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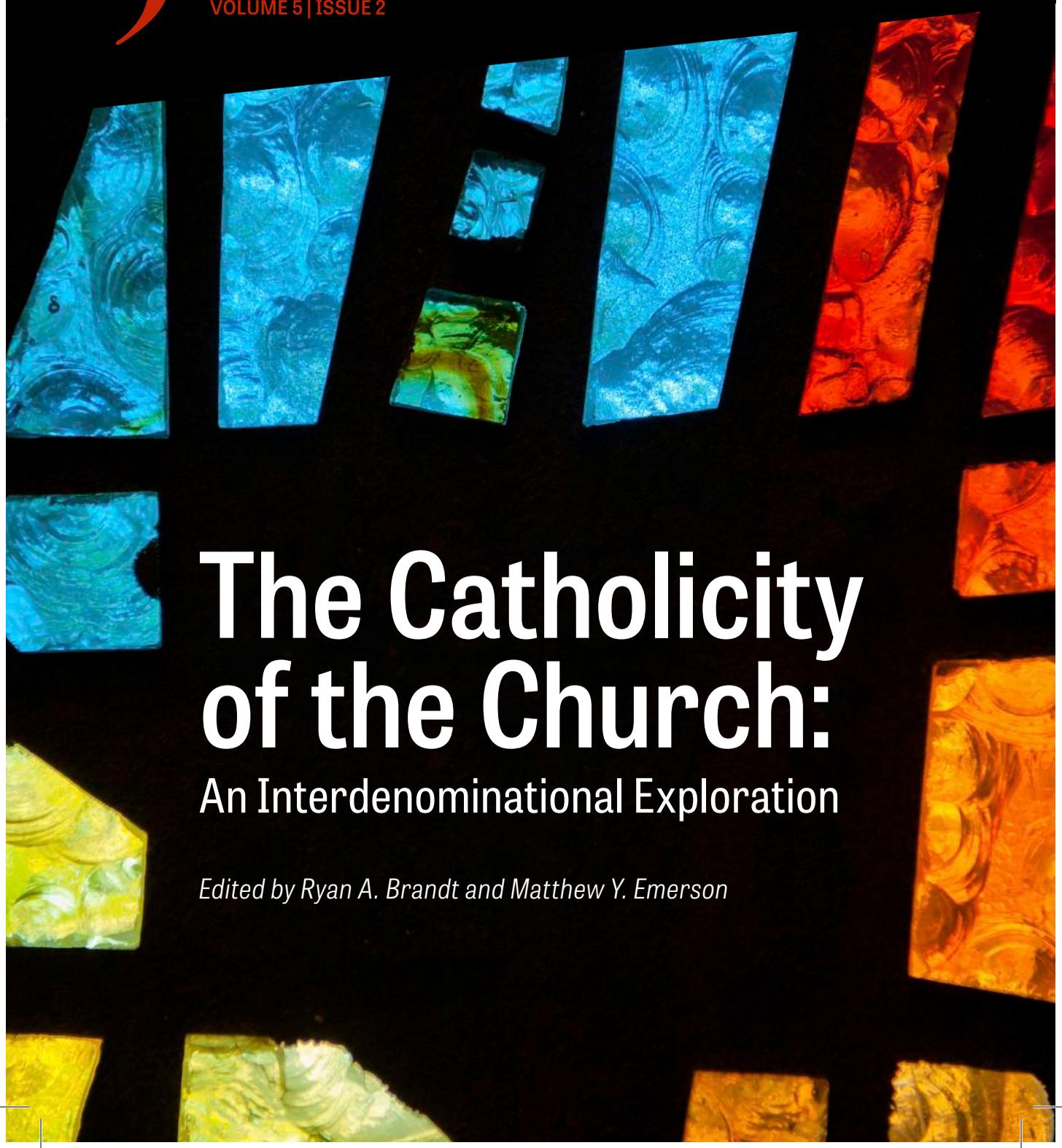
VOLUME 5 | ISSUE 2

JOURNAL OF  
BIBLICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL  
STUDIES

## The Catholicity of the Church:

An Interdenominational Exploration

*Edited by Ryan A. Brandt and Matthew Y. Emerson*



# *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*

*JBTS is published online at [www.jbtsonline.org](http://www.jbtsonline.org) and in print through  
Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 West 8th Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401, USA*

Print ISSN 2572-2832

Online ISSN 2572-2859

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The *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies (JBTS)* is a peer reviewed academic journal focused on the fields of Bible and Theology from an inter-denominational point of view. The journal is comprised of an editorial board of scholars that represent several academic institutions throughout the world. *JBTS* is concerned with presenting high level original scholarship in an approachable way.

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# *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*

## ***JBTS 5.2 THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH: AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL EXPLORATION***

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## **An Introduction to Catholicity: An Editorial Preface to this Special Issue**

**BY RYAN A. BRANDT AND MATTHEW Y. EMERSON**

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While it has a long and distinguished history in the Christian tradition, the word “catholicity” has become a buzzword of sorts in these last few decades. Across some denominational lines, it elicits polarizing responses that lead to neglecting or even dismissing it. Yet, in recent decades there has been a revival of interest on the topic, a growing awareness that catholicity is an essential part of Christianity, including at least most of the major denominational heritages. This volume was inspired by the renewed Protestant emphasis of catholicity in the contemporary landscape. Given the broadness of the term as well as the varied application across different denominational lines, it seemed helpful and timely to offer a survey of various approaches. Such approaches show real differences among Christians, but they also show encouraging signs that Christians are reappropriating their long and distinguished tradition, especially including its early and medieval roots. This article is an introduction to both the topic of catholicity as well as this special issue for interested readers.

### **What is Catholicity? Two Challenges**

“I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”

Thus reads the second clause in the third article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The unity of the church is highlighted in various ways by each of these four “notes,” but the term “catholic,” at least in contemporary discourse, holds a special significance with regard to affirming the church’s unity. Given the Great Schism of 1054, the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, and the plethora of denominations today, the church’s catholicity is viewed by many as a goal—one still out of reach, but one that is vital for the church’s health and vitality. The prayer of many Christians from a variety of traditions regarding the church’s catholicity is an echo of Jesus’s prayer in John 17, that we—the church—may be one, as Jesus is one with the Father. This positive vision of catholicity is a pursuit of the visible unity of the church.

Nevertheless, catholicity broadly defined as visible unity raises two particularly noteworthy challenges for Christians across different denominational lines.

First, the term catholicity can have broad connotations and a variety of meanings for different Christian traditions. Part of the purpose of this volume is to show just how different Christians define and use the term. Suffice it to say that Christian catholicity, at least minimally, shares the conviction that the beliefs and practices articulated and embodied in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church belong to all Christians. These beliefs and practices, especially as reflected in the early and medieval church, are often called the Great Tradition. Catholicity seeks to engage with church tradition for the purposes of the spiritual life and theological health of the church today. While attention to catholicity—or the related Nicean notes—has naturally been an integral part of the theology of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestants too are recovering or, in some cases, continuing to emphasize their original awareness and appreciation of catholicity as developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

For many Protestants, and particularly for evangelicals, the church as one, holy, and even apostolic raises no concerns; but to say that the church is “catholic” evokes worries about capitulating to the Roman Catholic Church. A common way of putting it would be to say that, for many Protestants, to affirm the church as “catholic” is a non sequitur, since we are Protestants, not (Roman) Catholics. Furthermore, in the wake of rationalism, sectarianism, and the Fundamentalism-Modernism divide, each especially characterizing the Western world, Protestants have often resorted to caricatures of their own view, viewing a high view of the Bible as somehow opposed to the teachings of church tradition. *Sola scriptura* in this view is seen as a call against all forms of tradition instead of a reaffirmation that the authority of Scripture trumps the authority of tradition. It is reduced to a view summarized as “No creed but the Bible,” implying that the Bible is the only authority for a Christian. This view of *sola scriptura*, a rather recent phenomenon, is more accurately called *solo* or *nuda scriptura*; it stands in contrast to the historically Protestant view, a view that went part and parcel of a high view of church tradition, which understood that theology was accomplished in the context of the Spirit’s work in tradition according to the ultimate authority as found in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Given the Protestant renewed understanding of *sola scriptura*, there are encouraging signs that evangelicals are moving past these misconceptions—hence the now Protestant emphasis on catholicity.<sup>2</sup>

1. For example, William Perkins writes, “By a Reformed Catholic, I understand anyone that holds the same necessary heads of religion with the Roman Church: yet so as he pares off and rejects all errors in doctrine, whereby the said religion is corrupted.” *A Reformed Catholicke*, Works of William Perkins, vol. 1 (London: John Legatt, 1626), 555.

2. Among the many examples of this trend, see the manifest written by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); see also Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

Ryan A. Brandt and Matthew Y. Emerson: *An Introduction to Catholicity*

As mentioned, this volume was inspired by the renewed Protestant emphasis of catholicity in the contemporary landscape, which then extends the discussion back to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. For Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, catholicity is integral to their conception of the church and is defined in particular ways relative to their respective communions. And while, at this moment in ecclesial history, calls for ecumenism and catholicity are relatively more common than they have been since the Reformation, there is no real agreement on how to pursue unity among Christians.

Second, therefore, there is a practical or ecclesial challenge concerning what actually constitutes catholicity. At the broadest possible level, for the church to be catholic means for it to exhibit visible unity. But where is this visible unity found? In institutions? If so, what institution claims primacy? In liturgy? If so, whose view of the sacraments or the elements required in worship prevails? In biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation? If so, which interpretive methods and doctrinal statements are taken to be foundational?

Relatively easy answers are sometimes given to these questions. For instance, regarding the latter question about doctrinal formulation, the Three Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian) are employed as a kind of creedal minimum for catholicity. In one respect, this approach is a serious-minded means of pursuing unity in the church. In another sense, however, it is often employed in such a way that it glosses over significant differences between different traditions. Taken to the extreme, this latter approach can also be used as cover for doctrinal positions that have not been held by any tradition for the two millennia of the Church's existence but that are popular in some segments of global Christianity today. Regarding the debates about human sexuality, for example, this approach says that the Creeds do not address the issue and therefore it is *adiaphora* with respect to doctrinal fidelity and a creedal approach to catholicity.<sup>3</sup>

Again, we could take liturgy as indicative of visible unity. Suppose there is unity between traditions regarding what is required in worship—the Word preached and the sacraments administered, at bare minimum. But once we dig in on either of these elements, divisions abound. Who is allowed to preach and (or) administer the sacraments? What view of the sacraments do we take—transubstantiation, consubstantiation, some version of real presence, spiritual presence, or memorial? Of course, the most problematic element for Protestant visions of catholicity concerns the first answer: institutional unity. But this is often where the Roman Catholic emphasis is placed in these discussions, even if it is not done so exclusively.

3. Of course, another problem with this “Nicaea is enough” kind of approach to doctrinal fidelity is that it presumes that there is not an assumed anthropology and hamartiology implied in the Creeds. A further and more significant problem is placing ultimate criteria for catholicity at the level of creeds and not in Scripture itself.

Given the various definitions of and approaches to catholicity, the essays in this special issue address the question of catholicity from within a variety of different traditions. This collection is not intended to answer the above questions in any kind of definitive manner, but these sorts of questions give rise to distinct conceptions of catholicity as well as distinct emphases as to what constitutes catholicity. Addressing these two concerns, then, becomes a sort of launching pad for further dialogue between denominations.

### **The Landscape of Scholarship**

This kind of discussion as well as the questions addressed in this volume are not new. This special issue comes in the wake of renewed interest in catholicity to date. Over the last half century, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox scholars have been addressing this topic in renewed ways, including the attempts by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI),<sup>4</sup> the late Avery Cardinal Dulles from the Roman Catholic perspective,<sup>5</sup> and those of Fr. Georges Florovsky from the Eastern Orthodox perspective.<sup>6</sup> Alongside Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, there has been a growing concern for Protestants to write their own confessional theology for the church catholic, each from the point of view of their own denominational heritage. The Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists, and Baptists are among some of the most important new constructive works.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the topic of catholicity interrelates with other kinds of biblical and theological issues that, while not always using the language of catholicity, have complementary theological visions or goals alongside the catholicity movement. Several examples are worthy of note. First, recent work has shown a growing desire

4. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "On the Progress of Ecumenism," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008 [1987]).

5. Avery Dulles, SJ, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

6. E.g., "The Catholicity of the Church," in *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. I: *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, Vaduz, Europa, 1987), 37-55.

7. For Lutheran, see Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). For Reformed, see Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*; and Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016). For Methodist, see Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: HarperOne, 1987, 1989, 1992). For moderate Baptist, see Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 27 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic-Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008); and Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). For evangelical Baptist, see Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, R. Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020).

Ryan A. Brandt and Matthew Y. Emerson: *An Introduction to Catholicity* to read Scripture and do theology in the context of the history of the church, or the Great Tradition as it is often called.<sup>8</sup> Part and parcel with this development, second, is the increasing number of volumes on ressourcement and (or) retrieval of the early and medieval church from an evangelical standpoint,<sup>9</sup> often connecting catholicity to questions of ethics, morality, and worship.<sup>10</sup> Third, and finally, there are a number of different attempts at constructive dialogue between major Christian denominations, including between Roman Catholics and Reformed,<sup>11</sup> Roman Catholics and Baptists,<sup>12</sup> and different Protestant denominations among themselves.<sup>13</sup> In short, within Christianity today, and evangelicalism in particular, there is a more explicit awareness of the importance of church tradition, on the one hand, and the catholicity of the church, on the other.

### Introduction to this Special Issue

Again, the essays in this issue address the question of catholicity from within a variety of different Christian traditions. The editors gave a certain level of freedom

8. See, for example, Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018); Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); Christopher A. Hall, *Studying Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); idem., *Reading the Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998).

9. See, for example, D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); idem., *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); W. David Buschart and Kent Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019). There are also wide-ranging examples of evangelical theology done from a more robustly catholic perspective. The examples here are too numerous to list, but in addition to the above bibliographic references, one stands out worthy of mention: Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

10. Christopher A. Hall, *Reading the Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017); idem., *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

11. Matthew Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine is Not Unbiblical*, with a Response from Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017).

12. See, for example, the recent joint report of the Baptist World Alliance and Roman Catholic Church, "The Word of God in the Life of the Church," which will be published, along with responses from scholars representing various Catholic and Baptist groups, in Derek Hatch, ed., *Conversation Toward Koinonia: Baptists and Catholics in North America* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, forthcoming).

