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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 systematicians. 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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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 1914.⁷

World War I interrupted van Imschoot's further studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.⁸ 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. Annoot-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 Rome, 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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."¹¹ In 1953 van Imschoot served as the society's president and inaugurated its meeting with his address, "The Holy Spirit: Principle of Biblical Piety."¹² 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.¹³ 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 Neiryneck, "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.¹⁴

In the foreword to *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* volume 1, van Imschoot alluded to working in unspecified “particularly disadvantageous and trying conditions.”¹⁵ 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, 1968.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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."²⁰ 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."²¹

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.²²

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.²³ 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.”²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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.”²⁷

24. Norbert Trippe, “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.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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."³⁰ 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.³¹

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.³² 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.³³ The OT theologies of Steudel and Hävernich in the mid-nineteenth century assumed a similar form.³⁴ Davidson's early twentieth century OT theology unfolded in twelve chapters divided among theology, anthropology, and soteriology.³⁵ The appearance of Köhler's and Sellin's theologies demonstrated that it was fully possible to appropriate this traditional structure for modern critical scholarship.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.