Reforming the Catholic Tradition

The Whole Word for the Whole Church

REFORMING THE CATHOLIC TRADITION: THE WHOLE WORD FOR WHOLE CHURCH

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"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

—Ephesians 4:11-16

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph Minich, The Davenant Institute

IN HIS *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, D. G. Hart argues that the label "evangelical" is so elastic that it is useless for solidifying any theological or ecclesiastical identity. And indeed, it has not been uncommon in the last decade to watch theologian after theologian problematize or obsess about labels—evangelical or otherwise. Undoubtedly, some would connect the identity crisis of evangelicalism specifically to the identity crisis of Protestantism more broadly. The proliferations of thousands upon thousands of denominations in the West, and the rootlessness of much of its practices and doctrines, have been the background content of "catholicity" movements from the Mercersburg movement in the middle of the nineteenth century, to the "Reformed catholicities" of the twenty-first—each claiming the label "catholicity" in its own distinctive way. Some see it as a supplementation to their Reformed identity, some see the former as the modification of the latter, and others conflate the two altogether. Between these two moments have been similarly motivated projects far outside Reformed circles—in the paleo-orthodoxy of Thomas Oden, the attempted recovery of ancient practices in the emerging church movement, or (perhaps most obviously) the number of persons who have converted from evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Jewish Messianic Christianity, Anglo-Catholicism, and so forth.

It is important to note, however, that these questions of identity (and authority) are not raised in an existential or cultural vacuum. Indeed, there is a rough parallel between the entire conversation about "Reformed catholicity," and the current conversation and controversy over what it means to

be "American" or "Western." Roughly the same fault lines exist between those who want to go back to the Founding Fathers, to a particular interpretation of the Constitution, or to the founding sources of Western thought. These discourses can even go together. Not a few conversions to the Roman Catholic Church have been attended by the corresponding hunch that it is in the see of Rome (or Constantinople) that we can find a mechanism for the preservation of Western values in general, or American values in particular—especially in light of the failure of other American-identity "recovery" projects. The cobelligerencies on this score are fascinating to behold.

And in each of these debates, there are legitimate questions to be asked, and important lines of inquiry to follow. There is some value in speaking about the democracy of the dead. There is wisdom in a kind of deference to the opinions of ancestors whose vantage point and sense of the world was often much larger than our own. Indeed, many have pointed out that the Reformers often rhetorically justified their project by pointing to Rome as the innovator and themselves as simply trying to preserve the simple Christian faith and attendant practices.

However, the repetition of this claim can cover a multitude of historical and strategic sins. While it is true that Rome could be condemned for innovations, the Reformers were also acutely aware that many of the traditions they condemned were very old, and had been part of Christendom for close to a millennium. To this extent, therefore, there is no way and no reason to deradicalize the Reformation. The call for Reform irreducibly implied that the institutional church could be wrong, and be severely wrong, for a very long time. Tradition could be wrong. One's fathers could be wrong. The vast majority of Christendom could be wrong, and wrong in awful and long-lasting ways.

We are still adjusting to the cultural shock of this claim and its aftereffects—a claim that stands in as much tension with the Roman see as with the instincts of much traditional human culture. Whatever else the Reformers taught, and whatever else they emphasized, no realistic reading of their message could but require the church to recast the extent and limits of its authority. Many have sought to disconnect the Reformation from the fallout that occurred in the Enlightenment, but the organic connection between the two moments must be admitted. The "universal acid" of their catastrophic claim had the capacity to eat through "authorities" of a more

general than a merely ecclesiastical sort. Though largely a dialectical rather than a linear development, the crisis of authority showed up in philosophy (the reliability of the senses and reason), in theology (the historical and factual reliability of the texts), in politics (the rights of kings and governments), and so forth.

Exhibit A of this effect has, of course, been the situation in the United States of America since its inception. Denomination after denomination, disintegrated tradition after disintegrated tradition, has rendered America—for all practical purposes—an unhappy home for "tradition" in general. Some of this is cultural, and some of it is the simple manifestation of its geographic expanse, the diversity of its inhabitants (from its inception), and the constitutional refusal to prevent difference from flourishing. But in this context, the theological and cultural free-for-all has increasingly rendered its inhabits despairing of an identity (a conundrum that accounts for all sorts of movements in American culture).

Before evaluating this phenomenon, it is worth highlighting it as a simple fact. However we respond to it, the above nevertheless describes the situation in which we find ourselves. And even if we take the above-mentioned strategies, these are but Band-Aids on forces that are (at least apparently) far more powerful and prevalent than any of our suggested antidotes in Reformed confessionalism, Roman Catholicity, or the dawn of a future united church. And, as I have already stated, bound up with such strategies are usually prognostications and therapies with respect to the destiny of the West more generally.

But there is a different response to offer. What if this situation is not a problem to be overcome, but an opportunity for a kind of growth that can only come from the very consumption of heritage that feels like a crisis to us? And note that no "return to our roots" can ever recover the past. To choose one's theological or cultural roots can never be the same thing as simply *having* them. And what can be obscured in that motion, therefore, is that we exist in an irreducible state of unmoored and unhinged agency in respect of the most fundamental questions of truth and life. We are forced to be ecclesiastically and culturally free, and no free conversion to Rome, or sentiment about our confessions, can erase this.

Indeed, our one and only option (even if retrospectively redescribed) is to *make choices* about what seems most prudent to us given what we can see and know from our own vantage point. And it is precisely in the irre-

ducibility of this choice that Reformed catholicity can be an aid. The Reformed synthesis is cryptically and seminally captured in Luther's speech at Worms—a manifesto of the Protestant movement, itself the surrogate of anything that we retroactively project upon and preserve in the "West." To wit, common to man are God's two books of Scripture and reason. And we ultimately must submit and subject our conscience to these alone. Indeed, reason is the most "universal" (i.e., catholic) tool of all. The project of the Enlightenment, on this score, was not defective for its pretension to universality, but for its particular conflations of the particular with the universal and vice versa. But what we see in the Reformation, and in the Protestant tradition that followed it, was an "in principle" openness to revision, to maturity, to growth in grace (perhaps paralleled in the openness of all modern constitutions to "amendment"). If the Reformation was a legitimate moment, then the church must always be open to new understanding. And for this reason, the Reformed churches rarely received even the ecumenical creeds as inerrant in themselves, but because they consciously agreed with the consensual exegesis they represented. But "receiving" the creeds is a far cry from simply assuming them. It is not that the doctrine is different, but one's relationship to it most certainly is—just as the child's relationship to food is different than that of the preparer of the meal.

And this can sound scary. Letting the buck stop at "Scripture" and "reason" sure sounds like a recipe for disaster. And indeed, anti-Protestant polemicists and shamefaced Protestants make much of this concern. But again, this simply is the situation of Christendom, and it does not change simply because one decides to treat a particular creed or church as infallible. One makes that choice, hopefully, as a free and responsible individual. Moreover, the only appeals one has to persuade others to do the same are, ironically, Scripture and reason. Scary or not, this is our situation. Reformed catholicity, then, is simply to put in discursive and programmatic terms what we already find ourselves doing when we're doing anything useful. We *all* behave like Protestants now, and radically so.