13. Biola University hosted a roundtable discussion that included Carl Trueman, Fred Sanders, and Peter Leithart in April 2014 called "The Future of Protestantism," and the recording can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKekHEco87U&feature=youtu.be>. The conference was prompted, in part, by a series of blog posts at *First Things* by Leithart, who subsequently published *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016) as a kind of capstone to those initial posts and the conference discussion.

to the contributors to approach the topic and craft their arguments from their own preferred vantage point, given some of the unique features of each denominational heritage. Because of this freedom, each article will approach the issue in unique—though often complementary—ways. This collection is not intended to answer every question of catholicity in a definitive manner, and the editors do not wish to pronounce their own views, either in general or as a kind of summary of the conclusions of the essays included. Instead, our hope is that these articles will serve as a starting point or—depending on one’s tradition—further clarifications about pursuing catholicity from within one’s own tradition.

It is our conviction that pursuing catholicity begins with a deep understanding of our own tradition, for only by understanding our own specific histories, doctrinal commitments, and liturgical practices can we attempt to converse with those who stand in a different historical or doctrinal or liturgical stream than us. Moreover, it is only by understanding our histories that we recognize that—at least for most denominations—our own denomination was seeking to be catholic all along! Given that goal, each essay attempts to describe what catholicity is from the perspective of the author’s tradition, and then, based on that definition, to offer ways forward for pursuing catholicity from within that same tradition.

Part 1 of this special issue consists of articles from several different denominational heritages, including Roman Catholic (Eduardo Echeverria), Eastern Orthodox (John Mark Reynolds), Anglican (Eugene Schlesinger), Lutheran (David R. Maxwell), Presbyterian (Blair Smith), Wesleyan-Methodist (Matt O’Reilly), Baptist (Derek Hatch), and Pentecostal (Chris Green). Each article stands independently and answers what catholicity is in its own tradition. Each article also addresses, at least to some extent, a biblical and theological reflection about the nature, foundation, and proper pursuit of catholicity, though each approaches the issues uniquely and without a standardized script.

Part 2 features an extended dialogue between Peter Leithart and Luke Stamps over the issue of paedobaptism (Leithart) and credobaptism (Stamps) and whether each view can account for the catholicity of the Christian tradition. Leithart and Stamps each thereafter substantially respond to one another’s article, and finally they offer rejoinders concluding the dialogue. The order is the following:

1. Peter Leithart, Paedobaptism and Catholicity
2. Luke Stamps, Credobaptism and Catholicity
3. Leithart, Response to Stamps
4. Stamps, Response to Leithart
5. Leithart, Final Rejoinder
6. Stamps, Final Rejoinder

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Questions they tackle include the following: How is their view of baptism catholic? How are the distinctives of their view not out of line with the tradition (e.g., rejecting baptismal regeneration)? How does their view of baptism relate to other theological traditions? Would you or would you not allow church membership to those who come seeking it but with a different mode or meaning of baptism? How does their view of baptism impact the practice of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper and other ecclesiastical or theological issues in church?

The editors want to thank the contributors for their work in this issue. We found the planning and editing process extremely edifying as we, in some small ways, helped to foster denominational dialogues in this important topic. We especially want to thank Peter Leithart and Luke Stamps for their graciousness and charitableness in their own interactions on a challenging and neglected subject.

In the end, we want this small volume to help cultivate greater understanding, perspective, and appreciation among different Christians throughout the world. Greater understanding does not always—or even usually—mean greater agreement, but it should lead to an increasing and ever-abounding humility and sympathy towards those with whom you do disagree. Our prayer, along these lines, echoes Jesus's prayer in John 17, that we—the church—may be one even as the Son is one with the Father:

I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23, NIV).

The positive vision of catholicity is a pursuit of the visible unity of the church, echoing Jesus's prayer for us here. Therefore, we offer this collection to the church catholic: to both students and scholars of the Bible and theology and to all those around the world who cling to Jesus in the hope of the consummation and restoration of his universal people, the Bride of Christ. Come, Lord Jesus, come.



# PART I

A House with Many Rooms?  
Catholicity in Denominational Perspective



# **The One Church, the Many Churches: A Catholic Approach to Ecclesial Unity and Diversity—with Special Attention to Abraham Kuyper’s Ecclesiastical Epistemology**

**EDUARDO ECHEVERRIA**

*Professor of Philosophy and Systematic Theology, Graduate School of Theology,  
Sacred Heart Major Seminary*

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. . . . Lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. —1 Cor 1:10, 17 EST

The very mystery of the Church invites, rather compels us, to ask about the perspective ahead for the difficult way of estrangement and rapprochement, of dialogue, contact, controversy, and for the ecumenical striving to overcome the divisions of the Church.... Our thoughts about the future of the Church must come out of tensions in the present, tensions that must creatively produce watchfulness, prayer, faith, and commitment, love for truth and unity, love for unity and truth. —G. C. Berkouwer<sup>1</sup>

What is the church?<sup>2</sup> That is the question I shall address in this article. I agree wholeheartedly with Baptist theologian Gregg Allison that a fundamental orientation to ecclesiology should take as its starting point “the ontology or nature of the church.”<sup>3</sup> From a Catholic perspective, this question is really two fundamental ecclesiological questions: “What is the Church? In other words, what is its nature? But also: Where is the Church and where is she realized in her fullness?”<sup>4</sup> The Catholic approach

1. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en de Nieuwe Theologie*, (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1964), 316. Translated by Lewis B. Smedes as *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 249-50.

2. This article is an adaptation of Chapter 6 from the revised and expanded second edition of my book, *Pope Francis: The Legacy of Vatican II* (Hobe Sound, FL: Lectio Publishing, 2019).

3. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32.

4. Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Katholische Kirche, Wesen, Wirklichkeit, Sendung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2011); Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. Thomas Hoebel, ed. R. David Nelson (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015). Both sources will be cited throughout the notes, first the original followed by the pagination for the English translation in square brackets. See also, Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*

to these two questions is made in light of the confession *credo in unam ecclesiam*, which is one of the marks of the Church—indeed, it has first place in the list of marks: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381). Differing from Allison, however, these marks of the Church are more foundational for answering the ontological question than the constitutive characteristics of the Church such as “being doxological, logocentric, pneumadynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and . . . eschatological.”<sup>5</sup>

I turn below, briefly to answer these two fundamental ecclesiological questions. But my main concern in this article is a Roman Catholic approach not only to ecclesial unity and diversity but also Catholicity. Essential to this approach is distinguishing unity from uniformity, division from diversity, and conflicting from complementary formulations of the truths of faith. Briefly, I distinguish the unity of meaning and truth in dogma from its diverse linguistic and conceptual formulations. John XXIII suggests this distinction between truth and its formulations in dogma in his opening address to Vatican II, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*: “The deposit or the truths of faith, contained in our sacred teaching, are one thing, while the mode in which they are enunciated, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*], is another thing.” The subordinate clause in this passage from *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* is part of a larger passage from Vatican I, *Dei Filius*,<sup>6</sup> and this passage is itself from the *Commonitorium* 23 of Vincent of Lérins: “Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only with the proper limits, i.e., *within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment.*”<sup>7</sup> Unity here is at the level of meaning and truth but not necessarily at the level of formulations. This distinction has ecumenical significance, as argued in *Unitatis Redintegratio*.<sup>8</sup> The following passages also

(London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 153.

5. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29; 162.

6. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum et definitionum: quae in rebus fidei et morum*, ed. P. Hünermann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), §3020; Cited subsequently as Denzinger, *Dei Filius*.

7. Vincent of Lérins, *The Commonitories*, trans. Rudolph E. Morris (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 309. The translator informs us about Vincent and the reason for the title of his work, “Although the *Commonitories* were written shortly after the General Council of Ephesus (431), it is doubtful if they were published during his lifetime. At any rate, he used a pen name and wrote as ‘Peregrinus’ (the Pilgrim); he may have felt, just as we do today, that each of us is only a pilgrim, having no secure place on earth. He called his work *Commonitories* in the strict sense of the word. He wrote them, as he tells his reader, because he felt his memory getting weak and because he had observed that persistent reading of his notes helped him to see more clearly in matters of decisive importance” (259). My study, “Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine,” will appear in the forthcoming book, *Faith Once for All Delivered: Tradition and Doctrinal Authority in the Catholic Church*, eds. Kevin L. Flannery, SJ. and Robert J. Dodaro, OSA (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021).

8. I show this point in my article, “Hierarchy of Truths Revisited,” *Acta Theologica*, 2015 (35)

touch upon the mutually complementary rather than conflicting formulations of the meaning and truth of dogma,

All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and *even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth* . . . What has just been said about the lawful variety that can exist in the Church must also be taken to apply to the differences in theological expression of doctrine. In the study of revelation East and West have followed different methods, and have developed differently their understanding and confession of God's truth. It is hardly surprising, then, if from time to time one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed it to better advantage. In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting. . . . Thus they promote the right ordering of Christian life and, indeed, pave the way to a full vision of Christian truth.<sup>9</sup>

I will return to this Lérinian ecclesiastical epistemology below.

*For now*, regarding the distinction between division and diversity, Catholic ecumenism is predicated upon the presuppositions, as *Unitatis Redintegratio* (§1) holds that “the Church established by Christ the Lord is, indeed, one and unique,” and that Christ himself is not divided. Furthermore, “Discord [division] openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world [Jn 17:21], and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature.” But ecclesial division is not the same as theological diversity. As the quotes above make clear, *Unitatis Redintegratio* distinguishes between truth and its formulations, and this distinction has ecumenical significance. Hence, diversity pertains to theological elaborations of revealed truth from various traditions, and in some instances, one tradition or another has a deeper appreciation of some aspect of the revealed mystery of the Christian faith. For example, the Reformed tradition has a deeper appreciation than Catholicism of the revealed mystery shared by both traditions of the Lordship of Christ, as Kuyper demonstrates in his three-volume

2: 11-35, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v35i2.2>.

9. Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), §§4, 17, emphasis added. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

work, *Pro Rege*.<sup>10</sup> In this context, we can understand why John Paul II regards ecumenism as an “exchange of gifts, not merely an exchange of ideas.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, following G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1996), I argue that Abraham Kuyper’s (1837-1920) ecclesiastical epistemology purports to account for ecclesial unity and diversity. I pay special attention in this article to Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology. Does Kuyper help us to distinguish unity from uniformity, division from diversity, and conflicting from complementary formulations of the meaning and truths of faith? For all its significance in raising the question of ecclesial unity and diversity, Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology fails to account for a “commensurable pluralism,”<sup>12</sup> or what Kuyper called an “organically connected multiformity,”<sup>13</sup> which is what he was arguably attempting to develop.

Following my critique of Kuyper, I then turn to the Lérinian ecclesiastical epistemology of Vatican II alluded to above—allowing for legitimate pluralism and authentic diversity within a fundamental unity of meaning and truth; and thus, a commensurable pluralism. Lérinian ecclesiastical epistemology accounts for legitimate ecclesial unity and diversity as well as Catholicity. Unlike Kuyperian ecclesiastical epistemology, it succeeds where Kuyper failed to arrive at a commensurable pluralism. Commensurable pluralism can (a) account for the need for new dogmatic formulations; (b) explain why propositions of dogmas and (or) doctrines are unchangeable, irreformable, or definitive; and (c) justify the distinction between propositions and sentences, content and context, form and content, and message and the medium.

Turning now to the question of Catholicity and the Church’s self-description as *Roman Catholic*, I argue that these two terms—“Roman” and “Catholic”—are not mutually contradictory, as some Protestants have suggested.<sup>14</sup> Put differently, it is

10. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §17. The council is speaking, in this paragraph, about the relationship of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. I am applying this point about complementary theological formulations to Catholicism and Reformed theology, for example, Kuyper’s theology of the Lordship of Christ. See Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege: Living under Christ’s Kingship*, vol. 1, *The Exalted Nature of Christ’s Kingship*, Abraham Kuyper: Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

11. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, *Encyclical Letter* (1995), §§28-29. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html).

12. For this phrase, I am indebted to Msgr. Thomas Guarino, Seton Hall University, *The Disputed Teachings of Vatican II, Continuity and Reversal in Catholic Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).

13. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology, Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 170.

14. For example, Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1901), volume 4, translated by John Vriend as *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). See also, most recently, Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but not Catholic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 97-100, 265-66.

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about Catholicity in a concrete form. The Church is a *concretum universale*. Walter Cardinal Kasper explains,

Just as in Jesus Christ God has taken form not in any general humanity, but by becoming “this” man Jesus of Nazareth, it is analogously true that the fullness of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ is also present in the Church in a concrete, visible form. Thus, the Catholic Church is convinced that in it—which means in the church in communion with the successor of Peter and the bishops who are in communion with him—the Church of Jesus Christ is historically realized in a concrete, visible form, so that the Church of Jesus Christ subsists in it—in other words, it has its concrete form of existence.<sup>15</sup>

This scandal of ecclesiological particularity in *this* concrete Church “provokes opposition in other churches and church communities.”<sup>16</sup> Still, Catholic teaching holds that Catholicity is closely connected with unity. Her Catholicity derives from Christ himself, who is the Lord and Savior of the whole world and of all humanity (cf. Eph 1:3-10; 1 Tim 2:3-6). In particular, this means that the Church is, as the International Theological Commission correctly states, “at home in every nation and culture, and seeks to gather in everything for its salvation and sanctification.” In sum, the Commission adds, “the fact that there is one Savior and Lord shows that there is a necessary bond between catholicity and unity.”<sup>17</sup> Let us turn now to briefly consider the two fundamental ecclesiological questions I raised above: what is the nature of the Church? And where is that Church most fully found?

### What is the Nature of the Church?

The answer to this question is fundamental to dispelling the attraction of ecclesial relativism or pluralism. The nature of the Church is such that “the Church established by Christ the Lord is, indeed, one and unique.”<sup>18</sup> In his 1970 dogmatic study, *De Kerk*, Berkouwer reflects on the Church’s confession, “*credo in unam ecclesiam*.”<sup>19</sup> In this light, he considers the unicity of the Church (that is, its singularly unique nature such that there is only one Church) and her substantial inner unity (that is, that the Church constitutes a single whole and a complete unity). Berkouwer does not ignore

15. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 261 [179]; see also, Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, 154.

16. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 233 [158].

17. International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, (2011) §2, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20111129\\_tologia-oggi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html).

18. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §1.

