

## ABSTRACT

The thesis of this study is that Geerhardus Vos' biblical-theological method should be viewed as a post-Enlightenment continuation of the pre-critical federal theology of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. Vos wrote in the context of the liberalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His biblical-theological methodology was largely a resuscitation of the federal theology of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy adapted to the times in which it was written. It will be argued, therefore, that Vos should not be viewed as a novelty and/or radical paradigm shift within the Reformed theological tradition. John Owen will be used as a case test in comparing Vos' methodology with that of the seventeenth-century federal theology of Reformed orthodoxy. Two books will be the primary focus of the comparison and analysis of Vos and Owen – *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* by Geerhardus Vos<sup>1</sup> and *Theologoumena pantodapa, sive, De natura, ortu, progressu et studio, verae theologiae* (*Theological Affirmations of All Sorts, Or, Of the Nature, Rise, Progress, and Study, of True Theology*)<sup>2</sup> by John Owen. The recently published English translation of Owen's work is entitled *Biblical Theology or The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth in Six Books*.

The dissertation contains four major sections. The first section (PART I: PROLEGOMENA) provides an overall introduction to the dissertation and a brief and broad survey of the history of the discipline of biblical theology. The introduction poses several questions that will be answered in the course of the dissertation. In the survey of the history of biblical theology special focus will be placed upon Reformed theologians, especially when those of the pre-critical, post-Reformation seventeenth century (Owen's era) and the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Vos' era) are discussed. This survey will be conducted to put federal theology and biblical theology in their respective historical contexts.

The second section (PART II: BIOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL) will discuss Geerhardus Vos and John Owen separately. It is comprised of a brief biography of Vos, and then a discussion of the historical-theological context in which Vos thought, taught, and to which he contributed. The section on Owen does basically the same thing – a brief biography and then a historical-theological discussion placing Owen in his seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox context. This will set the context for PART III, where the analysis of the two books mentioned above will be conducted.

The third section (PART III: ANALYSIS) forms the heart of the dissertation. It follows a linear, redemptive-historical approach, which can be found in both Vos and Owen. Both books mentioned above were studied section by section simultaneously. The outline is, roughly speaking, that of Vos. Each section considers Vos' then Owen's thoughts on the issue(s) at hand. An attempt was made to avoid anachronisms while studying Owen. Since Vos is a well-known commodity as a Reformed biblical theologian, his work forms the basis upon which Owen is compared. Attempt was made to identify elements of biblical theology first in Vos and then seek for similar elements and patterns in Owen. What will be amply observed is that Vos resurrected federal theology and adapted it to his post-Enlightenment context under the rubric of biblical theology.

The fourth section (PART IV: CONCLUSION) will be a discussion in light of our findings. It will compare and contrast, if and when necessary, Vos and Owen. It will offer some suggestions in terms of where and how Vos fits within the history of biblical theology and, especially, how he relates to Owen and the federal theology of the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox.

The dissertation also contains two appendices: (1) an analytical outline of the dissertation and (2) a discussion on the Decalogue in the thought of key Reformed theologians with special reference to John Owen.

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<sup>1</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948, reprinted, June 1988), referenced as *BTV* here on out.

<sup>2</sup> This is J. I. Packer's translation of the Latin title. Cf. John Owen, *Biblical Theology or The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth in Six Books* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), xii, referenced as *BTO* here on out.