But what I want to claim here is that the Reformed solution was not merely an unfortunate accommodation to tumultuous times, but the solidification of a vital project that began in the early church and which was the only game in town for a proper orientation to the modern world that followed it. In truth, the only path through the thicket of modernity is to be found in self-possessed responsibility toward the future. What the Reform-

ers left us with was not only a body of doctrine, but a pattern of thinking (in the largest Renaissance sense of this term) and of exegesis. Whatever the controversy, the relentless push of the Protestant project was to understand the Scriptures more and to understand reality more. It is in this intersection that God speaks, and the unity of the church and of society was to be found through that common frame of reference rather than outside of it. To stand in this project today is not merely to agree with our Protestant fathers on each point of doctrine, but to courageously remain in a project that pushes at the boundaries of our knowledge and wisdom.

It is obvious, then, that what I describe here as "Reformed catholicity" has little in common with those versions of it that think of Protestantism as requiring principled supplementation from other traditions. What those proposals miss is that the principle of maturity and supplementation is already built into the project's first principles. As such, what we require is not some Protestantism "plus" package, but rather to recover and absorb the wisdom of our Protestant fathers themselves who thought with extreme care about the principles of theological and cultural maturity. And interestingly, there is a parallel here with discourse about the fate of the West generally. Many think of it as requiring principled supplementation with foreign elements. But as Remi Brague (*Eccentric Culture*) has demonstrated, whatever can be reasonably described as the "West" has always had (even "external") supplementation and maturation built into its DNA.

In any case, of course, part of Protestant discourse involves sophisticated accounts of tradition as a mediate authority. While the books of God's revelation remain our ultimate authority, the tradition of the church and the large community of interpreters (exegetes, scientists, politicians, parents, etc.) are involved in a collective project. The reason we should respect the fathers, listen to other traditions, and so forth is not because they are even functionally of the same authority as God's revelation itself, but because it would be stupid not to. Just as no physicist or mathematician should ignore the work of his or her predecessors, so no exegete or theologian or parent or sociologist should ignore the enormous amount of work that has gone before them. The threshold of persuasion against a distinctive point of the Lutheran or Reformed faith might be only so high. The threshold of persuasion over against a doctrine of the ecumenical creeds is extraordinarily high for precisely this reason. But unless we believe in justification by perfect doctrine alone (rather than in a gospel and a God who

transcend our discourse about them), then this need worry us no more than it does in other relatively fixed disciplines and discourses. Mathematicians, after all, do not fret over the possible falsification of the Pythagorean theorem, even if they do not think Pythagoras was divinely inspired.

Still, one might be concerned that no amount of strategic deference to our fathers could prevent the chaos of identity in these times. But why should this be the goal? Once again, there is no "solution" that will fully get rid of this challenge and no forthcoming Sanhedrin of reality that will download its declarations into our collective consciousness. Whining about our lack of such a resource, or propping up a parody of one, is simply to avoid the calling that is right in front of our faces. Moreover, it is to reject the far more interesting project that we seek to carry out faithfully *coram deo*.

What is this project? Like Adam in the Garden, we are to bring order to the wilderness. We are to bring whatever wisdom we can muster to bear upon the small piece of the jungle in which we find ourselves. The Protestant project pushes us outside of this comfort zone. Rather than retreating to an enclave that we can perfectly predict, we are rather to be mature, to trust God, to understand and receive the benefits of our ancestors' labor, and to push forward into a confusing future with both the Bible and the world before us. And doing this wisely (once again) involves some deference to authorities past and present, as well as particular postures of character and heart that render one open to truth and repentance. Moreover, and most importantly, this means that the maintenance and proliferation of the Protestant faith is a proliferation that comes from a place of self-possessed persuasion rather than team spirit. We speak the truth of Christ and of His world not because this is our chosen community, but because (perhaps via our community) we are persuaded—truly persuaded—that this is the reality in which all humans commonly dwell. And from that vantage point, we can speak to our neighbors with the dignity, ethos, and poise that helps to persuade other men.

And it is this project of a "culture of persuasion" that remains the genius of the Protestantism and of whatever we want to preserve of the West more generally. A culture of persuasion is a culture that demands responsible ownership of the world, and the cultivation of spaces where men can engage and help craft one another. The task of "Reformed catholicity," then, is the task of persuading other men (via Scripture and reason) that Protestant first principles are the project in which they ought to be en-

gaged—or indeed, in which they are rightfully engaged—whether they like it or not. It is the task of pursuing the truth in wisdom. The creeds and confessions are not accidental or discardable to this pursuit, but are received and perpetuated precisely as that of which we are persuaded.

What the Protestant project afforded each Christian was a greater theological, rhetorical, and cultural capacity to self-possess the riches of their own faith and involvement in its expression in this world. Whether or not the Reformers would have liked the modern world, the discourse in which they engaged was uniquely suited to helping us navigate it. Our modern crisis of identity, of course, is not merely due to the influence of Reformation ideas, but the entirely history of modern globalization and trade, the proliferation of modern technologies, and so on. And what has disintegrated in the massive rupture of modernity is any plausibility of outsourcing our ecclesiastical and cultural responsibility to surrogate believers and reasoners (whether church, confession, or community). This has led to all varieties of Pharisaism. Rather, the Christian man lives before God and with his neighbor. And responding to both, he internalizes wisdom and brings it to bear on his small piece of the world. What the modern order affords us, arguably, is not merely a threat to what ought to be the goals of the Christian faith but, rather, a major opportunity for ordinary believers (all priests) to take a more prominent role in the task of dominion. The chaos is a simple fact. But the ordering effect of wisdom is up to all of us (each in our own way).

Arguably, then, the Protestant project is just the human project writ small. Consequently, its challenges and its tools are as wide as the human race and its resources. And if the particular articles of the Protestant faith are indeed correspondent to the Scriptures and to the world, then we should not fear that they lack innate persuasive gravitas. Precisely to the extent that we point persons back to the Scriptures and to reality, we will point them to the law and the gospel as summarized in our doctrine. Only it will not exist as the nomenclature of a team member, but rather as the vital and orienting truth that just *is* reality for them. Our situation is no tragedy. It is a vital moment for us to cultivate the church and the world.

The articles of this volume each aid us in the pursuit of this project in their own way. The first two essays, in particular, help us to properly define "catholicity." Brad Littlejohn tackles a fundamental incoherence in many modern proposals for catholicity or ecumenism: their rejection of the

Protestant doctrine of the invisible church and insistence that we must prioritize visible forms of unity. Such proposals, which have in recent years found their way from the mainline ecumenical movement into Reformed and evangelical discourse, tend to equivocate constantly on what exactly is meant by visible unity, and whether it relates to the *esse* or the *bene esse* of the church. Clarity on such matters is essential, for if formal structures of visible unity are prioritized as essential to the one, holy, catholic church, we will be hard pressed to long avoid embracing an exclusivist sectarianism—whether that of the separatist cult or that of the Roman church. An authentic catholicity that is able to articulate and witness to the unity of the scattered and sometimes divided members of Christ's body, Littlejohn argues, actually *requires* the doctrine of the invisible church. In other words, we can't actually hold on to the "catholicity" part of "Reformed catholicity" unless we also hold on to the "Reformed" part. Following Littlejohn, Andre Gazal's essay explores the manner in which Bishop John Jewel (1522–1571), the first major apologist of the Elizabethan church, attempted to redefine catholicity in order to vindicate England's Protestant national church as "truly catholic" by reappropriating the Vincentian Canon and the Cyprianic conception of the episcopate. Another central feature of Jewel's enterprise was his transfer of "catholic authority" from general councils to regional and national synods.