19. Specifically, see Chapters 2 and 3 of *De Kerk*, vol. 1, *Eenheid en Katholiceit* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970); *De kerk*, vol. 2, *Apostoliceit en Heiligheid* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1972). These two volumes are translated in one complete volume by James E. Davison as *The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976). Both sources will be cited throughout the notes, first the original followed by the pagination for the English translation in square brackets.

the division among Christians; the disunity in the Church, which has its origin in sin; or the difference between ecclesial diversity and division. Given the Church's pluriformity, Berkouwer develops an ecclesiology in which the unicity—there is only one Church—and inner unity of the Church, as an independent ontologically self-contained subject, is not shifted into the future or into an *ecclesia invisibilis* (a purely Platonic entity, as it were), with the latter seeking “to make everything dependent on the already present, but hidden, unity of the invisible church.”<sup>20</sup> He, for one, is persuaded that the New Testament teaches that there is only one Church, not many churches, and this Church is the concrete, visible Church, here and now, rather than a prospective future reality.

For Berkouwer, the Church's unity as unicity—that is, the one and only Church—is the foundation of the inner unity of the Church. He says, “We have in mind the reference to the unity between Father and Son: ‘That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me’ (John 17:21, EST). Unity cannot be indicated more deeply than in this analogy.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, according to Berkouwer, “The being of the Church, as willed by God, implies unity.”<sup>22</sup> He adds

Our conviction that the plural for “church” is an inner contradiction is confirmed by the numerous characterizations of the Church of Christ in the whole of the New Testament: the one people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the building of God, the flock of the good Shepherd. These images indicate in various ways the one reality of the church.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, Berkouwer continues, “Unity belongs essentially to the Church's being: the expression ‘one church’ is really a pleonasm.”<sup>24</sup> He concludes that in light of the reference in the fourth gospel to Jesus rounding up the scattered sheep, “Nothing else than one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:16) is conceivable.” Hence, “The Church may forget neither the harvest nor the Shepherd of the sheep, for the Shepherd is known and recognized in the one flock. The picture of the Shepherd shows us Christ's unique work of gathering, which brings and holds the flock together.”<sup>25</sup>

Berkouwer adds the following: “The unity is unquestionably clear: the Church is the household of God (1 Tim 3:15), the temple of God (1 Pet 2:9f.), the one flock of the one Shepherd (John 10:16). All such characterizations make any thought of the plural simply ridiculous.”<sup>26</sup> As Paul wrote in 1 Cor 12:12-13, “For just as the body is one

20. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 61 [51].

21. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 56-57 [48].

22. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 32 [30].

23. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 94 [77].

24. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 33 [30].

25. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 59 [50].

26. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 47 [42].

and had many members, and all the members . . . are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” We should add here that the Church is the new and reborn humanity in Christ, the Bride of Christ, the People of God, the Church as Mother, and the Church as an independent metaphysical subject. So, there cannot be many churches. Still, Berkouwer distinguishes between unity and uniformity, urging us to recognize not only ecclesial pluriformity but also the calling to unity within the unicity of the one Church, the one fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

In Kasper’s Catholic ecclesiology, the inner unity of the one Church is not only baptismal, as alluded to by Berkouwer, but also Eucharistic: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Says Kasper,

The inner unity has its foundation in one Holy Spirit through one baptism (1 Cor 12:13) and participation in the one Eucharistic bread (1 Cor 10:17). Paul can even say we are “one” in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). In short, the Church *is* one in Jesus Christ. Again and again, Paul calls for unity and unanimity in the Church. He believes “there is one body, one Spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4f).<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, we need to make clear that pluriformity is not the same thing as ecclesiastical relativism or pluralism. As Kasper explains, “It would be an anachronism to read into the New Testament the situation of today, which history produced, of separated denominational churches existing side by side. In the eyes of Paul, such a coexistence and pluralism of different denominational churches would be a totally unbearable idea.”<sup>29</sup> Denominationalism would affect Christ himself by leaving us with a divided Christ. But given that the Church has *one* Lord, *one* Mediator, and *one* Savior, we cannot “replace the singular with a plural for the Church.”<sup>30</sup> The reality of many separated churches would also leave us with a contradicting pluralism, or a confessional relativism,<sup>31</sup> meaning thereby a pluriformity that tolerates contradictions such that we can be indifferent to claims that purport to be equally valid. Says Kasper rightly, “Sooner or later, this causes new divisions or leads to indifference and

27. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 93 [75-76].

28. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 227 [154].

29. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 226 [153].

30. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 47 [41]. Peter J. Leithart’s position on pursuing unity in a fragmented Church agrees with Kasper and Berkouwer that “denominationalism is not what Jesus desires for his church. It does not fulfill his prayer [John 17]. Denominationalism does not produce a church that is united as the Father is united with the Son and the Son with the Father.” P. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 4.

31. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 82.

relativism in the question of truth.”<sup>32</sup> Rather, there exists a plurality of churches in the one and only Church, which Kasper calls a “complementary *communio*-unity.”<sup>33</sup>

Allison is right that this plurality of churches qua churches should be “characterized [as] doxological, logocentric, pneumadynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and spatio-temporal/eschatological.”<sup>34</sup> Of course, in Catholic ecclesiology, the linchpin of the Church is the Eucharist—Eucharistic presence, Eucharistic sacrifice, and Eucharistic unity. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Kasper’s concept of a “complementary *communio*-unity” anticipates the import of distinguishing division from legitimate diversity in one’s ecclesiological epistemology.

### **Where is the Church and where is she realized in her fullness?**

It is not sufficient to answer the first ecclesiological question about the Church’s nature, namely, that it is one and unique. Since Berkouwer rejects both a spiritual and future unity, the question regarding the concrete place where the Church is realized in all her fullness must be addressed. In the Catholic answer to this second question, we come upon the *scandal of particularity*. Why? The catholic church of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is no abstract entity but a specific, concrete, identifiable church. The late Lutheran systematic theologian Robert Jenson responded as follows to a question regarding Protestants such as Reinhard Hütter, Bruce Marshall, Rusty Reno, and others who came into full communion with the Catholic Church,

I think one thing is common to all or most of them: they intend to inhabit the one, historically real church confessed by the creeds, and could no longer recognize this in their Protestant denominations. And indeed, if the church of the creeds does not, as the Second Vatican Council put it, “subsist in” the Roman Catholic Church, it is hard to think where it could.<sup>35</sup>

Vatican II, following a venerable and long-standing part of Catholic tradition, speaks of the one and indivisible Church of Christ as “subsisting in” the Catholic Church,<sup>36</sup> meaning thereby that Christ’s Church is realized in her in a singularly unique way unable to be affirmed of any other community of faith. Thus, *subsists* means that the “Church of Christ is one, indivisible, unique and irrepeatably, and that

32. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 263 [181].

33. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 263 [181].

34. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29.

35. Robert Jenson, “God’s Time, Our Time: An Interview with Robert W. Jenson,” *Christian Century*, May 2, 2006, 35.

36. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium* (1964), §8, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html). Subsequently cited as *Lumen Gentium*.

its one reality exists concretely as the Catholic Church.”<sup>37</sup> These two are one in their concrete being, an identical subject.

Given the limits of this article, I must briefly state the first principle of Catholic ecclesiology; namely, the Church possesses “the extraordinary unity, fullness of being, self-sufficiency, and thoroughly concrete existence that characterizes Christ’s Church.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, as I shall argue in a moment, this unparalleled identification between Christ’s Church and the Catholic Church does *not* preclude ecclesial existence outside the visible boundaries of the Church. But it does leave no room for a multiple subsistence ecclesiology—ecclesiological relativism—“suggesting that Christ’s Church be identified simultaneously with a plurality of Christian communions.”<sup>39</sup>

Of course, neither Berkouwer nor Kasper are blind to the reality of a divided Church. Hence, in view of that division, unity is both a gift and a task, an indicative and an imperative, with the former preceding the latter; and the latter being an admonition to restore unity among a divided Church, heeding Jesus’s ecumenical imperative in his prayer that all should be one (John 17:21). Berkouwer says, for example,

The problematic of unity and division affects the *credo* [*in unam ecclesiam*] from the beginning on. There is no other Church than the earthly Church—in Corinth, in Philippi, in Smyrna, or in any other part of the world. As a result, whoever speaks confessionally about the unity of the Church must give account of what is in full view, namely, the Church in her disunity.<sup>40</sup>

Yes, there is division among Christians, disunity in the one Church, but this division is the fruit of human sin, and such disunity is sharply placed “under the criticism of the gospel.”<sup>41</sup> This, too, is the view of Vatican II’s *Unitatis Redintegratio* §1: “Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.” Berkouwer adds that “the disunity of the Church stands under God’s criticism!”<sup>42</sup> Still, division and diversity, or pluriformity, are not the same thing. Significantly, pluriformity is not just another name for division, for unlike division, it is positive.

There is diversity, but it is “the pluriformity of the church” and not a “plurality of churches.”<sup>43</sup> Berkouwer’s ecclesiology “seeks to examine the concrete, visible church, and does so by placing her in the light of pluriformity.”<sup>44</sup> He explains, “One must definitely ask what we are to think of the undeniable ‘plural’ that dominates

37. Stephen A. Hipp, *The One Church of Christ, Understanding Vatican II* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 3.

38. Hipp, *One Church of Christ*, 38.

39. Hipp, *One Church of Christ*, 11.

40. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 32 [29].

41. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 36 [33].

42. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 64 [54].

43. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 61 [51].

44. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 61 [51].

our speech, particularly in light of the self-evident singular.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, there must be another way to do justice to the pluriformity of the one church, of diversity within unity, and unity within diversity, and it is here that Berkouwer brings into this discussion Abraham Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology.<sup>46</sup> I come back to this ecclesiastical epistemology in the next section of the paper.

The extraordinary unity of the Church is not a human construction but a divine reality received as a gift. That is why Ratzinger can say, and Berkouwer and Kasper agree, “The true Church is reality, an existing reality, *even now*.”<sup>47</sup> In sum, Catholic ecclesiology holds that the one Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church on the one hand, and the plurality of churches on the other. “The Catholic Church dares and must dare to take the paradoxical position of attributing to herself in a unique way the singular form, ‘the Church,’” concludes Ratzinger, “despite and in the midst of the plurality she has accepted.”<sup>48</sup> Put differently, it is about Catholicity in a concrete form. The Church is a *concretum universale*, as I explained earlier.

This constitutive feature of Catholic ecclesial identity, as correctly underscored by Kasper, does not imply that others outside the Church are not Christians or, adds Ratzinger, “Dispute the fact that their communities have an ecclesial character.”<sup>49</sup> Briefly, in this connection, here is the dilemma that Catholic ecclesiology seeks to avoid,

- *Either* correctly affirming that the Church of Christ fully and totally subsists alone in its own right in the Catholic Church, because the entire fullness of the means of salvation and of unity, which is not found in any other church, is present in her; and then implausibly denying that Orthodoxy and the historic churches of the Reformation are churches in any real sense whatsoever, such that there exists an ecclesial wasteland or emptiness outside the Church’s visible boundaries.<sup>50</sup>
- *Or* rightly affirming that they are churches in some sense, in a lesser or greater degree to the extent that ecclesial elements of truth and sanctification exist in them, but then wrongly accepting ecclesiological relativism or pluralism—meaning thereby that the one Church of Christ

45. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 59-60 [50].

46. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 65-76 [55-63].

47. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 119. See also, 130-38.

48. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1977), 149, as quoted in Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger, Life in the Church and Living Theology*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 309.

49. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 119; italics added.

50. *Lumen Gentium*, §8; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3-4; *Ut Unum Sint*, §14. See also, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration: *Dominus Iesus*, On the Unicity and salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, August 6, 2000, §16; on line: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html).

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Jesus subsists in many churches, with the Catholic Church being merely one among many churches.<sup>51</sup>

Focusing on the second horn of this dilemma, what Berkouwer sees here as a “radical change in the Roman Catholic judgment of other churches” does not mean that she has either relativized,<sup>52</sup> in the sense of ecclesiological pluralism, or taken back her first principle of ecclesiology (the entire fullness of the means of salvation are present).<sup>53</sup> He explains: “The other churches—in spite of their relatedness to Christ and the Holy Spirit—still do not partake in this *concrete, institutional condensation and centralization of fullness*.”<sup>54</sup> Yet, this aspect of fullness referred to by Berkouwer no longer means all or nothing, as Kasper rightly states. In other words, since there are “elements of sanctification and truth outside the Church’s visible structure,” the Church is present in these other ecclesial communities to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>55</sup> Hence, as I stated above, it is not the case that there exists an ecclesial wasteland or emptiness outside the church’s visible boundaries. To the extent that these elements or vestiges are present, the Church of Jesus Christ is efficaciously present in these particular churches to a lesser or greater degree. Vatican II introduces not doctrinal change to the Church’s historic ecclesiological self-understanding (namely, the Church of Christ fully and totally subsists alone in its own right in the Catholic Church, because the entire fullness of the means of salvation and of unity), but it does represent a development thereof.

Thus, Roman Catholic ecclesiology does not consider the matter of ecumenical relations to be an addendum or an appendage to her ecclesiology. The fundamental question regarding the “one Church and the many churches,” of ecclesial unity and diversity is at the core of this ecclesiology. Following from her ecclesiology is her corresponding understanding of ecumenism. Consequently, ecumenism has been at the core of her engagement with other Christians, especially since Vatican II, and hence, for the last half-century, as is evident from her formal ecumenical dialogues

51. *Lumen Gentium*, §8; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3-4, 20-21, 23. For helping me to formulate this dilemma, I am grateful to Msgr. Thomas Guarino.

52. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 138 [114].

53. *Unitatis Redintegratio* §4, “[T]he Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and all means of grace.”

54. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 138 [114-15]. My emphasis.

55. *Lumen Gentium*, §8, “The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Savior. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ.”

*Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3, “Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.”

with the Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, and Methodist communities, with the fruits of these dialogues being manifested in the documents resulting from these dialogues.<sup>56</sup>

Berkouwer agrees with this interpretation of Vatican II. “Since the relationship between churches is not simply a question of confession or denial of the truth, the problem arises as to degrees of [unity and] catholicity in the understanding of God’s truth.” Significantly, then, “Fullness’ is not always contrasted to ‘emptiness,’ but also to incompleteness and partiality.”<sup>57</sup> Kasper summarily states the point Berkouwer makes about the proper interpretation of Vatican II ecclesiology: “The Council thus advocates a graded concept of Church according to which the non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities participate in a graded way in the unity and catholicity of the Catholic Church.”<sup>58</sup> Different endowments of “elements” therefore bring about different degrees of unity and Catholicity, and hence of ecclesial status. Thus,

The one (“*unica*”) Church of Christ is (“*est*”) the Catholic Church, and this Church subsists in (“*subsistit in*”) the Catholic Church, and in her alone, while, in a way inseparable from the Catholic Church, it extends itself to and is present in (“*adest in*”) every communion in which (“*in quibus*”), by reason of the sanctifying action of Christ the Head and of his Body, elements (“*elementa*”) of this Church, in a partial way (“*ex parte*”), are found (“*adsunt*”).<sup>59</sup>

### **Gift and Task: *Ressourcement***

The Church of Christ is really one thing (unicity) in an ontological sense; that is, “one *per se* and absolutely, existing in itself as one complete and perfect body with a single intrinsic constitutive principle, namely, the life of grace flowing from the Christ who, as Head, is organically one with the body.”<sup>60</sup> Evangelical Protestants have often criticized this claim by Catholic ecclesiologists as possessing an alleged tendency to “assimilate Christology into ecclesiology.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, the inherent

56. See Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*.

57. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 145 [120].

58. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 235 [160].

59. Hipp, *One Church of Christ*, 87.

60. Hipp, *One Church of Christ*, 29.

61. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 152. Objections like this have been around for a while. The great American Presbyterian theologian, B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) raised this charge in his 1915 study, *The Plan of Salvation*, Chapter 3, Sacerdotalism. For example, “[The Church] does not, of course, supersede the work of Christ. . . . But in the present dispensation, the Church, in large measure, has taken over the work of Christ. It is in a real sense, a reincarnation of Christ to the end of the continuation and completion of his redemptive mission” (51). Again, “In one word, the Church in this [Roman] system is conceived to be Jesus Christ himself in his earthly form, and it is therefore substituted for him as the proximate object of the faith of Christians” (52). And again, “It is to the Church rather than to Christ or to the grace of God that the salvation of men is immediately ascribed” (52). Gregg Allison quotes Michael Horton to raise a similar objection. Allison is deeply distressed by the tendency in Catholic

incarnational relationship between Christ and the Church is substantial, such that there is an unqualified identification between the two according to Catholic teaching. The consequence of this claim is that it “forecloses the possibility of reforming the church’s teaching,” and hence, “Roman Catholicism has become master of the gospel rather than servant.”<sup>62</sup> I have addressed at length elsewhere Vanhoozer’s critique of Catholic ecclesiology.<sup>63</sup> For now, I argue that the Church is committed to the project of *ressourcement*, particularly in an ecumenical context, given the division between Christians and the presupposition that the Church established by Christ is one and unique. Therefore, unity is both a gift (in an ontological sense) and a task, given the ecumenical call to restore unity among divided Christians.

Both unity and, indeed, Catholicity are already an existing reality—a concrete embodiment—given in the Catholic Church, but they are also dynamic realities because “in the fullness that the Church received [in Christ], she is directed toward fullness.”<sup>64</sup> Hence, unity, as well as Catholicity, are both divine gifts and human tasks. Perfect unity and Catholicity will be found only in the eschaton.

Regarding the former, the task of restoring unity, Kasper notes, “Unity is flawed because of the divisions. The ecumenical dialogue is to heal these wounds. Through it, the imperfect unity is to be brought to full unity. This dialogue is not only an exchange of ideas but also of gifts.”<sup>65</sup> This is receptive ecumenism. In other words, different theological traditions

have developed differently their understanding and confession of God’s truth. It is hardly surprising, then, if from time to time one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has *expressed* it to better advantage. In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually *complementary* rather than conflicting. . . . Thus they promote the right ordering of Christian life and, indeed, pave the way to a full vision of Christian truth.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, these traditions of other churches and ecclesial communities have a contribution to make—through integrating and respecting all their *legitimate* differences—to the

theology of substituting “the church in the place of its absent Lord.” Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000); Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 5, quoted in Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 65. Similarly, Leonardo De Chirico, *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on post-Vatican 2 Roman Catholicism*, Religions and Discourse, ed. James M. M. Francis, vol. 19 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

62. Robert McAfee Brown, *The Spirit of Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 167, cited in Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel*, 228.

63. Eduardo Echeverria, *Revelation, History, and Truth: A Hermeneutics of Dogma* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018).

64. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 135-36 [113].

65. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 236 [160].

66. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §17; emphasis added.

Catholic Church, bringing about a fuller and hence more perfect—that is, catholic—realization as possible of the church. In other words, our non-Catholic brethren have a real contribution to make to the fuller realization of the church’s unity and Catholicity, and hence to the fullness of understanding and living of Catholic truth.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, there is a connection to be made between unity, Catholicity, and fullness. The Catholic Church alone is given the fullness of all means of salvation. Berkouwer’s reflections on “fullness in Christ”<sup>68</sup> and the Church’s participation in that fullness in Christ, having been entrusted to the Church of Christ in its concrete form, are very helpful for gaining a proper perspective on this ecclesiastical sticking point—the scandal of particularity—for Protestants in general. The Catholicity of the Church cannot be adequately understood except in light of Christ’s fullness. Regarding Jesus Christ, he is full of grace and truth (John 1:14), full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), with the fullness of God pleased to dwell in him (Col 1:19), and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (2:9). According to Dulles, “Jesus Christ is, so to speak, the concrete universal, for in the particularity and contingency of his human existence the plenitude of divine life is made available to all who will receive it.”<sup>69</sup> Now, in what way is the Church related to the fullness of Christ and the fullness of God?

Significantly, “Fullness [in Christ] and fulfillment” are a gift to the Church’s being, entailing a task as well since this gift does “not describe a tensionless ‘being,’ as if the Church had already achieved the final purpose of all her ways; rather they appear in living and relevant connection with her concrete life on earth.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, Berkouwer rightly says, “In the fullness [of Christ] that the Church received, she is directed toward fullness. That is the fantastic dynamic characterizing Paul’s view of the Church, and through it, he wants to make the Church rest in Christ’s self-sufficient work.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, we cannot abstract the fullness that the Church received from Christ and his all-sufficient work from the calling to preserve this relatedness to him. Christology is not assimilated into ecclesiology as if we were left with a deistic conception of the Church, meaning thereby that she is “left to her own, independent existence, as if her acquisition of fullness meant that she could find and go her own way.”<sup>72</sup> What Berkouwer calls the “correlative language of the Scriptures” must be attended to so that we might see the Church in the light of the fullness of Christ: “Therefore, the Church, after receiving this fullness, must set her mind on and seek

67. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §4.

68. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 135-39 [112-15].

69. Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 9.

70. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 135-36 [113].

71. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 135-36 [113].

72. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 137 [114].

many things (Col. 3:1f); and from the fullness, the whole life becomes visible in a radical, utterly concrete admonition (Col. 3:5f.; cf. Eph 4:17ff).<sup>73</sup>

The limits of this presentation will only allow me to give one brief example to illustrate that dynamic correlation between Christ and the Church, and hence, between fullness in Christ, the concrete universal, and fulfillment. *Ressourcement* is at the heart of this dynamic correlation. *Lumen Gentium* §8 states that the Church “is at one and the same time holy and always in need of being purified (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*), and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal.” In *Unitatis Redintegratio* §6, the Council states that the Church is called “to continual reformation” (*ad hanc perennem reformationem*). Furthermore, several other paragraphs of *Lumen Gentium* makes clear that purification, renewal, and reformation of the Church is the work of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth. . . . By the power of the gospel, He makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her [*Ecclesiae eamque perpetuo renovat*], and leads her to perfect unity with her Spouse.”<sup>74</sup> In *Lumen Gentium* §7, the Church is subject to her Head, Christ, “In order that we may be unceasingly renewed in Him [*Ut autem in illo incessanter renovemur*] . . . so that she may grow and reach all the fulfillment of God.” It is said about the Church in *Lumen Gentium* §9, “That moved by the Holy Spirit she may never cease to renew herself [*seipsam renovare non desinat*] until through the cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting.” Finally, *Lumen Gentium* §12 states that the gifts of the Spirit among Christ’s faithful “renders them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which help the renewal and upbuilding of the Church [*pro renovatione et aedificatione ecclesiae*].”

The Second Vatican Council focused not only on the dynamics of the hermeneutics of reform and renewal in the life of the Church but also on the development in her understanding of the truth. This is evident in the Vatican II decree on ecumenism,

All [Catholics] are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform. . . . Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. . . . Thus if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies . . . in the way that Church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these can and should be set right at the opportune moment.<sup>75</sup>

Elsewhere in the Dogmatic Constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*, we read,

For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words [of divine revelation] which have been handed down. . . . For as the centuries

73. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, [114].

74. *Lumen Gentium* §4.

75. *Unitatis Redintegratio* §§4, 6.

succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.<sup>76</sup>

Consequently, pace, Vanhoozer, and others, the Catholic tradition does not assimilate or reduce Christology to ecclesiology, as if to suggest that the Church was now the subject rather than Christ. Christ precedes the Church as its head; the Church mediates the light of the nations that is Christ. Kasper explains:

What the captivity letters [of St. Paul] mainly express is the superordination of Jesus Christ as Head over the Church. Therefore, the Church cannot be identified with Jesus Christ, and it cannot tout court be called the Christ living-on. It depends on what is respectively the subject in such a statement and what is the predicate object; not the Church is Christ, but Christ is present in the Church as his body; he lives and works in it.<sup>77</sup>

Elsewhere Kasper adds, “It is not the Church, it is Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). . . . The Church is not itself the light of the nations. The light of the nations is Jesus Christ, whose human face reflects the image of the living God.”<sup>78</sup> This Christological consciousness is at the core of the ecclesiology in *Lumen Gentium* §1 from Vatican II.

### **Kuyperian Ecclesiastical Epistemology**

In volume 1 of his 1970 work, *De Kerk*, Berkouwer argues that Abraham Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology deals with the perennial problem of the relationship between truth and its human expression. Berkouwer writes about that challenge in his 1957 study, *Nieuwe Perspectieven in de Controvers: Rome-Reformatie*, “This is the problem of variable, historically defined thought forms in different eras when all kinds of philosophical notions have played a definite role. What is the relationship between unchanging truth and theological formulations and doctrinal choices?”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, but more explicitly focused on ecclesial unity and diversity, Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology attempts to make intelligible the distinction between unity and uniformity, and ecclesial diversity or pluriformity, without falling into either epistemic (confessional) relativism or ecclesial relativism.

76. VaticanII, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, §§8-9 Online: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

77. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 191 [127].

78. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 111 [68].

79. Berkouwer, *Nieuwe Perspectieven in De Controvers: Rome-Reformatie*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 20, No. 1 (Amsterdam: N.V. Noord-Hollandsche UitgeversMaatschappij, 1957), 20.

Berkouwer is drawing mainly from Kuyper's *Principles of Sacred Theology*.<sup>80</sup> Says Berkouwer, "Kuyper was dealing with a real problem, and he definitely touched on present-day problems when he asked whether varying interpretation as such already breaks fellowship with respect to the reality to which varying understanding is directed."<sup>81</sup> In *Gemene Gratie*, Kuyper states, "The objective truth remains one, but its appropriation, application, and confession must differ, even as the color of the light differs according to the glass in which it is refracted."<sup>82</sup> To show the ongoing relevance of Kuyper's ecclesiastical epistemology, Berkouwer compares Abraham Kuyper and the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, "Neither Kuyper nor [Karl] Rahner postulates that truth is not one, but they touch each other with respect to the limited, and therefore varied, understanding of truth." Still, Berkouwer is right, "From the nature of the case, there are profound problems here, both for Rahner in connection with the old tradition of the infallible confession of the Church and for Kuyper in connection with pluriformity in confessions."<sup>83</sup> Regarding Rome, Kuyper says, "However much Rome has insisted upon uniformity, it has never been able to establish it, and in the end, she has adopted the system of giving to each expression of the multiformity a place in the organic harmony of her great hierarchy."<sup>84</sup>

Kuyper is both right and wrong in his claim about Rome. He is right that Rome insists on the unity of meaning and truth, according to Vatican I (1869-70), *Dei Filius*, Chapter 4, Faith and Reason:

Hence also that *meaning* of the sacred dogma is *perpetually to be retained* which our Holy Mother Church has once declared, and there must never be a deviation from that meaning on the specious ground and title of a more profound understanding "Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only within the proper limits, i.e., *within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment*."<sup>85</sup>

80. See Kuyper, *Principles*, particularly §104, Development of Multiformity [Pluriformity], 658-68. The Dutch original of *Principles* is a three-volume work (1894), *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*. The English translation contains the first fifty-three pages of volume 1 of the original, Introduction, and the entirety of vol. 2, Systematics. Berkouwer also occasionally draws from vol. 3, *Gemene Gratie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok), particularly 232-38. Until recently, available in English translation from the volumes on *Gemene Gratie* are selections; see *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, "Common Grace," 165-201. Now the entire three- volumes are available in English translation by the Acton Institute.

81. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 69-70, [60-61].

82. *Gemene Gratie*, vol. 3, 237; my translation.

83. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 69-70, 74 [58, 60-61].

84. Kuyper, *Principles*, 170, "Organically connected multiformity."

85. Vincent of Lérins, *The Commonitories*, 306. See also, Denzinger, §3020; emphasis mine. The permanence of meaning and truth is taught in the constitution: "... is sensus perpetuo est retinendus... nec umquam ab eo sensu, altior intelligentiae specie et nomine, recedendum... in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu, eademque sententia" (§3020); also, "ne sensus tribuendus sit alius" (§2043).

Canon 3: “If anyone says that, as science progresses, at times a sense *is to be given* to dogmas proposed by the Church *different from the one* that the Church has understood and understands, let him be anathema.”<sup>86</sup> But Kuyper is wrong when he claims that Roman ecclesiastical epistemology has never been able to show a commensurable pluralism. Commensurable pluralism can (a) account for the need for new dogmatic formulations; (b) explain why propositions of dogmas and doctrines are unchangeable, irreformable, or definitive; and (c) justify the distinction between proposition and sentences, content and context, form and content, and message and the medium.

In other words, commensurable pluralism can show that new doctrinal formulations mediate the universality and material identity—a dogmatic conceptual hard core—of the permanent meanings and truths of Christian dogmas such as that of the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement, according to the same meaning and same judgment (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*). If the latter, then the new linguistic formulation or expression can vary as long as they mediate the same meaning and same judgment of truth. As Bernard Lonergan puts it, “The meaning of the dogma is not apart from a verbal formulation, for it is a meaning declared by the church. However, the permanence attaches to the meaning and not to the formula. To retain the same formula and give it a new meaning is precisely what the third canon [of Vatican I] excludes (Denzinger §3043).”<sup>87</sup>

It is precisely Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology, not Rome’s, which is unable to account for commensurable pluralism. Here is my argument about the weakness of Kuyper’s epistemology.

