



Convivium Irenicum 2018: “Exploring Reformed Catholicity: The Whole Word for the Whole Church”

Plenary Speaker: Michael Allen, “The Central Dogma”

Michael Allen is the John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando. He is author of *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval in Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015) and editor (with Scott R. Swain) of *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), along with numerous other books, the most recent of which is *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

Location: Davenant House, Landrum, SC

Dates: May 30–June 2 AND June 6–9, 2018

You’d have to have lived under a rock for the past decade or so to have missed the chorus of calls within the Reformed and evangelical churches for a “reformed catholicity.” The vision set forth under this name takes many forms, some vague and wistful, some more sharply and historically defined. Distinctive versions have recently been set forth under different names, such as Peter Leithart’s “Reformational Catholicism” and Kevin Vanhoozer’s “Mere Protestant Christianity.” Nor is this movement necessarily new; after all, William Perkins penned *A Reformed Catholick* in 1597.

Too often, calls for “catholicity” become mere nostalgic longings for a church more in touch with its pre-Reformation past or naïve calls for an ecumenism that sets aside our differences large and small and restores the visible unity of the church of God. As such, the two terms in the phrase “Reformed catholicity” seem doomed to stand in tension with one another. And yet if *catholicity* is used in its historical sense of fullness and wholeness, we must see catholicity as the demand to proclaim the whole Word of God for the whole church, as the Protestant Reformers did. This wholeness must be a recovery of the whole counsel of God, the whole body of Christian doctrine, the whole history of the church’s life, liturgy, and traditions, and the whole mission of the church in the world. A tall order indeed.

In seeking such comprehensiveness, we must not sacrifice either clarity or charity, diffusing the church’s witness into a blurry mishmash of incompatible traditions *or* constricting it into a confessional straitjacket to exclude elements of the rich diversity which is both God’s gift to the church and the inescapable result of our finitude and fallibility. This requires us to undertake the hard biblical, historical, and systematic work of distinguishing essentials from non-essentials, matters of faith and matters of practice, eternal truths from historically-contingent forms, without thoughtlessly discarding any part of the rich inheritance we have received from the church’s past.



THE DAVENANT TRUST

In this year's Convivium Irenicum, we propose to draw upon the important historical work we have done in many past Convivia, as well as fresh examination of key historical exemplars to forthrightly engage the key questions of the church's present, sketching a coherent vision of how the church can remain rooted in God's Word without clinging stubbornly to the distinctives that divide us. Accordingly, we invite paper and panel proposals on questions such as the following:

- What is *catholicity*? Is it already innate within or does it supplement traditional Protestant principles?
- What is the relationship between *catholicity* and *confessionalism*? What are the limitations and boundaries of catholicity?
- How should we think about the relationship between Reformed Christianity and the pre-Reformation church?
- How should we think about the relationship between Reformed Christianity and contemporary un-Reformed churches (viz., Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy)?
- What are problematic formulations of "Reformed Catholicity?" What are the differences between the visions of persons like William Perkins, Philip Schaff, John Armstrong, Peter Leithart, and Kevin Vanhoozer?
- How does *catholicity* relate to irenicism?
- What does a commitment to *catholicity* imply about theological method (e.g., our responsibility to retrieve and protect historical articulations of doctrine vs. our ability to rethink doctrine in light of Scripture)?
- How does catholicity as the retrieval of the church's past relate to catholicity as a commitment to the wholeness of the church today, which is a largely non-Western church? When the two are in conflict, how do we negotiate such conflicts?

Note that although all of the above are framed as normative questions, historical explorations of these issues, uncovering models from our catholic and especially Protestant past, are also welcome.

Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words must be submitted to b.littlejohn@davenantinstitute.org by March 1, 2017 for consideration.

Please note that since there are two iterations of the Convivium this year, you will need to specify when submitting your proposal which of the two you intend to attend (or whether you are open to attend either).