The three following essays detail the relationship between Reformed catholicity in relation to the doctrines of God and Scripture more specifically. Steven Duby engages recent discussions among Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant theologians, in which the topic of the so-called 'analogy of being' has played a significant role. Often Protestant theology, in the wake of Karl Barth, is portrayed as having little room for an analogical relationship between (sinful) creatures and God the Creator. In some circles this has yielded an assumption that a consistently Protestant approach to human knowledge of God will reject the project of natural theology and hold that human beings can know God only on the basis of God's grace given in Christ and the act of faith. Contrary to this, Duby argues that a Reformed Protestant approach to human knowledge of God does in fact have room for an 'analogy of being' and can, in constructive dialogue with medieval and contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, pursue a truly catholic vision of the knowledge of God available by nature. Following this, Iain Provan challenges the prominent claim within

some recent discussion of Protestantism and catholicity that much Protestant exegesis of Scripture has been lamentably out of step with the glorious tradition of patristic Scripture-reading, which in turn has commonly been represented as grounded in apostolic authority. Provan argues, however, that the magisterial Reformers were in fact correct in their judgments about the unwarranted and dangerous nature of much pre-Reformation exegesis, and that these judgments themselves were grounded in patristic perspectives (i.e., in tradition). Protestants should not, therefore, welcome contemporary initiatives aimed at resurrecting such "spiritual" readings of Scripture. Finally, David Haines addresses the question of how can we "infallibly" determine which doctrines are necessary for a person to be considered orthodox if the only authority for Protestant theology is the Bible, as interpreted by the individual reader? Any approach to solving "the Protestant problem," he argues, must be multifaceted. For example, one must reconsider the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and the notion of individual interpretation; the interaction between the individual and the interpretative community; the role of Christian doctors and of the Holy Spirit; how we should understand theological authority, truth, infallibility, certainty, consistent hermeneutics, and so forth. Part of the solution to the Protestant problem is, Haines proposes, found in the role of natural knowledge in biblical interpretation. He argues that natural knowledge of man, God, and the universe is necessary for biblical interpretation, and is a key element in a well-rounded solution to the Protestant problem.

The final two essays address matters of liturgy. Christopher Dorn surveys the impact of the twentieth-century liturgical and ecumenical renewal movements on the conception of worship in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America and then attempts to answer the question why this impact did not entirely succeed in reaching into the twenty-first century. Following this, Gregory Soderberg traces appeals to "catholicity" in various branches of the Scottish Reformed and English Protestant traditions. He contrasts some contemporary voices arguing for more frequent communion with authors who argued for more frequent communion in the English and Scottish churches in the 1700s and 1800s. By comparing and contrasting some of the similarities and discontinuities of communion frequency debates in the past, he provides theological and historical resources for those who are navigating issues of communion frequency in the present.

I:
IS CHRIST DIVIDED? WHY REFORMED CATHOLICITY NEEDS REFORMED ECCLESIOLOGY

Bradford Littlejohn, The Davenant Institute

I. THE MODERN ECUMENICAL IMPERATIVE

IF THERE is one thing that everyone writing on ecclesiology in the twenty-first century can agree on, it seems to be this: the church today is fragmented by divisions; the body of Christ has been torn into pieces at war with one another. The fact of our problem seems often to be taken for granted, and the only debate is over the solution: whether Protestants should renounce their intrinsic sectarianism and take refuge in the one true undivided church of Rome or Constantinople, or hope that the Catholics and Orthodox will rejoin us someday in an undefined "Church of the Future"; whether we should work for an ecumenism built on common creed, common worship, common mission, or all of the above.[1]

Most ecumenically minded theologians also seem remarkably agreed on one prime culprit for our persistent divisions: an unhealthy preoccupa-

[1] This essay draws upon material previously published in my article "Believing in the Church: Why Ecumenism Needs the Invisibility of the Church," *Religions* 10, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020104 (accessed April 30, 2019), and, to a lesser extent, "The Search for Visible Catholicity and the Danger of Boundary-Drawing: Lessons from John Nevin and Richard Hooker," in *Marking the Church: Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. Greg Peters (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

tion with the "invisible church." Ola Tjørhom, for instance, asserts in his 2004 *Visible Church—Visible Unity* that ecumenism has been hampered by a kind of Protestantism in "which the church is understood as essentially invisible. As a consequence of this misinterpretation, the church tends to emerge as a kind of *societas platonica*, or as a mere idea that has no 'body.' … When the church is described as fundamentally invisible, there will be no room for the concept of visible church unity."[2] More recently, Harald Hegstad begins his *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* by rejecting outright the visible/invisible church distinction as incoherent, lacking biblical support, and making the church here and now "something unreal in relation to theological ideas about the church."[3] Instead, he insists that the church should instead be seen "from an *eschatological* perspective. From the perspective of faith, the church is understood in light of its future as a sign and anticipation of that fellowship between God and humans which will be brought about by the forthcoming kingdom of God."[4] The reader might well ask whether a future eschatological reality is visible, as such, now—and if not, then doesn't that mean it is *invisible*?

However, evangelical theologian Peter Leithart has made similar moves in his 2016 book *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church*, stating that "an invisible unity is not a biblical unity," that "Paul expected—demanded—that the church's unity be visible in table fellowship, in loyalties and allegiances," and that "the unity of the church is not an invisible reality that renders visible things irrelevant. It is a *future* reality that gives present actions their orientation and meaning."[5] In recent follow-up articles, Leithart has acknowledged that "there *are* invisible dimensions of the church,"[6] but questioned whether there is any theologically appropriate sense in which we can speak of "the invisible church," especially when it comes to the question of church unity. The only result of such language, he

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[2] Ola Tjørhom, *Visible Church—Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and the "The Great Tradition of the Church"* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 77.

[3] Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 2.

[4] Hegstad, *Real Church*, 2.

[5] Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 20, 19.

[6] Peter J. Leithart, "Attaining Unity: A Response to Mike Allen," Theopolis Institute, June 13, 2017, accessed April 30, 2019, https://theopolisinstitute.com/attaining-unity-a-reply-to-mike-allen/.

thinks, can be a complacency and escapism: "If we think the church is an invisible community of true believers, then we might be tempted to avoid the mess of membership in a real community. If we pound a wedge between the 'church-as-she-appears' and the 'church-as-she-truly-is,' we mistake the very nature of redemption."[7]

Similar charges recur in much modern ecumenical writing.[8] John Webster summarizes, "The consensus of much recent ecclesiology has been…[that] no ecclesiology can be adequate which does not give primacy to the church's *visibility*."[9]

Since most modern ecclesiologists seem agreed that the church is deeply divided, and that any appeal to its invisible unity will simply compound the problem, we should not be surprised to also find a consensus that ecumenism must prioritize the search for visible forms of unity. Leithart puts it crisply: "If the church is a visible reality, its unity must be visible…. The church's present unity is visible, or it isn't ecclesiastical unity."[10] John Paul II's crucial encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, agrees: "The ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to re-establish full visible unity among all the baptized."[11] More generally, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen writes, "With the exception of most Free churches, almost all other Christian churches cur-

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[7] Peter J. Leithart, "The One City of God," Theopolis Institute, February 21, 2019, accessed April 30, 2019, https://theopolisinstitute.com/article/the-one-city-of-god.