The first principle of Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology is epistemic perspectivalism, namely, that “our knowledge of the truth is always imperfect and inadequate.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, perspectivalism recognizes “subjectivity in the understanding of truth.” The acceptance of perspectivalism is a result of recognizing that “absolute or objective truth, which Kuyper affirmed,” cannot “appear in unity of form and content.”<sup>89</sup> Like Kuyper, Herman Bavinck also holds “no one claims that content and expression, essence and form, are in complete correspondence and coincide. The dogma that the church confesses and the dogmatician develops is not identical with the absolute truth of God [himself].”<sup>90</sup> Kuyper makes clear his rejection of the claim that “truth, which of necessity must be absolute, was also bound to maintain this absolute character in the unity of form and expression.”<sup>91</sup> In Kuyper’s view, “the truth of God was too rich and the great salvation in Christ too abundantly

86. The italicized words are the ones cited in the text.

87. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 323.

88. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 69 [58].

89. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 69 [58].

90. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol 1, Inleiding Principia (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1895), 7, translated by John Vriend as *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 32-33.

91. Kuyper, *Principles*, 664.

precious, by reason of the Divine character exhibited in both, for them to be able to reach their full expression in one human form.” Of course, Kuyper understood “that theology as such could not dismiss the problem of *how this multiformity was to be brought into harmony with the unity of the body of Christ.*”<sup>92</sup>

Berkouwer explains Kuyper’s view regarding the distinction between truth and its formulations: “Even though ‘objective’ truth is one, the ‘subjective’ application and confession must differ.” He continues, “Revelation . . . is not an ‘objective truth’ suspended above human life. Consequently, Kuyper characterizes opposition to pluriformity as a form of dualism that does not allow the gospel to penetrate the fabric of life. . . . All of this is concentrated in Kuyper’s conception of the [epistemic] distance between ‘absolute’ truth and what we men assimilate of it in our subjective perception.”<sup>93</sup> Clearly, for Kuyper, it is not that divine truth recedes behind various perspectives; truth itself is not plural, but our understanding of truth is. Says Berkouwer, according to Kuyper, “Certainly, revelation is one, and truth in Christ is one; but when Christ is formed in believers, the law of development and subjectivity comes into operation along the way of a meaningful pluriformity.”<sup>94</sup>

Berkouwer insists with some justification that a concern for perspectival pluriformity, and its basis in the inadequacy of expressions, such as in Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology, should not be mistakenly understood as relativism or subjectivism about truth, or ecclesial relativism. Still, insists Berkouwer, there are profound problems “for Kuyper in connection with pluriformity in confessions.”<sup>95</sup> For one must make clear that inadequacy of expression does not mean inexpressibility of truth, even divine truth.

Regarding this point, Berkouwer explains: “Kuyper’s anti-dualism in itself is irrefutable; revelation is fully intended to be understood and known, to enter into human conceptions, experiences, feelings, knowledge, and understanding. This ‘entrance into’ does not cast shadows on revelation; nevertheless, the Church must be aware of the incompleteness in all her speaking and confessing.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, Kuyper’s antidualism does not imply that the inadequacy of expression means, according to Kuyper, inexpressibility of divine truth. Still, Kuyper’s distinction between truth and its formulations rests upon a more particular epistemological presupposition; namely, that all formulations of the truth are inadequate. Such formulations can never be adequate because they can never be exhaustive expressions of the truth. In other words, Berkouwer adds, “The issue is not about challenging revealed truth, but about recognizing the ‘limitation’ or ‘incompleteness’ of our knowledge . . . that is only

92. Kuyper, *Principles*, 664, emphasis added.

93. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 69 [57-58].

94. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 70 [61].

95. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 70 [61].

96. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 74 [61].

sketched even in the most worthwhile formulation.”<sup>97</sup> There is always more to say about the reality of faith. In short, “This has everything to do with inexhaustibility of the truth of the gospel.”<sup>98</sup>

This is unquestionably true, but Berkouwer leaves unanswered the question, how, say, the formulations of Nicaea or Chalcedon consist of statements that describe reality entirely truthfully, even if inadequately. In other words, his attempts, in light of Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology, to legitimize ecclesial diversity must answer the question in what sense dogmatic formulations or creedal statements are determinately true (that is, actually corresponding to reality, bearing some determinative relation to truth itself) but also how “every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining its truth.”<sup>99</sup> To answer this question, one must show that it does not follow from the true claim that doctrinal statements are historically conditioned and limited, indeed, inadequate, that this must result in their not being wholly true. As Karl Rahner correctly states, “They are an *‘adequatio intellectus et rei,’* insofar as they state absolutely nothing which is false.”<sup>100</sup> So, the new linguistic formulation or expression can vary as long as they mediate the same judgment about objective reality. What is more, adds Rahner, “A more complete and more perfect statement does not falsify the one it supersedes.”<sup>101</sup> All of this requires treatment that I cannot give here but have given elsewhere.<sup>102</sup>

For now, let me just note that Kuyper fails to show a relationship between language and reality with respect to truth. This is a fundamental flaw in Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology since the relationship between dogmatic formulations and reality determines the truth status of the dogma. Consider, for example, the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Is what they assert and hence make judgments about—for example, the Trinity and the person and natures (human and divine) of Christ—true to reality? In other words, do they have truth-conveying status, meaning thereby that what is asserted in them is ontologically true? And, what about linguistically articulated doctrine; judgments expressive of propositional truth; supporting the conclusive and abiding assertions of revelation and doctrine; and logically sustaining the affirmations of Christian belief, their universality, continuity, and material identity? Divine truth may be expressed incompletely and inadequately, but neither falsely nor indeterminately. Just because we do not know everything that

97. Berkouwer, “Vragen Rondom De Belijdenis,” *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 63 (1963): 6, 10, 22, 25-26, 35-36 [my translation].

98. Berkouwer, “Vragen Rondom De Belijdenis,” 5.

99. Karl Rahner, “*Mysterium Ecclesiae*,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl, vol. 23 (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 151.

100. Rahner, “The Development of Dogma.” In *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1961), 44.

101. Rahner, “*Mysterium Ecclesiae*,” 151.

102. Eduardo J. Echeverria, *Revelation, History, and Truth: A Hermeneutics of Dogma* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018).

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there is to know about a particular divine truth, it does not follow that what we do know is not determinately true in these doctrinal formulations.

Regarding Berkouwer's second point that justifying ecclesial diversity does not justify ecclesiastical relativism or pluralism, he writes,

Yet the decisive question arises precisely at this point. Must the so greatly varied subjectivity inevitably lead to the pluriformity of the Church (in the sense of many concrete churches)? Convinced that this question must be answered in the negative, we want to point out that a different conclusion can be derived from the variations in subjectivity and the plural assimilation of new, modern information than the conclusion that Kuyper drew from history: precisely when plurality becomes more visible than ever before, the call to unity and fellowship gains more force!<sup>103</sup>

In other words, Berkouwer explains,

The stress on inadequacy and incompleteness does not legitimize the Church's pluriformity [in the sense of ecclesiological relativism], but rejects it because of the necessity of unity. In New Testament times, when the 'spread' of subjectivity had also become a reality, it was subjected to the discipline of unity in Christ. Imperfection is recognized, but it is taken up in the call—in antithesis to the individualizing of our knowledge—to understand the love of Christ “with all the saints” (Eph 3:17). There is simply no road from the incompleteness that has its place within the framework of love (1 Cor 13; Eph 3:17) to a pluriformity whose form is division, disunity, and contradiction.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, ecclesiological relativism also has implications for the teaching authority of the Church. According to the then-Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Then no Church could claim to possess definitively binding teaching authority, and in this way institutional relativism [ecclesiological relativism] will lead to doctrinal relativism.” In other words, “If belief in ‘the body’ of the Church is taken away,” he adds, “the Church's concrete claims regarding the content of faith disappear along with her bodiliness.”<sup>105</sup> Ratzinger's conclusion is now obvious in view of the fragmented churches in our culture who are no longer able to hold the universal validity of the Christian faith.

On the matter of truth and its doctrinal formulations, Kuyper was already criticized by his contemporary Catholic theologian Theodore Bensch. Bensch argued that Kuyper never made clear how mutually contradictory creedal statements

103. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 75 [62].

104. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 75 [62].

105. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “*Deus Locutus Est Nobis In Filio*: Some reflections on Subjectivity, Christology, and the Church,” in *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus Christ*. Papers from the Vallombrosa Meeting (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2000), 13-30.

could nevertheless be the formulations of the same revealed truth, according to the same meaning and same judgment, rather than formulas of verbal compromise.<sup>106</sup> Berkouwer summarily states Bensdorp's objection,

Bensdorp asked how flatly contradictory confessions can both be 'forms' of one revealed truth. How can there be harmony in the contradictions? Kuyper replied that he did not mean to say that in the doctrine of the Lord's supper, for instance, both transubstantiation and consubstantiation are true. But there is a certain 'harmony' in the sense that "the mystical fellowship with Christ is partaken of in the sacrament; however, the way that that fellowship comes about cannot be expressed by us in an adequate form." The differing formulations are attempts to understand the same mystical reality.<sup>107</sup>

But Kuyper's response to Bensdorp bypasses the question of the propositional truth status of conflicting claims, treating such claims of the various traditions as objectifications of the same basic experience. This sounds more like the experiential expressivism of modernism rather than orthodoxy. In other words, how do the formulations of Nicaea or Chalcedon consist of statements that describe reality entirely truthfully, even if inadequately? In his attempts to legitimize ecclesial diversity, Kuyper's ecclesiastical epistemology must answer the question in what sense dogmatic formulations or creedal statements are determinately true (actually corresponding to reality, bearing some determinative relation to truth itself), but also how every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining material identity of propositional truth. To answer this question, one must show that it does not follow from the true claim that doctrinal statements are historically conditioned and limited, indeed, inadequate, that this must result in their not being wholly true. How then, exactly, is a single and unitary revelation homogeneously expressed, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment, given the undeniable fact of time-conditioning, indeed, of historicity?

In this connection, given Kuyper's failure to answer this fundamental question, we can understand why Bensdorp criticized Kuyper of ultrasubjectivism. I agree with Berkouwer that "it would be erroneous to interpret this concern [for plurality and pluralism] as relativism or subjectivism." He adds, "Rather, in the plurality it is necessary to grope for that which truly binds and unites."<sup>108</sup> Berkouwer then elaborates,

That harmony [between various dogmatic formulations] had always been presumed, virtually self-evidently, to be an implication of the mystery of the truth "*eodem sensu eademque sententia*." Now, however, attention is captivated primarily by the historical-factual process that does not transcend the times, but is entangled with them in all sorts of ways. It cannot be denied

106. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 70-71, but missing from the English translation.

107. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 70-71.

108. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 73 [60].

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that one encounters the undeniable fact of the situated setting of the various pronouncements made by the Church in any given era.<sup>109</sup>

How then, exactly, is a single and unitary revelation homogeneously expressed, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment, given the undeniable fact “of time-conditioning, one can even say: of historicity.” Berkouwer comments, “All the problems of more recent interpretation of dogma are connected very closely to this search for continuity. . . . Thus, the question of the nature of continuity has to be faced.”<sup>110</sup>

Because Kuyper does not directly address the question of the nature of continuity, he leaves himself open to the charge of holding a contradicting pluralism or a confessional relativism, meaning thereby a pluriformity that tolerates contradictions between confessions, leading to indifference and relativism in the question of truth. Still, to be fair to Kuyper, his ecclesiastical epistemology must not be understood as a plea for ecclesiological relativism, meaning thereby that there are many concrete churches, or even that Kuyper was oblivious to disunity and division in the Church as the fruit of sin. Kuyper knew the difference between division and diversity.

One might say that Kuyper’s ecclesiastical epistemology, in its most favorable light, is after a commensurable pluralism—to use a term coined by the American dogmatic theologian Thomas Guarino—allowing for legitimate pluralism and authentic diversity within a fundamental unity of meaning and truth. But neither Kuyper nor Berkouwer succeeded in giving coherent expression to a commensurable pluralism.<sup>111</sup> Still, Berkouwer is correct that “the rise of a stronger sense of plurality coincides with new openness for the ecumenical problematic.”<sup>112</sup> In my judgment, Vatican Council II was successful precisely where Kuyper and Berkouwer failed despite the fact that Berkouwer recognized the hermeneutics of the ecumenical significance of Vatican II almost a half-century ago.

## Vatican II and Lérinian Ecclesiastical Epistemology

The then-Pope Benedict XVI, in his now-famous 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, called the hermeneutics of Vatican II “the ‘hermeneutic of reform,’ of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.”<sup>113</sup> This hermeneutics of creative

109. Berkouwer, *Nabetrachting op het Concilie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1968), 52.

110. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 236-37 [190-91].

111. In respect of Berkouwer, I argue this point in my book, Eduardo Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions*, vol. 24, *Studies in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

112. Berkouwer, *De Kerk*, vol. 1, 73 [60].

113. Pope Benedict XVI, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia offering them his Christmas greetings. <http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/>

retrieval, in short, of *ressourcement*, is at the heart of the Second Vatican Council's Lérinian hermeneutics.

The ecclesiastical epistemology implied by the Lérinian hermeneutics of Vatican II helps us to address the issue of how to distinguish unity from uniformity, division from diversity, and conflicting from complementary formulations of the truths of faith. Turning now to Kasper, who stands in the line of this hermeneutics, he (like Berkouwer) recognizes the ecumenical significance of the distinction between unchanging truth and theological formulations and doctrinal choices.<sup>114</sup> He explains,

The dogmatic decisions always take place in a specific historical situation, they use historical human language and ways of expression and are insofar historically conditioned. It pertains also to the historicity that dogmas can subsequently be deepened and complemented, obviously always in the same sense and the same meaning [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*"]. In other words, there is growth and progress in understanding the faith. However, within all this historical conditionality they express something that is valid and binding for all times.<sup>115</sup>

Hence, Kasper is drawing here a distinction between truth and its formulations in dogma, between the propositional truths of faith and their expression in sentences, form and content, content and context, such as was suggested by John XXIII in his opening address to Vatican II, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*: "The deposit or the truths of faith, contained in our sacred teaching, are one thing, while the mode in which they are enunciated, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment [*eodem sensu eademque sententia*'], is another thing."<sup>116</sup> As I explained earlier, the subordinate clause in this passage from *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* is part of a larger passage from Vatican I, *Dei Filius*,<sup>117</sup> and this passage is itself from the *Commonitorium* of Vincent of Lérins: "Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only with the proper limits, i.e., *within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment.*"

The Council's Lérinian ecclesiastical epistemology implicitly distinguishes between propositions and sentences. Propositions—contents of thought that are true or false, expressible in various languages, but more than mere words, expressing

december/documents/hf\_ben\_xvi\_spe\_20051222\_roman-curia.html.

