) 548–59.

Any hope of making headway in these directions will reshape the reading program of systematic theologians. Some careful consideration should be given to which journals are required reading, what monographs and texts must be devoured to attain competency, and, finally, what ways will most likely aid one's development as a dogmatic and an exegetical thinker. A regular practice of reading theologically-interested biblical commentaries (both contemporary and classical) will likely fit in any such program, and we recommend that this be adopted by many theologians. There are institutional implications along these lines. We cannot assume that doctoral programs of the past prepared students well to do exegetically careful dogmatic theology. Too many top-notch programs will require more reading on Žižek than Zechariah or Zephaniah, more thinking about alterity than about the *imago Dei*. Without suggesting that we retreat from cultural engagement or reading of theology beyond the evangelical pale, we do want to insist that priorities ought to be placed on the biblical writings and the classical dogmatic tradition of the orthodox churches. Of course there is another danger: some may have guided students into exegetical literature to such a degree that they have much less familiarity with historical theology and the shape of doctrinal development, involving issues in hermeneutics and the like.

Second, biblical scholars should expect rigorous exegesis to lie behind such proof-texting and should engage it conversationally and not cynically. When reading an exegetical excursus or even a parenthetical reference within a dogmatic text, assume that it represents an attempt at teasing out valid implications from a portion of Scripture read in proper literary and canonical perspective. Remember that dogmatics does not merely remain within the explicit categories, much less the idiom of the Bible. Be open to implications being drawn from the conjoining of various biblical passages, even across literary divides (say, Pauline and Johannine letters, let alone the Synoptic Gospels). Belief in the divine authorship of Scripture feeds the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*)—while every text must be read within its own immediate historical context, it cannot be restrained to that most narrow horizon but must be read within a broader canonical framework as well. Expect theologians to show how we move from texts and conglomerations of texts and themes eventually to biblical-theological movements and finally to constructive dogmatic assertions. Better yet aid them in the endeavor by seeking to move beyond narrow exegetical arguments toward biblical-theological analysis in your own writing as a technical biblical scholar. The dangers of doing big picture thinking being what they are (and anyone, who tries or even watches carefully as others try, knows how perilous the attempt can be), we will do well to have all hands on board as much as is practicable.

It might be helpful to point out that systematic theologians are not the only ones seeking to make use of organizing principles that are not always explicit in the Bible. Biblical theology also employs certain organizing principles and themes that function as systems or grids.<sup>59</sup> It is unfortunate, therefore, to

<sup>59</sup> Biblical theology, of course, takes different forms. It can operate as a narrative account of the history of revelation (e.g. Geerhardus Vos). It can function to offer a theology of particular biblical books or biblical authors (e.g. the New Testament Theology series published by Cambridge Univer-

read some suggest that systematic theology imposes a foreign logic upon the Bible, while biblical theology more inductively follows the narrative shape of the Bible itself.<sup>60</sup> This is misleading for several reasons. The Bible itself is not a narrative. While it does tell a story of creation, fall, and redemption, it includes many elements and genres that cannot be classified as narrative, strictly speaking. Carson notes that biblical theology is a synthetic discipline that does not make use of all biblical materials but works selectively.<sup>61</sup> Even the gospel—the best candidate for a “center” to Scripture—cannot be identified strictly with a narrative, for it includes not only the story of Jesus but also the application of that story to the spiritual well-being of persons throughout history (namely, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection bring about the “forgiveness of sins”). Furthermore, the Bible speaks about many relationships that are not strictly historical or temporal but that are more properly causal or “communicative”<sup>62</sup> (e.g. the relationship between God and the world [Rom 11:33–36], the relationship between calling and conversion [John 6:44–45], etc.). Better to avoid claiming that either biblical theology or systematic theology is somehow closer to the Bible.<sup>63</sup> Instead we can distinguish them by noting the types of organizing principles that each discipline draws from the Bible and expands in its own idiom. Biblical theology looks to narrational elements and construes its material in a diachronic, historically-shaped format. Systematic theology actually makes wide use of this historical format (typically moving from God’s life in eternity past to predestination to creation to fall to salvation in Christ to the application of that redemption now to the last things) and inserts other biblical concerns in various places (discussing repentance under the application of redemption, even though repentance was necessary both before and after the coming of Jesus, temporally considered).<sup>64</sup> Whereas biblical theology fixes narrowly upon the history of redemption, systematic

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sity Press). It can also trace themes through the Bible (e.g. many of the studies in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series published by InterVarsity Press, which trace the theme of the temple or race through the whole canon).

<sup>60</sup> Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology” 100–101.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Geerhardus Vos was careful to eschew just such a claim in his inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary: “The very name *Biblical Theology* is frequently vaunted so as to imply a protest against the alleged un-Biblical character of Dogmatics. I desire to state most emphatically here, that there is nothing in the nature and aims of Biblical Theology to justify such an implication. . . . Dogmatic Theology is, when rightly cultivated, as truly a Biblical and as truly an inductive science as its younger sister” (“The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* [ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980] 23).

<sup>64</sup> It is too frequently overlooked that systematic theologies (like ecumenical creeds) tend to be structured based on biblical patterns or histories (whether the descent/ascent theme of NT Christology that guides the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed or the exit/return motif from the OT that shaped Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*). While systematic theology is not limited to the historical framework, it typically begins there in its organizational principles (contra Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology” 95).

theology moves beyond (though not around) this to also consider the way this history of salvation (*historia salutis*) is applied to persons (*ordo salutis*).<sup>65</sup>

Along these lines, biblical scholars will do well to familiarize themselves with the history of biblical interpretation. They will begin to see how dogmatics and exegesis can function in harmony, each enriching the other with the diverse gifts. By reading the commentaries of Calvin alongside his *Institutes* or by dipping into the expository homilies of Augustine on 1 John or Genesis, they will see how the church has always insisted on teasing out doctrinal implications from interpretive insights.

If both concerns are honored, proof texts could be a literary signal of a disciplinary symbiosis. They could serve once again to highlight the necessary interpenetration of exegesis and dogmatics.

<sup>65</sup> Instructive regarding the relationship of the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* is Richard Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006).