[8] For instance, Eduardus Van der Borght, "The Unity of the Church in the Reformed Tradition: An Introduction," in *The Unity of the Church: A Theological State of the Art and Beyond*, ed. Eduardus Van der Borght (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1; J. H. (Amie) van Wyk, "'Is Christ Divided?'—An Analysis of the Theological Justification of a Church Schism," in *The Unity of the Church*, ed. Van der Borght (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 62, 65.

[9] John Webster, "On Evangelical Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 1, no. 1 (2004): 24.

[10] Leithart, "One City of God."

[11] John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism* (Rome: The Vatican, 1995), §77. John Webster, in "The Goals of Ecumenism," in *Paths to Unity: Explorations in Ecumenical Method*, ed. Paul Avis (London: Church House, 2004), 1–28, and "*Ut Unum Sint:* Some Cross-Bench Anglican Reflections," in *Ecumenism Today: The Universal Church in the 21st Century*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Christopher Asprey (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 29–44, critically surveys the prominence of the language of "full visible unity" in modern Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogue; for a broader survey of recent models of ecumenism, see Lukas Vischer, Ulrich Luz, and Christian Link, *Unity of the Church in the New Testament and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 19–27.

rently regard visible unity as the desired goal of ecumenism."[12]

On one level, it is difficult to disagree with these aims. Who would not love to see a true visible unity of the Christian church realized in history? However, the recent ecumenical consensus has been more passionate than precise. In what sense is the church actually divided? Certainly, plenty of empirical divisions suggest themselves, but ecclesiology is (or at least used to be!) a subdiscipline of theology, not of sociology.[13] How should we assess the unity and division of the church from a theological standpoint? Answering this question, of course, requires that we also give a theological account of *what the church is*, which will, I argue, necessitate a recurrence to the category of the invisible church. Moreover, we must ask more carefully just what is envisioned by the ideal of "full visible unity." There are several different kinds of visible unity that might be imagined, and it matters a great deal which we prioritize. In the following section, I will briefly address each of these points, before turning to argue that the reactionary catholicity of much modern ecclesiology actually tends to generate the very sectarianism that it decries. A more promising path toward practical catholicity, I will conclude, can be found via a thoughtful refocusing of the doctrine of the invisible church.

II. CLARIFYING THE ISSUES

The Invisible Unity of the Church

The New Testament church, like the church of our own day, was no stranger to divisions. Early in 1 Corinthians, Paul famously admonishes the Corinthian church:

> I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I fol-

[12] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 84.

[13] Pace Leithart in "Attaining Unity."

III:
REFORMED CATHOLICITY AND THE ANALOGY OF BEING

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INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT discussions among Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant theologians, the topic of the so-called analogy of being has played a significant role. Often Protestant theology, in the wake of Karl Barth, is portrayed as having little room for an analogical relationship between (sinful) creatures and God the Creator. In some circles this has yielded an assumption that a consistently Protestant approach to human knowledge of God will reject the project of natural theology and hold that human beings can know God only on the basis of God's grace given in Christ and the act of faith.

In light of this, this essay will argue that a Reformed Protestant approach to human knowledge of God does in fact have room for an "analogy of being" and can, in constructive dialogue with medieval and contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, pursue a truly catholic vision of the knowledge of God available by nature. Such a pursuit is catholic not only in the sense that it enables Protestants to find common ground with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox believers in a secular society but also in the sense that it leads to an affirmation of what John Owen calls a "catholic" revelation of God to all humanity, a revelation that is preparatory

for human beings to come to a saving knowledge of Christ.[1]

To make the case that Reformed Protestants can and should embrace a carefully defined—and catholic—analogy of being, I will attempt to do three things. First, I will summarize a traditional doctrine of analogy expounded by Thomas Aquinas and some Reformed orthodox theologians. Second, I will summarize Barth's critique of such a doctrine. Finally, in response to Barth, I will seek to explain how an essentially Thomistic (and broadly Reformed orthodox) view of analogy coheres with a Protestant rendering of nature, grace, and human knowledge of God.

THOMAS AND THE REFORMED ON ANALOGY

Thomas

Though we will focus our attention on analogy in Thomas and the Reformed, it is helpful to begin by briefly noting its place in Aristotle's thought. The Stagirite famously illustrates his understanding of analogy by using the example of health, observing different ways in which something might be called "healthy." One thing might be called "healthy" by preserving health, another by producing it, another by signaling it, another by in fact having it. Similarly, something may be called a "being" in different ways: for example, by being a substance, by being an "affection" or disposition of a substance, by being a quality of a substance, by being a generation or production of a substance or something that belongs to a substance. That subject that is healthy or has health is what is principally called "healthy," and those other things we call healthy are deemed such by reference to that principally healthy thing. Likewise, substance is principally called a being, and other things are called beings by way of an analogy or certain correspondence and similarity to substance. While substance exists per se and in its own right, a quality, for example, exists insofar as it inheres in a substance. "Being" is thus predicated in different modes according to a πρὸς ἕν analogy (an analogy "toward one" or by reference and likeness to a principal thing, i.e., substance). This form of analogy is often called an "analogy of attribution." In Aristotle's metaphysics, the πρὸς ἕν analogy

[1] John Owen, *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, in vol. 17 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), I.5.9–10, p. 51.

serves as a way to affirm the diversity of being while also securing the unity of being as a subject of scientific study. Because of the relationship of the various categories of being to a primal category (substance), being in its different modes can be studied in a single science.[2] Another form of analogy also appears in Aristotle's thought, where there is a correspondence between features of two things, in the sense that a feature of one is to it as a similar feature of another is to the other: *a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*. A quality proper to one thing is analogous to a similar quality that is proper to another in that it is (proportionally) in its own substance as the other quality is (proportionally) in its substance.[3] This is often called an "analogy of proper proportion (or proportionality)."

In the thirteenth century Thomas continues the Christian development of Aristotle's reflections, discussing analogy both with respect to the relationships that exist among creatures and with respect to the relationship between creatures and God.[4] Thomas conveys his understanding of analogy

[2] Aristotle, *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), IV.1, 1003a–1005a, pp. 59–64.

[3] E.g, Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, XII.1071a, pp. 248–29.