114. Walter Kasper, "The Continuing Challenge of the Second Vatican Council: The Hermeneutics of the Conciliar Statements," in *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 166-76.

115. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 376 [264].

116. John XXIII, "Gaudet Mater Ecclesia," Allocation on the Occasion of the Solemn Inauguration of the Second Ecumenical Council (October 11, 1962), no. 14. I am following Joseph Komonchak's translation that is superior to both the Abbott and Flannery translations. <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>.

117. Denzinger, *Dei Filius*, §3020.

possible, and if true, actual states of affairs—do not vary as the language in which they are expressed varies. Furthermore, a proposition is true if what it says corresponds to the way objective reality is; otherwise, it is false. Of course, human beings speak in sentences to communicate propositions, but they are not the same thing as propositions. Propositions are nonlinguistic entities. That is, the same proposition, or the same meaning, is the message having many and varied expressions in different languages or in the same language. Moreover, the truth of a proposition is closely connected with its meaning. Bernard Lonergan rightly explains that “meaning of its nature is related to what is meant, and what is meant may or may not correspond to what is in fact so.” He continues, “If it corresponds, the meaning is true. If it does not correspond, the meaning is false.” Lonergan then correctly notes the implication of denying the correspondence view of truth, which is a realist view of truth, namely, that a proposition is true if what it says corresponds to what is, in fact, the case; otherwise, it is false:

To deny correspondence is to deny a relation between meaning and meant. To deny the correspondence view of truth is to deny that, when the meaning is true, the meant is what is so. Either denial is destructive of the [Catholic] dogmas. . . . If one denies that, when the meaning is true, then the meant is what is so, one rejects propositional truth. If the rejection is universal, then it is the self-destructive proposition that there are no true propositions. If the rejection is limited to the dogmas, then it is just a roundabout way of saying that all the dogmas are false.<sup>118</sup>

Significantly, normative Catholicism has supported the realism of Lérinian hermeneutics of dogma on this very point from Vatican I through Vatican II, including post-conciliar interpretations of doctrine. Hence, because of its realism in respect of truth, Lérinian hermeneutics is antihistoricist or antirelativist.

Vincent already saw this clearly in the early fifth century: doctrine can develop, but cannot change its fundamental meaning and truth, that is, the realistic meaning and truth embedded in the dogmas, creeds, and confessions themselves. In short, the Lérinian legacy of Vatican II is that of commensurable pluralism—allowing for legitimate pluralism and authentic diversity within a fundamental unity of truth. Commensurable pluralism is, arguably, presupposed, even if not fully worked out, in postconciliar interpretations of dogma and (or) doctrine. Commensurable pluralism can (a) account for the need for new dogmatic formulations; (b) explain why propositions of dogmas or doctrines are unchangeable, irreformable, or definitive; and (c) justify the distinction between propositions and sentences, content and

118. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., “The Dehellenization of Dogma,” in *A Second Collection*, William F. J. Ryan, S. J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S. J., eds. 11-32 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 14-15, 16, respectively.

context, form and content, and message and the medium. Commensurable pluralism is consistent with receptive ecumenism. Receptive ecumenism urges us to consider that the practice of ecumenism involves an exchange of gifts. The latter is able to account for the gifts of other Christian traditions that contribute to the unity and Catholicity of the Church by bringing about a fuller realization of the truth.<sup>119</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In sum, I have given an answer to the fundamental ecclesiological question regarding ecclesial unity and diversity, and hence Catholicity, within the one Church of Jesus Christ. I have sought to be faithful to the Church's teaching regarding the unicity and inner unity of the Church, distinguishing between unity and uniformity, division and diversity, and complementary and contradictory differences in ecclesiological epistemology. I have brought into ecumenical conversation the ecclesiology of Catholic and Reformed theologians, Kasper and Berkouwer. I have given a critical analysis of Kuyper's ecclesiastical epistemology, Berkouwer's account of it, shown its weaknesses, and argued that the Lérinian ecclesiastical epistemology shows its strength precisely where Kuyper's ecclesiastical epistemology is at its weakest, namely, in developing a commensurable pluralism or, in Kuyper's terms, an "organically connected multiformity."<sup>120</sup>

119. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, On the Missionary Activity of the Church, §6, online: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html). See also, *Lumen Gentium* §13.

120. Kuyper, *Principles*, 170.

## **Surely a Catholic Church: The Orthodox Church as the Church**

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The Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The Church is one, and no salvation is found outside the Church. The unity of the Orthodox, catholicity, is a completeness. Where the grace of God is present, the Church is present. This is normally based on the grace of God poured out to the individual member of the Church through the sacraments of the Church and other means of grace. This grace grants the Church, and individual members of the Church, right doctrine about and right relationship with God in the work of salvation. Because the world is broken by sin, the unity of the Church, which is certain and known absolutely by God, is a “known unknown” to us.

We know the unity exists, but we will be consistently uncertain of boundaries. Some communities are most probably Orthodox, while others are most probably not. Individuals are members of the Church when they are recipients of the saving grace of God. Many will be recognizably Orthodox, yet some that seem Orthodox are not and other individuals that do not seem so Orthodox are recipients of divine grace. Only at the end of time will we know the truth as a certainty.

The Orthodox begin with a different view of catholicity defined by the fullness of the Spirit and led by Christ. As the Body of Christ, the Church must be one, but the Orthodox recognize that the Spirit moves where he wills in individuals. There is a philosophic limit to what can be known about God's work in individuals, so there must be ambiguity about the outer limits of the Church.

The ambiguity of our present knowledge is both true and practically important. Practical discussions and recognition of saving grace can take place on an individual level between Christians without lowering the doctrinal and ecclesiastical divisions that the Orthodox must maintain.<sup>1</sup> Far from being a disadvantage, the reality of ambiguity forces the Orthodox to look to God and live by the Spirit in pastoral ministry and the daily life of the layman. We know where the Church is, but not where it is not.

1. I write as a layman who has been orthodox for almost twenty-five years and as a philosopher in the analytic tradition, not a theologian. Hopefully, I have faithfully conveyed a school of Orthodox thought on catholicity and the nature of the Church. My hope is also to have made some helpful distinctions.

### **Catholic: Visible and Invisible Christ's One Body**

A father in Christ, Father Michael Trigg, died too early.<sup>2</sup> With his Oxford doctorate and educational administrative background, he served as a university administrator and a parish priest. In one phase of his higher educational career, Trigg had been hired by a Christian university and was examined on his beliefs numerous times, but suddenly found his faith questioned. He had a peculiar disadvantage in every discussion because he was an Orthodox Christian. He was quizzed endlessly about his beliefs, and a committee demanded he submit a creedal statement. He sent the Creed of Nicaea. Pedantic scholars were not satisfied. "Of course," they said, "now what do you believe?"

"This." He was sure about what was most certain but would not pretend to have knowledge where he had none. Like all Orthodox Christians, he was true even to death. The Orthodox have no formula to produce absolute limits to the Church, but there are some things the faithful do know. He was not simple minded. He simply knew what was knowable and refused to commit to what was not. Trigg recognized the difference between what is true and what he could know was true and was willing to assert as certainly the case.<sup>3</sup> That is a distinction most often missed.

Orthodoxy begins with the profound ideas that the church is the body of Christ and that this body cannot be divided. The body is one since the Lord Jesus could not have two bodies or a divided body and live. That will not answer all questions by any means, but what if the church, the Body of Christ, is not defined by one person, one group, and is not "invisible?" What if a man asserts, with the Fathers and Mothers of the Church, that there is one visible holy, catholic, and apostolic church?

"Where is this Church?"

"Where Christ is."

This is not going to be enough for those who crave personal certainty as opposed to divine reality. The Church is known, God knows, the holy angels know, the company of saints know, but you and I do not know. We only deal in probabilities. We live by faith, reasonable hope.

The Orthodox, perhaps not so surprisingly, begin with the Creedal and Scriptural truth that there is one body of Christ and that this body is visible. Catechisms and popular polemics make this point obvious. The Orthodox also accept that the cosmos is complex and God's ways often difficult to fathom. The providence and grace of God are real, rational, but are not always manifest to us. We know there is one church, know the contours of that church, and where the church can be found.

2. Parish-Admin, "Fr. Michael Trigg, Memory Eternal," Saint Michael Orthodox Church, last updated May 21, 2007, <http://www.stmichaelwhittier.org/parish-site/2007/fr-michael-trigg/>.

3. Naturally, there were issues, say, veneration of icons, where Father Michael would have had other explicit beliefs, but those were not the issues under discussion.

## **What is Catholicity?**

**The Catholic Church is the Fullness of the Body of Christ.** Catholicity comes from the head of the Church, Jesus Christ, and His work in each Christian and in every gathering of those Christians. Those Christians receive the grace of God even if only “two or more are gathered.”

Catholicity is universal but also particular. The microcosm is found in the macrocosm and the macrocosm in the microcosm. Holy Orthodoxy knows one woman, the Mother of God, can hear the word of God and say, “yes,” and so, change everything. She is one person, yet in the Annunciation was the Church. When the Holy Spirit filled her womb, based on her consent to God, then the Church was fully present.

If only one parish of the Orthodox Church worshipping with her bishop was left, the fullness of the Body of Christ would be there, because Christ would be there fully in the sacraments. The Church would be catholic since the invisible Church would join with that parish worship.<sup>4</sup> Such a hypothetical draws attention to the fact that the universal church is not a mere aggregate of local parishes and bishops, but an organic whole that recognizes commonality in love.

There are, God help us, many Orthodox bishops claiming Houston as their diocese, each surely Orthodox pastors, true Christians, yet the entire situation is irregular. The good in this brokenness is the confirmation that Orthodoxy can be found in situations that are not orthodox.

When I worship at Saint Basil, under a Greek bishop of Houston, I am Orthodox. When I worship at Saint George, under an Antiochian bishop of Houston, I am Orthodox. Why? The Spirit is in both places. The true light is seen at the end of the eucharistic feast. The Holy Ghost fills us as we hear the word of God preached from both pulpits. How do we know?

There are many clues. In all the Orthodox churches of Houston, the creed and the Scriptures are honored. We confess just as our ancestors did without reservation or equivocation. The sacraments of the Church are honored and given to the faithful. The icons are venerated. A single Christian, baptized in the Holy Spirit, contains the fullness of the faith. This does not lead to isolation. Any Christian will look for those like he is, and so form a community. We are commanded to love, even our enemies, so we will run to join with our brothers and sisters. A church community based on love will never be individualistic.

There is a normative ecclesiology, a bishop to guide, and in all but extraordinary cases, such as times of persecution, a single parish joins with all the other churches in

4. See the illuminating article, Nicholas Afanassieff, “The Church which Presides in Love,” in *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992), 91-143. Afanassieff goes very far suggesting, “Eucharistic ecclesiology teaches that the unity and fullness of the Church attach to the notion of a local church, and to the fluid and indefinite character of the Universal Church” (110).

their city and in the world. This is what is normal in healthy times, but the Orthodox Church is not fundamentally defined by power, but by the love of Jesus manifested in making saints for the kingdom. The city with a bishop and body of the faithful that consistently, over time, evangelize, worship, and make saints for the kingdom will become the head of that church in that generation.

The fullness, the catholicity, is in Christ's presence in the parish and in the individual. If there was, but one Orthodox Church left in all the world, cut off from every connection through some massive persecution, then that Church would be as much the Church as the Hagia Sophia at the height of the Eastern Empire. The church in Jerusalem has directed other churches as has the church in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

The Creed is plain and so is the teaching of the Church. There is only one body of Christ, visible and invisible, and any true schism in that divine body is impossible. Even in the analogy of the Church as the Bride of Christ, the bride is one. Christ cannot be married to more than one bride.

Every Christian keeps in mind that John the Baptist and then Jesus of Nazareth were not what was expected. The Spirit came in a way not expected. The moral law, the theological truth, was not contradicted but revealed in ways not anticipated. Things turned out rationally but exceptionally. The Orthodox, at our best, know this is true, so we look forward to what will (almost surely!) be remarkable but compatible with the ancient truth. This is the offense of the Church: we are not what the conservative or the liberal anticipated. We are consistent with the past while being new.

The Church is visible and one. Popular resources for Orthodox Christians or inquirers agree with (almost) all mainstream Orthodox theologians and holy teachers: The Church is visible and invisible, and the Church is one.

**The Church is Visible and Invisible.** The faithful can know the Church by the Spirit. Is this mere subjectivity? By no means! We look for signs by looking for a bishop who governs rightly using the right doctrine. This is partially subjective. Many of the faithful are too easily fooled by good liturgical practices. There is universal agreement amongst Orthodox thinkers that the Church is visible, and this idea is present in scholarly and popular presentations of ecclesiology:

The Church is both visible and invisible. The Church as the carrier of the divine gifts and divine energies, by which mankind is transformed into the Kingdom of God, is invisible. The Church as the assemblage of the people who confess faith in Christ is visible . . . the visible characteristics of the Church are the criteria of the invisible ones.<sup>6</sup>

The Church is not merely visible as a ghost might be. The Church is also subject to other senses in the faithful as living icons, the sacraments, and the liturgy itself:

5. Afanassieff, "Church which Presides," 163.

6. George Mastrantonis, *A New-Style Catechism on the Eastern Orthodox Faith for Adults* (Saint Louis, MO: Ologos Mission, 1969), 104.

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“Christ’s Body, the Church, is tangible and visible.”<sup>7</sup> The visible and tangible is pure as the Church qua Church, but as a hospital for sinners, may appear tainted. “Sinners do not taint the holiness of the Church. Her mission is exactly this: to extend sanctification to sinners. All men are sinners, and no one can say that is without sin.”<sup>8</sup>

This fact matters because it means no human, regardless of position, can make any church the Church due to his merit. We are all broken. Simultaneously, no human can make the Church, not the Church, since Jesus Christ is the guarantor of the holiness of the Church. Any person that knows Jesus contains the fullness of the Church. If the day should ever come when the antichrist spirit dominates all things and only a few are faithful, then on that day, the Church is no less present than at any other moment.