[4] A number of studies of Thomas on analogy have appeared in recent times, often seeking to correct some misunderstandings associated with Cajetan's reading of Thomas. See, e.g., Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala, Sweden: Lundequistska, 1953); Gerald B. Phelan, *St. Thomas and Analogy* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1941); George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960); Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), esp. parts II–IV; Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004); Ralph M. McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 65–93, 543–75. Some emphasize that Thomas's writing on analogy is focused on the semantic or logical level of inquiry (e.g., McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*; see also Laurence Paul Hemming, "*Analogia non Entis sed Entitatis*: The Ontological Consequences of the Doctrine of Analogy," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 [2004]: 118–29), while others argue that it is directly bound up with certain ontological commitments (e.g., Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*; cf. Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas and Analogy: The Logician and the Metaphysician," in *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006], pp. 81–95; Alan Philip Darley, "Predication or Participation? What Is the Nature of Aquinas' Doctrine of Analogy?," *Heythrop Journal* 57 [2016]: 312–24).

across a range of works in his corpus. In *De Principiis Naturae*, he discusses the ways in which various things may stand in unity with one another. Beyond the stricter kinds of unity (in number, in species, in genus) there is unity or "agreement" (*convenientia*) by analogy.[5] A predicate, he writes, may apply to something univocally, equivocally, or analogically. In univocal predication, not only a common name but also a common *ratio* or definition of a name applies to two different things. In such a case, the predicate indicates a genus under which two things are located. In equivocal predication, only a common name (not the *ratio* or definition of it) applies to two different things. In analogical predication, there is a commonality of both the name and, in a qualified way (*non ex toto*), the diverse *rationes* of the name too. The commonality of the *rationes* consists in that they are all "referred to one thing" (*attribuuntur uni alicui eidem*) from which the feature named (e.g., health) is in some sense derived. That one thing to which a plurality of analogates are referred for their unity may be a particular end, a particular agent, or a particular subject. Of special importance here is the case in which the basis for analogical unity is a subject. For Thomas, *ens* is analogically predicated of quantity, quality, and other accidental instances of being because they have substance (*ens* in its primary mode) as their subject. "Being," Thomas reasons, is not a genus encompassing both substance and accidents because it applies to substance in a primary way (*per prius*) and to accidents in a derivative way (*per posterius*). Among beings there is a relative ordering and hierarchy, while a genus applies to its sundry species (e.g., animal to man and donkey) equally and without this relative hierarchy. Due to the relationship between substance and accidents, being is therefore not predicated univocally across the categories of being.[6] Thomas also adds that

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For a mediating approach, see Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay between Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 127–34. I follow the second approach here, with an appreciative nod toward Rocca's way of explaining the relationship between the logical and ontological dynamics of analogy.

[5] Here *convenientia*, *analogia*, *proportio*, and *comparatio* all appear as roughly synonymous.

[6] It may be worth pausing to note that this means Thomas does not accept the metaphysical framework of Parmenides, whose monism was built upon the principle that beyond being there is only nonbeing. As Thomas unfolds the reasoning of Parmenides, he observes that nonbeing is nothing (*nihil*) and thus cannot produce diversity in being. Therefore, for Parmenides, since there is nothing to diversify being and since being is one, all being must remain one. Thomas, however, takes it

the principles of different beings agree "according to proportion": the matter of a substance, for example, relates to its substance like the matter of a quantity relates to its quantity.[7]

In a number of works, Thomas presents his view of analogy in relation to the question of theological language and the Creator-creature relationship. In the commentary on the *Sentences*, he writes that the unity of Creator and creature is "by a community not of univocation but of analogy." Analogical "community," though, is twofold: either by posterior things participating in a prior thing or by one thing receiving its existence and *ratio* from another. God does not participate with creatures in something prior to both Himself and creatures, so in the unity of Creator and creature just the latter sort of analogy applies: "The creature does not have existence except as it descends from the first being, nor is it called a being except insofar as it imitates the first being."[8] Later in this commentary, Thomas remarks that univocity assumes a "community according to the *ratio* of nature" with diversity according to (individual) existence, which community cannot apply in the case of God and creatures because God's nature is identical with His own existence. Accordingly, "being" is not predicated univo-

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to be a fact that there are diverse beings and diverse categories of beings (substance and the various categories of accidents) in which beings have various modes of existing. He therefore denies that being is a genus that would have to be diversified by factors external to it (see Thomas Aquinas, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, ed. M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi [Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950], I.9, nn. 138–39, pp. 41–42; cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 66–73, 87–89). In Thomas's view, then, being applies to the many, and its unity consists not in that it is a genus equally applicable to all things but rather in that, on the level of created being (or the "predicamental" level), it always stands in some correspondence or πρὸς ἕν analogy to substance (*In Metaphys.*, IV.1, nn. 535–44, pp. 151–52). To elaborate, in medieval philosophy and theology, to identify being as a genus applicable under the same *ratio* to the many would inevitably raise questions about (1) how being could be diversified (for a genus is differentiated by factors extrinsic to it) and (2) how it could remain a transcendental concept predicable equally and under the same *ratio* across the categories of things that in fact have diverse modes of existing. As noted below, when Duns Scotus defends the univocity of being, he will thus argue that his view does not require being to be a genus and does not stipulate that all beings have the same mode of existing in reality.

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae*, in vol. 43 of *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976), 6, pp. 46–47.

[8] Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1, ed. R. P. Mandonnet (Paris, 1929), prol., q. 1, a. 2 ad 2, p. 10.

cally of God and creatures. A predicate like being or knowledge is predicated analogically of God and creatures insofar as creatures imperfectly imitate God and are thus "like God" (even as God is, strictly speaking, not "like creatures").[9] In the same work, Thomas provides another ramification of analogy under three types: (1) analogy according to mental "intention" only (*secundum intentionem tantum, et non secundum esse*), where something is thought to belong to multiple things (with reference to a first) even though in reality it is properly in the first only; (2) analogy according to being only (*secundum esse et non secundum intentionem*), where something belongs to multiple things in reality in an analogical manner but is thought by the mind to apply to them univocally; and (3) analogy according to both intention and being (*secundum intentionem et secundum esse*), where something applies in an analogical manner to multiple things both in the intention of the mind and in reality. For Thomas, the third type of analogy is in view when being is predicated of substance and accidents and when various things (truth and goodness, for example) are predicated of God and creatures. Truth and goodness are in God and then in creatures by reason of greater and lesser degrees of perfection.[10] Clearly, Thomas is deploying the notion of analogy here in a way that underscores that a given perfection is not merely caused by God but also truly present in God Himself.[11]

In *De Veritate*, Thomas presents an alternative account of analogy. Once again he denies that something (in this case, knowledge) can be attributed to God and creatures univocally. However much creatures might imitate God, nothing can belong to creatures according to the same *ratio* with which it belongs to God, for all that is in God is identical with His own *esse*. Yet, pure equivocity is ruled out because some similarity between God and creatures is presupposed in God knowing creatures by knowing Himself and in our ability to learn about God by studying created beings. To explain how this analogical "community" does not undermine the Creator-creature distinction or the "infinite distance" between God and creatures, Thomas explains how analogy or *proportio* can have different meanings. On the one hand, "agreement according to proportion" can apply when two things have a proportion toward one another in that they have a "determined distance" or some mutual "habitude" between them.

[9] Thomas, *Sent.*, I.35.1.4 sol. and ad 6, pp. 819–21.

[10] Thomas, *Sent.*, I.19.5.2 ad 1, p. 492.

[11] Compare Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 549–50.

Thomas calls this an "agreement of proportion" (*convenientia proportionis*). For example, the number two has such a distance or habitude to the number one, in that two is its double. On the other hand, there may be an agreement not of two things proportionate to one another but of two proportions to one another. Thomas calls this an "agreement of proportionality" (*convenientia proportionalitatis*), and it echoes Aristotle's identification of an analogy in which *a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*. Here Thomas gives an example: sight is to the eye as understanding is to the mind. Because creatures have no habitude or relation to God in which His perfection is determined by them, only this second form of analogy—an analogy of "proportionality"—can apply in the case of God and creatures: God's knowledge is to God as the creature's knowledge is to the creature. This "similitude of proportionality" does not compromise the "infinite distance" between God and the creature or entail a mutual habitude between them; creatures are like God, but, in accord with Isaiah 40:18 ("To whom then will you liken God?"), God is not like creatures.[12]

In later works, Thomas does not persist in limiting the Creator-creature analogy to that of "proportionality." He returns to the "analogy of attribution" in which the perfections of creatures are referred back to God.[13] To conserve space, this can be presented in a composite sketch of relevant portions of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, *De Potentia*, and the *Summa*

[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, in vol. 22.1/2 of *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome: ad Sanctae Sabinae 1970), 2.11 corp. and ad, 1, 2, 4, pp. 78–80.

[13] It is worth noting that in light of Thomas's *De Veritate* Cajetan famously linked the analogy of proportionality to the analogy *secundum esse* described in Thomas's *Sentences* commentary and argued that the analogy of proportionality uniquely upholds that a given perfection is truly found in God Himself (see his *De Nominum Analogia. De Conceptu Entis*, ed. P. N. Zammit [Rome, 1952], III.23–30, pp. 23–30). On this point, his reading of Thomas is criticized by various authors (e.g., Montagnes, *Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, pp. 120–40; McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, pp. 3–29; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 90n87, 553). However, for a more recent effort to explain Cajetan's own constructive aims in *De Nominum Analogia*, see Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's* De Nominum Analogia (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). In my view, it is important to recognize that Thomas's treatment of analogy in *De Veritate* is not his last word on the matter and that the analogy of attribution too can uphold the intrinsic character of God's perfections. At the same time, I believe that one helpful point made in the *De Veritate* treatment is that God and creatures have no *proportio* or determinate distance between them. While they do have an ontological relationship, it is not a mutually constitutive one.

Theologiae. Thomas stresses that nothing belongs to God and creatures univocally, for created effects are not formally "adequate" to the divine power by which they are wrought. God is an analogical agent who produces His likeness in His effects, but in only a limited fashion. For God's perfections are really identical with His own essence, while the creature's perfections (wisdom, goodness, power, and so on) are qualities added to essence. God has His perfections in an unlimited or "universal" way, while creatures have their various perfections by participation in God's perfection and thus in a limited or "partial" way. God's perfections "pre-exist" in Him in a simple and preeminent manner, while creatures' perfections exist in them in a divided manner. Moreover, the attributes used to signify God's perfections do not circumscribe or capture the fullness of those perfections. In addition, what is predicated univocally of two things is simpler than and prior to both of them, but, according to Thomas, nothing is—ontologically or conceptually—simpler than or prior to God. Univocity also assumes a parity in the modes of existing of two things, but God is His own *esse* and creatures exist only by participation in *esse*.[14] *Ens* (a term derived from the verb *esse*) therefore cannot be predicated univocally of God and creatures, for it is predicated of God in an absolute manner (essentially and *secundum prius*) and of creatures in a derivative manner (by participation and *secundum posterius*).[15]

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[14] On the senses in which creatures participate in *esse*, see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 120–21.

[15] Furthermore, for Thomas, since *esse* within the order of created being is the concrete actualization of essence, it is not included in genus or species but rather lies on the side of that which individuates things (see, e.g., *Quaestiones de Quolibet*, in vol. 25 of *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. [Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996], II.2.2 [4], pp. 216–18; *Summa theologiae*, vols. 4–12 of *ibid.*, Ia.3.5 corp., p. 44). Thus, the meaning of the commonality of *ens* and *esse* within the horizon of created being might be summarized as follows. First, *ens* or *esse* commonly applies to various categories of things (delineated in the ten Aristotelian *praedicamenta*) by an analogical correspondence in which things in the nine accidental *praedicamenta* depend on substances. Given the evidently diverse modes of existing of substances, quantities, qualities, and so on, *ens* is not restricted to one genus and is not itself a genus equally and univocally applicable to all the categories of being. Second, *ens* or *esse* commonly applies to distinct individuals in that all individual things exist, but it is not a genus or species that accounts for the common determinations of a group of individuals. Rather, it can be said to apply similarly to individuals across categories or within a category, genus, or species by an analogy of proportionality (e.g., the *esse* of Peter is to Peter as the *esse* of John is to John) (compare Montagnes, *Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, pp. 87–88; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 93, 545–56; Thomas Joseph White, "'Through Him All Things Were Made'

To put it differently, *ens* cannot be abstracted from God and the creature to function as a conceptual genus under which the two fall, for in its application to creatures it always "carries with it an awareness of it as ordered to…and as dependent upon the primary analogate" (i.e., God).[16] Pure equivocity, however, also is ruled out. For, among other things, it would conflict with the fact that knowledge of creatures leads to knowledge of God (so Rom. 1:20). Thomas therefore reiterates his commitment to analogy and distinguishes between two kinds of analogy of attribution. The first is an analogy of many to one (*multa ad unum*), in which the analogates both participate in something prior, which cannot occur when God is one of the analogates. The second is an analogy of one to another (*unum ad alterum*), which applies to God and creatures as creatures are entirely dependent upon God for all that they possess.[17] In these texts, it is evident that Thomas's deployment of the analogy of attribution (in its *unum ad alterum* form) (1) precludes any common factor in which God and creatures alike might participate, (2) assumes that the referring of created perfections back to God entails the presence of each perfection in a "preeminent" or "superexcellent" manner in God's own being, and (3) is built, at the predicative level, upon the ontological relationship of creatures to God, a relationship explicated in terms of causality and participation.

Early Reformed Authors

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Reformed Protestants assessed the arguments of various medieval and Roman Catholic writers on the matters of analogy and univocity, including Thomas, Duns Scotus, Cajetan, Francisco Suárez, and others. The early Reformed certainly drew upon the

[John 1:3]: The Analogy of the Word Incarnate according to St. Thomas Aquinas and Its Ontological Presuppositions," in *Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011], pp. 265–6nn47–48). Outside the framework of created being altogether is God, who does not merely "have" *esse* in a generic or specific determination but rather in utter uniqueness and supremacy is his own unlimited act of being.

[16] Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 571.

[17] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, vol. 13 of *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome: ex Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918), I.32–34, pp. 97–98, 102, 103–4; *De Potentia*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, 10th ed., ed. P. Bazzi et al. (Rome-Turin: Marietti, 1965), 7.7, pp. 202–5; *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, in vol. 4 of *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome: ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1888), Ia.13.5, pp. 146–47.