**The Church is One.** While there are many ways of speaking theologically of the life of the Church, some of which appear to create a division in the Church, the Orthodox Church is essentially one. Metropolitan Kallistos Timothy Ware notes, “The Church is a single reality, earthly and heavenly, visible and invisible, human and divine.”<sup>9</sup>

This we know without dispute. Yet, what are the boundaries of the Church? Who is in the Church? All the saved are in the Church, so what of those individuals who come to a canonical Orthodox Church who show the fruit of the work of the Spirit? What of those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and the bishop discerns that despite the organization that officiated, the Holy Spirit came and did a saving work in that person? Is it possible that some sheep are in the Church, but physically distant?

**We Do Not Always See the Boundaries of the One Church.** As Sergius Bulgakov asserts, “This Orthodox spirit, which lives in the universal Church, is more apparent to the eye of God than to man. In the first place all baptized persons are Christians, hence in a certain sense Orthodox.”<sup>10</sup>

One need not go as far as Bulgakov and argue that all baptized persons are Christians, yet almost surely, some have received the grace of God. Those baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and who show the love of God, are growing to be like God, seem to have the grace of God. Our heart calls to their hearts. Most Orthodox do not rebaptize at least some Christians, and this is ultimately

7. Michael Shanbour, *Know the Faith* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2016), 29.

8. Elder Cleopa of Romania, *The Truth of Our Faith* (Thessalonica, Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2000), 41.

9. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 244.

10. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1988), 188. I recognize that there are important differences in the approaches to other Christians in the Orthodox scholars I quote. However, I think that most within the Orthodox tradition recognize that many that do not appear to be in the Church have been recipients of the grace of God (at least to some extent). The explanations of how this is the case differ and many would not go as far as Bulgakov on Christian baptism.

inexplicable if there is not a recognition that God has done a work in the life of that person. Of course, sometimes, a bishop may discern that the person just got wet, and no baptism has ever taken place. This can be known only through pastoral care and not a blanket rule.

Orthodoxy is diverse and so while most often individuals from other groups are not rebaptized, and some do not even receive chrismation, some Orthodox think this is wrong:

Among the Orthodox churches, different visions of ecumenism and of inter-Christian reconciliations lead to conflicts about ecumenism. "Some of us [Orthodox] see ecumenism as a sign of hope, others as a pan-heresy. Some of us think that Roman Catholics have true priesthood; others consider that they should be re-baptized. When we meet other Christians, we speak with a divided voice. Consequently, our participation in the ecumenical movement has been far less effective than it could and should have been."<sup>11</sup>

Most of the canonical hierarchy have chosen to engage in ecumenical dialog that the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America describes this way:

Recognizing the operation of God's Spirit in other Christian churches, which are not in communion with the Orthodox Church, implies at least the theoretical acknowledgment that these churches in their ecumenical commitment have the potential to enhance the life and the ministries of the One Church as well as these churches to be enhanced by the catholicity of the Orthodox church. As the churches recognize their limitation in their separation from one another and the need to move towards unity in faith, life and witness, they need to receive with humility and appreciation the gifts that God's Spirit has bestowed in each one. The refusal of the Orthodox churches to be in sacramental communion with other Christian churches, despite the affirmation that they are in an imperfect and incomplete manner members of the One Church of God, should not be perceived as a sign of arrogance; neither it should be a source of Orthodox triumphalism or self-sufficiency. It is a painful reminder for all that the unity of God's Church requires the fullness of the apostolic faith and tradition. It does not allow the churches to become complacent with present relative unity and collaboration. This leads to an irrevocable and unabated commitment of the Orthodox Churches to the fellowship of Christian churches that seek jointly to discover their unity in the faith, life and witness of God's Church.<sup>12</sup>

There is a general recognition in Orthodoxy that the borders of the Church are greater than canonical Orthodoxy minimally because of the work of the Holy Spirit in the

11. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Clapsis, "*The Orthodox Church and The Other Christian Churches*," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, last updated August 18, 2010, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-orthodox-church-and-the-other-christian-churches>.

12. Clapsis, "Orthodox Church."

John Mark Reynolds: *Surely a Catholic Church: The Orthodox Church as the Church* lives of individuals. Many Orthodox bishops discern this work as already present in those who come from other groups to enter the fulness of the faith. This is one reason that many are not rebaptized and why some pastors or priests received into Orthodoxy have been made priests in Orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, this does not reduce the desire that all those who are alive in the Spirit, thus part of the Church, should openly join the visible Church. Orthodox churches are communities where liturgical continuity plainly manifest catholicity by ancient ties, histories of faithfulness, and lines of unbroken pastors and bishops. We must look with charity to what God may be doing in other individuals without compromising the unity of the Church.

**The Church Lives by the Spirit of God: the Catholic Church is a Place for Pentecost.** There is no autopilot set of assumptions that lets us ignore living in the Spirit. We know we are in the Church when we are becoming like God, when we are seeing the true light after receiving the sacraments, and when we are under the authority of a bishop. Attempts to locate this source of authority in one patriarchate, such as Rome, seemed forced historically when applied to the church of the first century.

When James was in Jerusalem as a leader of the church, Rome was pagan. For centuries, Rome was the dominant Christian city, and New York City did not exist! Times change, even if slowly, yet the natural or organic changes in the family of God will reflect the nature of the good God. There was a time when Greek was the main language of most of the Orthodox, but now there are many languages in which Orthodox liturgy is said. There are several different liturgies, including a Western rite, that are recognized as Orthodox, and all of them show a slow development over time.

The Orthodox must not fall into the follies of the twenty-first century that believes the work of a committee or scholarly group can finally and fully define where God is and what God is doing. We have no rule that makes it certain that God has not worked in the life of a man who loves the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, shows great love to his neighbor, and gives evidence of becoming like Christ. We know some actions are bad, and God will not command his Church to commend those actions. This leaves billions of other actions God could tell a person to do or ways that God could choose to meet a person.

We are left knowing there is one holy, catholic, apostolic church, and we are reasonably certain where it is but have less certainty about where it is not. We sometimes see the fruits of salvation that only come from within the Church in certain lives of individuals that are not physically attached to the Church. This is not because of niceness or even implicit universalism regarding salvation. A nice person who physically attends the Church may not live by the Spirit and so be in the building, but not in the Church.

God knows.

**This Lack of Certainty about “Who Is in the Church” Applies to Every Human Being.** A pastor or bishop discerns the best he can with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Some are physically separated from the Church, and this is not good but have been baptized indeed by the grace of the Triune God. Some are physically in the Church but have rejected the grace found in the Sacraments. This is also not good. No ecclesiology will tell the Orthodox the limits of the Church since we cannot know the entirety of God’s work.

Of course, a second problem of the twentieth and twenty-first century is the odd assumption that the explosive growth in scientific knowledge should find a parallel in philosophy or theology. In science, old ideas are sometimes replaced and abandoned. Scientists do not use phlogiston as an explanation for combustion anymore. Of course, this is not always the case as some explanations or theories become subsumed in larger, more embracing models.

In philosophy, progress occurs differently. While some ideas do fade in importance, many major views are sharpened by dialogue with critics, not destroyed. Platonism, for example, remains viable after millennia in areas such as the philosophy of mathematics. The arguments used to defend mathematical Platonism improve, and the basic notion becomes more sophisticated, but Platonism is not replaced or abandoned. In fact, twentieth-century thinkers Heidegger and Nietzsche asserted that they had ended alternative philosophies, even all of metaphysics! This has not turned out to be true with their approach (including this assertion) just being one of many possibilities.

Christian theology, beginning in the divine revelation of God in Jesus Christ, also would have a different means of progress. If the Spirit is guiding the Church, then we would expect continuity from one generation to another. Theological truth and liturgical life would develop and change but within the truths found by the community of faith in reflecting on God in relationship with God. We read sacred Scriptures with the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church would be able to show continuity with the long experience of theologians, prelates, martyrs, holy fools, monarchs, and laity with God through the Holy Spirit.

The visible Church is seen when one considers how revelation comes to be understood through the Holy Spirit over time. The canonical Orthodox Church is visibly, organically, connected to the life of the ancient church, makes missionaries and martyrs in the modern world, and is led by bishops with a spiritual and historical connection to the entirety of Church history. The Orthodox faithful endure and are full of the life of the Holy Spirit.

Does the Holy Spirit work in others, outside canonical churches, and make those individuals part of this Church by the actions of the Holy Spirit? So Orthodox priests and bishops have discerned, and so these Spirit-filled too are, in one sense, Orthodox. This can be said without making the visible institutions, often in open schism with Orthodoxy, part of the Church.

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Is it possible that some groups are Orthodox that are not part of the canonical churches? What of groups like the Syrian Orthodox? Are they not Christian?<sup>13</sup> One need not, and I would argue, should not, make any judgment whatsoever about these other groups as groups. One can charitably discern the fruit of a given individual. The goal of the faithful is to move Godward and to do so in the Church.

### **What are the Theological and Philosophical Parameters for Catholicity?**

This uncertainty at the edges of the catholicity is theologically necessary. God is a person and can do as he pleases. God is only limited by his nature and his will. He has the power to do as he wills. The faithful know that God will not do evil and so we will see consistency over the centuries in his commands and in the truth. He has revealed to humankind most fundamentally in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Church is found where Christ is found in a gathering of humans, visible and invisible. The marks of that Church are right belief and practice leading to theosis.<sup>14</sup> Normatively, one will see a bishop leading the people Godward, as the Apostles did, and a people that show the fitness of the bishop by their progression toward God. The people of God are known by their bishop and the Orthodox bishop by their people. A worthy bishop is generally known by the fruit of his ministry to the faithful.

This Church is perfect and cannot die, because of the inclusion of the living and the dead, as members. The saints are with the living faithful, praying for us, leading us by their examples. The Orthodox Church will be known through the ability to produce saints and, if the circumstances warrant, martyrs.

A reasonable expectation, based on the character of God, is that the Orthodox Church may understand theological and ethical truths more deeply, but not in a manner inconsistent with the thrust of the arguments of the Fathers, the Councils, Scripture, and the totality of Sacred Tradition. Ideas related to the nature of Christ, for example, will develop precision over time. Implications of these ideas, such as the use of icons in worship after the Incarnation, will be grasped and introduced to the faithful. The liturgical practices of an Orthodox church would show steady development that is organic with the growth of the life of the Church.

13. Research for this all-too-brief article revealed a wide difference of opinion between Orthodox willing to consider that some groups (outside of the “canonical Orthodox churches”) may be also in the Church and those unwilling to do so. I am arguing from the perspective of the more restrictive view. Why? The organizations are of less importance than the persons. If an organization turns out to be part of the visible Church, then that would be good and interesting. However, if a soul is saved and not damned, then that is marvelous and of utmost importance. God saves by the Holy Spirit and those saved are in the Church. We do not know the identity of all those people.

14. Theosis is the process of a person becoming God or like God by participating in the divine nature. For a popular level discussion of theosis, see: Mark Shuttleworth, “Theosis,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Arch Diocese of North America, accessed April 26, 2020, <http://ww1.antiochian.org/content/theosis-partaking-divine-nature>.

The Orthodox Church is defined philosophically by the questions asked, based on previous knowledge revealed to the Church. The Church, led by the Holy Spirit over time, developed icons and used them in worship. Any person, even if an emperor, bishop, or patriarch that banned this practice that was sacred to generations of the faithful, made a grave error. The iconoclast bishop became no bishop because he did not give voice to the faithful of all generations.

The proper response to questions about the use of icons answered why they were not only licit but good. Why had the Church globally become iconodule? Why was iconoclasm not proper, indeed a heresy? Orthodox thinkers like John of Damascus gave new and Spirit-filled answers to these questions that preserved the historic development of the Church and the faithful. More vitally, John of Damascus illuminated an old doctrine in a new way that gave new insights into old practices. Much theological speculation and eventual development could come from such insights.

The Orthodox philosopher or theologian knows what he or she knows. Speculation, philosophical and theological, is not only permissible but useful! However, that speculation, even if true, must be tested in the life of the Church. Generations of bishops must discuss and provide guidance. The impact of an idea on the faithful should be tested. As a result, the Orthodox Church will be uncertain about many things, even many truths.

Jesus has a bride, his Church. We can see clearly enough where that Church is, and that is what we need to know in order to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. The Spirit might be working over there in that person. A bishop might even discern that such a person received the grace of baptism. Other theologians will speculate whether certain Anglo-Catholics or some Wesleyans have important commonalities with Orthodox theology.<sup>15</sup>

Certainty in ecclesiastical boundary setting is a philosophic impossibility since the Church is present even if there was just one living member remaining in the Church. The fullness of God dwells in any man that is truly baptized.

15. Discussions between the Syrian Orthodox Church and Anglicans were very active at one point. See William Henry Taylor, *Antioch and Canterbury* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005). For a discussion of Wesleyanism and Orthodoxy see the collection, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough Jr. Father Thomas Hopko says, “the essays in this volume clearly demonstrates that what informed, instructed, and inspired the Orthodox church fathers and their disciples and John and Charles Wesley and their companions was exactly the same. These were men and women bound to God’s word recorded in the Bible and recapitulated in Christ crucified. They read, prayed, preached, and lived this Word personally and in community as called, chosen, and faithful people justified, sanctified, and glorified by the one God and Father and his only Son Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word, and the one Holy Spirit. They were witnesses and worshippers of the Holy Trinity, one in nature and undivided” (pgs. 8-9). My views need not go as far as Father Hopko has here.

## **The Tension: One Body, Schismatics and Grace**

If there is one body of Christ, then an attempt to divide that body is both impossible and evil. The Body of Christ cannot be divided. God cannot be defeated. If a person attempts the impossible, breaking the visible and invisible unity of the body, he cannot be in the Church. He has formed a sect, even if the new group looks and sounds very much like the Body of Christ. What is a sect?

It is very difficult to give an exact and firm definition of a 'sect' or 'schism' (I distinguish the theological definition from the simple canonical description), since a sect in the Church is always something contradictory and unnatural, a paradox and an enigma. For the Church is unity, and the whole of her being is in this unity and union, of Christ and in Christ. 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body' (1 Cor. 12.13), and the prototype of this unity is the consubstantial Trinity. The measure of this unity is catholicity or communality (sobornost), where the impenetrability of personal consciousness is softened - and even removed - in complete unity of thought and soul, and the multitude of them that believe are of one heart and soul (cf. Acts 4.32). A sect, on the other hand, is separation, solitariness, the loss and denial of communality. The sectarian spirit is the direct opposite of the Church spirit.<sup>16</sup>

No sect is the Church any more than a doxy is a wife. This is true, and this truth matters. How? An Orthodox Christian is saved in the Church and so would wish to fellowship within the Church. He eagerly would desire to be at home and be able to readily receive the Sacraments. He would love the truth and holiness and so would wish to find the Church that teaches and demonstrates sound doctrine and right practice. He would love all Christians in the Church and so would look for a bishop would speak the mind of the entire Church, including the vast number of saints who have gone to glory. This would not, however, resolve every question. Uncertainty will still exist and does exist within even canonical jurisdictions.