IV:
ON ESCHEWING THE LABYRINTHS: WHY PROTESTANTS SHOULD NOT RESURRECT THE "SPIRITUAL READING" OF SCRIPTURE

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FOR MANY Protestants, 2017 was a year of celebration: the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Yet this was not true of all. For some, the Reformation was not, in fact, a positive development in the history of the church that we should continue to celebrate. It was, instead, a tragedy whose occurrence we should lament.[1] It contributed significantly to the process by which the church lost its robust connection to "the Great Tradition": the "broad consensus of the church fathers and medieval theologians" concerning orthodox faith and life.[2] In so contributing, the Reformation helped to pave the way for the rise of the modern secular world[3]—a world in which, in Hans Frei's words, there has occurred a profound "eclipse of biblical narrative."[4] An entire premodern

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[1] Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 85, 104.

[2] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, xi.

[3] Here this Protestant thinking clearly converges with the kind of Roman Catholic analysis presented in recent, significant books by authors like Charles Taylor and Brad Gregory. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007); Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012).

[4] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth*

world defined by and organized in terms of the great Christian story began to disappear, and a new, modern world began to emerge, in which the Bible gradually lost its cultural authority, and fewer and fewer people looked to synthesize with it the knowledge they were rapidly acquiring from other sources. What contemporary Protestants need to do now, on this analysis, is to reconnect themselves to the Great Tradition—to retrieve what was lost in the midst of the tumult of the sixteenth-century European church. At least in my friend and colleague Hans Boersma's case, the task is specifically to recover what he calls the ancient "Platonist-Christian synthesis"—the synthesis that preceded the rediscovery of Aristotle in the West and then his rise to dominance in high medieval theology.[5] Central to this project is the retrieval of an integrated, spiritually focused Bible for the church. In pursuit of this, we must reject the Protestant dismissal—a *fateful* one, which led ultimately to the development of a secular hermeneutic—of much of the pre-Reformation approach to the Bible. We must instead attempt the recovery of a sacramental approach to Scripture in which its literal meaning points to its spiritual meaning.[6] For the literal sense of Scripture so beloved of the magisterial Reformers is in fact only "the starting point (*sacramentum*) of a search for the greater, more christological reality (*res*) of the gospel," and it is only a sacramental hermeneutic that will allow us "to retain the centrality of the Bible while…rediscover[ing] its hidden spiritual depths."[7]

On this kind of view, then, the answer to the problem of the eclipse of biblical narrative is to get back behind the Reformation, which was in fact one of the significant causes of the eclipse. We must learn to inhabit once again an older, better, and more orthodox worldview, involving an older, better, and more orthodox hermeneutical method. And in this better method the allegorical reading of Scripture plays a central role, since the reader in question does not believe that the Word of God is only or even predominantly expressed in ordinary human words in their ordinary communicative intent. The reader believes, rather, that what God wishes to say through Scripture might be considerably different from what any of its human authors originally meant. As one contemporary scholar has summarized the prevailing view on this question in the pre-Reformation period:

Century Hermeneutics (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

[5] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 33–39.

[6] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 21–24, 137–53.

[7] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 152–53.

"Spiritual meanings…were the golden hoard contained in the casket of the literal."[8]

Now I am both skeptical about this entire proposal and doubtful about the analysis upon which it is based. However, it is neither the entire analysis nor the entire proposal that is the subject of my deliberations in this essay.[9] Here I wish to focus on only one element of the larger proposal, asking this question: Should contemporary Protestants recommit to a pursuit of spiritual meaning in Scripture of the kind that significantly marked the pre-Reformation period—should we, like so many of our pre-Reformation forebears in the church, regard Scripture's literal meaning only as our "starting point" in the quest for "its hidden spiritual depths"?[10]

THE LITERAL SENSE

So confused and confusing has this debate become in our present environment that we cannot even begin this discussion without defining our terms. So what does it mean to read Scripture "literally"? What does it mean to read *any* text "literally"? Consider the following statement: "I was literally glued to my seat throughout the entire performance." What the writer means, of course, is that he was *metaphorically* glued to his seat throughout the entire performance. The addition of the word "literally" to this sentence is therefore unhelpful, if the author's purpose is one of clear communication. It encourages certain kinds of readers, in fact, to do what they might have done anyway, precisely because they pride themselves in reading texts literally. "He *says* he was glued to his seat," they might say; "we must take him at his word." These are the kinds of readers that Peggy Parish has in mind in her popular I Can Read! series of stories concerning "Amelia Bedelia."[11] Amelia *is* a certain kind of "literal reader." If her employers ask her

[8] Lesley Smith, "Nicholas Lyra and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible /Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, 2: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 49–63 (55–56).

[9] Readers interested in an extensive analysis of the entire proposal should consult my recent book: Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), from which the substance of the present essay is also drawn.

[10] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 152–53.

[11] E.g., Peggy Parish, *Amelia Bedelia*, 50th anniversary ed. (New York: Greenwillow

to change the towels, for example, she will go out and buy new ones. When she makes a sponge cake, she puts in real sponges, and when she pitches a tent, she throws it into the forest. In this case, however, the word "literal" refers to a kind of reading that misses the point of a communication through failing to understand how language is being used. This being so—as Kevin Vanhoozer suggests—this kind of reading does not deserve to be called "literal" at all, precisely because it does *not* attend carefully to the communicative intent of the person who put the "letter" of the text on the page in the first place.

Vanhoozer proposes instead (and I concur) that we call this "literalistic" reading. For a truly literal reading pays attention to the "speech acts" of the author, and not just to words in themselves, whereas a literalistic reading focuses only on the latter. The literal sense of Jesus' statement, "I am the door," for example, is discovered not only by consulting a dictionary about what a word like "door" typically means in the language spoken by the author (which is indeed important), but also by paying attention to how that word is actually being used in a particular speech act. An author might well use a word like "door" metaphorically, but nevertheless intend to communicate "literal truth" (e.g., about Jesus) in the process. Literal reading makes room for this possibility. Literalistic reading does not. If this is so, then we should avoid using the word "literal," not only emphatically, but also as the opposite of words like "metaphorical." And so we should not say: "She failed to understand the metaphorical language in the poem and interpreted it literally." We should rather say: "In failing to understand the metaphorical language in the poem, she failed to interpret it literally." She missed the point of the literary communication.

"Literalistic" is of course a modern and not an ancient term, but the distinction I am drawing here is one that the Reformers certainly considered important. Luther is very interested in the ways that the biblical authors are "artists and poets," and he is attentive to phenomena in the text like Hebrew parallelism and metaphors. This is also true of Calvin. William Bouwsma tells us that "like earlier commentators in the tradition of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*…Calvin regularly identified metaphor, allegory, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, and other tropes."[12] Calvin is in-

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Books, 2013).

[12] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 123. In "metonymy," the name of an attribute or adjunct is

deed impatient with those who fail to grasp that a faithful reading of Scripture must attend to such phenomena. This is well illustrated in the comments in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* about "fanatical men" whose commitment to reading Scripture literally (as they see it) threatens to open the door to "a boundless barbarism [that] will overwhelm the whole light of faith."[13] It was necessary, rather, for the biblical exegete to possess a sound knowledge of rhetoric, without which, as he (Calvin) observed, "many supervacuous contentions will arise."[14] Reformation exegetes could sometimes disagree about *which* texts were meant to be read metaphorically, or in accord with some other figure of speech, but they do not disagree *that* the literal sense *included* such phenomena.

It becomes clear as we begin to develop this argument in this way that literal reading is never simply a matter of words or even sentences alone, read apart from their contexts. There is, first of all, the historical context—for words mean what they mean in particular languages at particular times. And this is why the Reformers urged their readers to attend closely to matters like the nature of the grammar and syntax of the original Hebrew and Greek texts that lay before them, and not simply depend on Latin translation. "Become a text critic," Luther advises his readers, "and learn about the grammatical sense, whatever grammar intends, which is about faith, patience, death, and life."[15] What God says in Scripture, He says in the ordinary language of those who lived in the past, and were indeed conditioned by that past—so we need to engage with that same past. Just a few years later, Luther tells Erasmus that "we must everywhere stick to the simple, pure, and natural sense of the words that accords with the rules of grammar and the normal use of language as God has created it in man."[16] The same idea is often expressed in Calvin's writings. In his search

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substituted for that of the thing meant (as in "lend me your ears"). In "synecdoche," a part represents the whole, or vice versa (as in "Denver won by six runs," meaning "Denver's baseball team"). A "trope" is a figure of speech.

[13] R. M. Frye, "Calvin's Theological Use of Figurative Language," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 172–94 (181), citing Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.23.

[14] Cited in Frye, "Figurative Language," 189.

[15] Martin Luther, *A Brief, Yet Clear Exposition of the Song of Songs* (1530–1531), as cited in Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. E. W. and R. C. Gritsch, ed. V. I. Gruhn (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1997), 92.

[16] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), *LW* 33:162.

for the mind of God in the writings of Paul, for example, Calvin keeps firmly in mind, writes Ward Holder, that "Paul was a first-century thinker who was conditioned by the cultures in which he moved and taught."[17]

There is the historical context, and then, secondly, there are the literary and the canonical contexts. Words mean what they mean in particular textual places—in paragraphs, and in books, and in the whole of Scripture. And to read them apart from these contexts is to fail to read them literally. The communicative intent of the authors of the books and of the shapers of the canon was that they should be read *in* such contexts—and, thereby, that we should hear the Word of God to us through them. This is certainly also what both Luther and Calvin believed; they would have regarded as incomplete any efforts of theirs to read "literally" any discrete section of a biblical book, had they not then proceeded to read it in its larger context. For example, "Calvin always believed that each book of the scripture represented a coherent effort at expression by its author."[18] We routinely find in his commentaries, therefore, attention to the nature of the whole as well as to the parts of a particular biblical book. Both Reformers would have regarded anything less than such efforts to read contextually as a failure to make the attempt to read fully "literally"—and they would surely have been right to believe so.

And this brings me finally in this section of the essay to the question of typology—sometimes called "figuration." Resemblance within the context of the whole biblical story is the key idea here. Within that context, into which Christians believers are now also to "read" themselves, certain persons or entities are, or ought to be, like each other in certain ways. Some of these resemblances involve a "lesser" and a "greater," leading some to suggest that "escalation" through time is the main defining feature of biblical typology. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that "escalation" is always or even normally in view when typological connections are present in Scripture. For this reason, Dan Treier's more neutral definition of typological reading is preferable. He proposes that we think of it simply as "iconic" mimesis, which preserves "a 'narrative coherence' between referents."[19]

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[17] R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin's First Commentaries* (SHCT; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 106.

[18] Holder, *Grounding*, 75.

[19] Daniel J. Treier, "Typology," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 823–27 (825).

The main point here is to resist the idea that there is in the NT any generalized notion that God's dealings with Israel in the OT are any less real, or any less important in themselves, than his dealings with the church in the NT. It was precisely because of the tendencies of some typological reading in this direction that Luther can be found criticizing the approach, even though he himself was far from shy about making typological connections between biblical texts. God did not reveal Himself in the OT through figurative hints, Luther believed, nor did that body of literature merely provide images for a later Christ event. The Israelites lived their own substantive life of faith in response to God's revelation in OT events, *and then they also* prefigured NT realities. Likewise, however much the OT is considered in the NT to "point beyond itself," this is not at the cost of the reality or importance of God's dealings with his OT people. As Hans Frei puts it, in typology, "*without loss to its own literal meaning or specific temporal reference* [my emphasis], an earlier story (or occurrence) [becomes] a figure of a later one."[20]

This being so, it is clear that we should not drive a wedge between the literal and the typological, as some do. The literal and the typological or figurative are best understood, not as two *different* ways of reading, but as two aspects of the *same way* of reading. The latter comes into its own not so much at the level of sentence or paragraph, but at the level of larger entities like whole books and even collections of books. In Frei's words, typological reading involves "literalism at the level of the whole biblical story." Figuration should not be conceived of, he writes, as "being in conflict with the literal sense of biblical stories, [but as being]…at once a literary and a historical procedure, an interpretation of stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative referring to a single history and its patterns of meaning."[21] "Literal" and "typological" should not be considered as opposites, then. Nor were they generally considered to be so by the magisterial Reformers. Calvin's general commitment to this kind of large-scale contextual reading is well illustrated, for example, by his approach to Paul's letters in his commentaries; he is not only interested in reading well all of Romans as an entire book in itself, but also in reading it within the context of the whole corpus of the Pauline literature, and then of the whole of Scripture. In general, his belief is that "the story of Israel

[20] Frei, *Eclipse*, 2.

[21] Frei, *Eclipse*, 2.

repeats itself in the life of the (Christian) reader, and thus the words of the text are addressed not only to the characters in the story but also to Calvin and all readers."[22]

THE SPIRITUAL SENSE

This, then, is the literal reading of Scripture that the magisterial Reformers commended. In so doing, they set their face against the marked tendency among many of their ancestors in the faith, already described, to practice a spiritual, that is, an allegorical reading of the text that leaves the literal somewhat or entirely behind. And here, again, we must be particularly clear as to what we best mean by our words, because there have always been those (whether in ancient or modern times) who have wished to blur the distinction between allegorical and typological reading, representing *all of it together* simply as "spiritual reading." John O'Keefe and Rusty Reno, for example, frequently refer to "typology" in their book on early Christian interpretation of the Bible "without assuming a sharp distinction from allegory."[23] Allegory, they claim,

> is not conceptually or essentially distinct from typology. It is an extension of the typological strategy that does not limit itself to discerning patterns of and between events. Allegory is more fluid and ambitious. It seeks patterns and establishes diverse links between scripture and a range of intellectual, spiritual, and moral concerns.[24]

The attentive reader will note, however, that O'Keefe and Reno here deny a sharp distinction at one moment, only to reinforce its reality in the next. Typological reading is *indeed* best thought of as discerning "patterns within and between events [and I would add "persons" and "entities"] depicted within scripture." On the other hand, allegorical reading is *indeed* "more fluid and ambitious," moving beyond (and often well beyond) "pat-

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[22] Kathryn E. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3* (IST 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 111–12.

[23] John J. O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 20.

[24] O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 21.