Some canonical Orthodox priests and bishops behave as if certain ecclesiastical divisions are human and not sectarianism. There are five persons who claim the title "Patriarch of Antioch," and there is much functional cooperation between the groups. John Binns writes,

To the east of the country is the Syrian diocese of the Gezirah, and here I once spent a day visiting the homes in the Syrian Orthodox parish of Nasr'a with Father Louis, the parish priest. He told me that there were in the parish 300 Syrian Orthodox families, 130 Armenian Catholic, sixty Syrian Catholic, five Syrian Protestant, four Armenian, three Assyrian Church of the East, and two Chaldean. The Syrian priest knows them well and many of them attend his church. The life of the Christian communities in Syria shows clearly that there

16. George Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," *Church Quarterly Review* 117, no. 233 (October 1933), 117.

is not one single Eastern Orthodox Church, nor one doctrinal tradition that can be called Orthodoxy. The varied composition of the ecclesiastical life of modern Syria provides clear demonstration of the division, complexity, richness and turbulence of the history of the Christianity of the East.<sup>17</sup>

This practice makes sense if one thinks of the Church as one institutionally in heaven, while individuals of that Church on Earth can recognize each other as fellow Christians in a lifelong relationship under trying circumstances. If one assumes, as I do, that the Antiochian Patriarch represents the Orthodox voice of that holy and historic city, then the practice and words of those patriarchs matter. Something important is recognized in a statement such as this:

Over the past couple of months, many worrying reports and claims regarding the case and fate of the two Archbishops Boulos Yaziji and Mor Gregorius Youhanna Ibrahim who were kidnapped on April 22, 2013, in the western countryside of Aleppo – Syria, went viral in media outlets. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, have been closely monitoring these reports that are totally independent from our relentless efforts and endeavors in the search for our two missing Archbishops and we are determined to leave no stone unturned until we identify their whereabouts and their fate.<sup>18</sup>

As a minority during hundreds of years of Muslim rule, the Patriarch of Antioch knows his friends and has no hesitation in calling an archbishop of a noncanonical group an archbishop, and use the beautiful phrase “our two missing Archbishops.” The recognition of the canonical and the noncanonical churches of Antioch, and of each other’s ministry, is extensive. Documents from the canonical Antiochian church refer to the Syrian church as a sister church.<sup>19</sup>

The Orthodox do not pretend to know what they do not know, but patriarchs and bishops also do not refuse to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church if they think they are hearing the voice of God. The God-fearing Patriarch recognizes his brothers in the Spirit even as he sustains some physical divisions that must be sustained while the rest of global Orthodoxy discerns what the Holy Spirit is doing.

17. John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

18. “A Statement Regarding Recent Reports on the Two Missing Archbishops of Aleppo,” Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, last updated January 20, 2020, <https://antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/a-statement-regarding-recent-reports-on-the-two-missing-archbishops-of-aleppo/2348/>.

19. Patriarch Ignatios IV and Patriarch Iganatius Zakka Iwas, “Statement of the Orthodox Church of Antioch on the Relations between the Eastern and Syrian Orthodox Churches,” Orthodox Unity (Orthodox Joint Commission), Various Documents Concerning Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Joint Commission and Unity, November 12, 1991, <https://orthodoxjointcommission.wordpress.com/2014/06/27/statement-of-the-orthodox-church-of-antioch-on-the-relations-between-the-eastern-and-syrian-orthodox-churches/>.

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The Orthodox have this advantage: they do not pretend to a certainty nobody possesses. The desire for such knowledge, not unlike the choice in Eden to know what cannot be known by humans, creates tyrannical sin. Why? There is a profound arrogance in any limit placed on God that goes beyond his good nature and his own will. The Spirit blows where the Spirit wills, but a false prophet thinks he can say for a certainty what God is not doing. A prophet might know what some singular thing that God is doing, or the pattern of what God does, but no prophet can constrain God. Of course, God cannot sin, but God often does the unexpected. After all, men did not all recognize God in the flesh when he was on Earth!

### **Necessary Epistemological Uncertainty in People**

A great error of modernity is the desire for certainty about things that must remain uncertain to us. Certainty about some truth is known only by God, not by men. Science, as science, can find some degree of certainty about some physical things, but it is blind to metaphysical truths.<sup>20</sup>

Why? The metaphysical contains truths that God will not tell us, since they are part of his relationship with another individual. God will not justify himself, something he has no need to do, by revealing to one person the entire backstory of someone else. Grace might give us a vision of God for ourselves that we cannot doubt, but grace does not tell us someone else's story. C.S. Lewis has one of his characters ask about exactly what God is doing in the life of another, and the response was, "'Child,' said the Voice, 'I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own.'"<sup>21</sup> This is not mystery as an excuse for culpable ignorance but mystery as a recognition of what we cannot know by the nature of the topic under examination. The full story of God's work in another human life is not accessible to us because it is none of our business.

God works in the life of an individual, calling that person to himself. This process is lifelong and comes through many means. A priest and a bishop might discern the character of a person or the disposition of that person to God generally, but only God will know all the *whys* of His work in that life. God loves each human, and each individual relationship is unique. We do not need to know the entire story of God's work in any individual. Working out our own salvation is hard enough.

This is the unknown known: the vast number of souls that are in the ark of safety, the Church of God. There is one Church that we know, but the entire list of those in that Church is known now only by God. This side of the glorification we as

20. John Mark Reynolds, "On Creation and Post-Modernism," *First Things* (blog), The Institute on Religion and Public Life, March 18, 2010, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/03/on-creation-and-post-modernism>.

21. C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, The Chronicles of Narnia (HarperCollins, Kindle Edition), Location 2060.

individuals cannot have certainty that this person or even that parish is full of grace. Jesus Christ gives his grace and mercy to any person he wishes, and only he knows the state of any person's heart.

Orthodoxy describes a Church that is visible and invisible, spotless, and one. All who are redeemed are part of that one Church. There are signs of the life of the Spirit, and so we can recognize the Church. Because Christ is fully in each one of the faithful, the Church is not an aggregation made fuller or more catholic by numerical growth. As a result, there are individuals in the Church we do not know and will not know. This uncertainty humbles us and encourages us to work out our own story of salvation as we grow to be like the good God.

### **What Can We All Learn from Orthodoxy?**

Some groups claim more certainty than they have or try to create systems that will make the exact boundaries of the Church certain based merely on creeds and outer conformity to liturgical norms. This always breaks down practically at the pastoral level, and this is the level that most fundamentally concerns us. One cannot merely point to a canonical bishop as the measure of the Church, because this ignores the deep truth that the Church is the continued work of the Holy Spirit. This work is found in the life of the individual Christian: a microcosm of the macrocosmic Church. In *The Mystical Theology of the Orthodox Church*, Vladimir Lossky concludes,

Thus, man is at one and the same time a part, a member of the Body of Christ by his nature, but also (considered as a person) a being who contains all within himself. The Holy Spirit who rests like a royal unction on the humility of the Son, Head of the Church, communicating Himself to each member of this body, creates, so to speak, many Christs, many of the Lord's anointed: persons in the way of deification by the side of the divine Person.<sup>22</sup>

My Father Michael of blessed memory spoke a profound truth when he said he knew where the Church was, but not where it was not. He could sense the eucharistic power and the grace of the Orthodox churches (in the main), yet also knew that

Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord appointed to appear at the final judgement of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits . . . She does not judge the rest of humankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of humankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgement of the great day.<sup>23</sup>

22. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1998), 174.

23. Alexis Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, section 2, quoted in Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 308.

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We seek theosis, becoming like God through God's grace. This grace is mediated by the Bible, Sacraments, and any other means God chooses to use. Practically, the canonical Orthodox Churches have historic continuity with sacred tradition, have maintained fidelity to Sacred Scriptures, have defended the holy icons, and dispensed the ancient sacraments of the Church. Any given parish of those ancient churches (and their progeny) is most probably part of the Church. However, I have seen some parishes and monasteries that appeared Orthodox dissolved, because what appeared true was not. There might have been more orthodoxy and orthopraxis down the road at some other gathering!

The boundaries of Orthodoxy are based on the grace of God. This grace will produce the right doctrine, and this doctrine will be consistent with itself over time since God is unchanging. The grace of God is revealed in history, so the visible Church will have a link to the Apostles. The Orthodox Churches of the East and those who remained in communion with them (such as the Russian, Romanian, or Bulgarian Orthodox Churches) are the most apparent parts of that one body.

Where else is the grace of God? The answer will be different for the Orthodox if discussing organizations or individuals. God's grace has been given to individuals who belong to organizations that may be schismatic. This is the most sensible explanation for why, in the main, Orthodox Churches do not rebaptize those received into the Church who have been previously baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. The Orthodox do not recognize the organization, but the grace apparent in the individual being received. This is the very grace that has eventually drawn them to the fullness of the faith.

This grace does not come because of schism but despite it. The very remnants remaining in Christian groups, the Creeds, orthodox doctrine affirmed, Sacred Scriptures, and elements of liturgical practice may stimulate a congregant Godward. The group possessing these treasures may mix them with error.<sup>24</sup> God may baptize despite the person or group doing the baptism. After all, this is true when an apparent, but false "Orthodox" priest engages in baptism. The priest or even a bishop may end up laicized, but the faithful are not rebaptized. Sacred Scripture exists and is studied in many groups. There may have an overlay of false exegesis from the Orthodox perspective, but Scripture remains Sacred Scripture. God can speak there.

Father Michael, the priest who began my own journey to Orthodoxy, embraced a generous Orthodoxy that saw many individuals that had received the Holy Spirit. Like Hopko, he felt he had much to learn from what the Spirit had said to other groups separated from the fullness of the faith. He was eager to dialog with anyone who proclaimed the Lordship of Christ and belief in the triune God. Sadly, while he made many dear friends in such dialogue, he also suffered greatly.

24. A reminder that many Orthodox prelates and theologians have seen some groups as potentially being the Church. The Syrian Orthodox Church is an example.

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Father had given up much materially to become Orthodox but felt the winner. He had gained the fulness of the faith, yet saw much that was good, true, and Godward in what he had learned at Oxford and at seminary as a younger man. He once told me that he thought he was Orthodox before he was Orthodox. One of his last acts was to bless his congregants because that is what a good priest does.

He made visible the grace of God.

## Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective

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Every Sunday, Anglicans,<sup>1</sup> along with the majority of other Christians, confess their belief in “one holy catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed). Such a confession carries within itself the implicit premise that we understand ourselves to belong to this church. And, indeed, as shall become clear over the next several pages, one finds within this credal confession the pith of the Anglican understanding of catholicity, an understanding that there is indeed a church catholic, that we belong to it, and that we are not alone in that belonging.<sup>2</sup> This Anglican notion of catholicity is, on the one hand, nothing all that groundbreaking. We are far from unique here. And yet it does present a genuine ecumenical contribution and stands as an invitation to all other Christian churches.

It bears noting that Anglicanism is a broad and diverse tradition, one in which evangelical and reformed expressions exist alongside Catholic or charismatic ones, if not always comfortably, at least authentically.<sup>3</sup> In our more charitable moments, we refer to this phenomenon as comprehensiveness, though at times, it threatens to become incoherence. Nevertheless, it is an ineluctable given of Anglicanism, which, from the Reformation onward, has sought to embrace within the Church of England the varied pieties and convictions of the English people, and with its global expansion through means both colonial and missionary (and often both at once) has also taken

1. Within my own North American context, the label “Anglican” has become politicized, especially after the formation of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA), which broke away from the Episcopal Church in 2009. As it currently stands, “Anglican” tends to be deployed with an implicit and often explicit contrast to “Episcopalian.” I resolutely refuse to give into such politicization or to cede the term to the ACNA. The Episcopal Church is a member province of the Anglican Communion and does well to remember this in its own life.

2. This understanding is expressed in the Church of England’s Declaration of Assent (Canon C 15), and the Preamble to the Constitutions and Canons of the Episcopal Church. Hence, throughout this article, references to the “Catholic Church” do not refer exclusively to that communion of churches in communion with the bishop of Rome, but rather to that church which the creed confesses. Below, in connection with the 1920 Lambeth Conference, I will specify precisely what is meant by this usage.

3. Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Stephen W. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 8–24; Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 25–36; *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective*, Revised and Expanded ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2002); Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2015), pt. 4.

root in a number of non-English contexts and found non-Anglo expressions.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it is difficult, if not impossible, to articulate *the* Anglican view on nearly any question, including the question of catholicity. So, in what follows, I will be presenting *an* Anglican understanding of catholicity. While I speak from the Catholic end of the Anglican spectrum, I do so cognizant of the comprehensiveness of the tradition. I view this comprehensiveness as a gift and strength, if not at times also a challenge. In fact, it lies rather close to the notion of catholicity that I shall articulate. This is a notion that I hope can be recognized and embraced by Anglicans of different persuasions, even if they might not put things in quite the same way.

Stated briefly, this Anglican understanding of catholicity is the recognition that all Christian people belong together and that the ideal of the church is the visible union of all the baptized with one another and with Christ.

### **Foundations of Catholicity**

Belief in the church's catholicity is grounded in the Scriptures, particularly those of the New Testament, but in many ways is an outgrowth of the monotheism that the Christian community, itself initially a movement within Second Temple Judaism, inherited from Israelite religion. To be catholic is to be universal, having to do with all times and places, and with all dimensions of humanity. No segment of humanity nor any dimension of humanity is left out in a catholic expression of Christianity. Because there is one God who is the creator of all, Christian faith must necessarily be catholic. God is the God of all of us (collectively) and the God of all of us (every aspect).

At a few junctures in The Acts of the Apostles, Luke utilizes the Greek phrase that will eventually develop into "catholic" (Acts 9:31, 41; 10:37). In each case, καθ' ὅλης (*kath holes*) refers to dispersal throughout the entirety of a region, whether it is the church (9:31), the word of Peter's raising of Tabitha (9:41), or the message that Jesus is Lord (10:37).

The foundation of catholicity, though, rests on foundations more theological than lexical. Paul, writing to the Romans, in a nod to Israelite monotheism, contends that God is the God of all, and not just of the Jews but also of Gentiles (Rom 3:29). The conviction that both Jews and Gentiles belong to the people of God essentially amounts to a belief in catholicity; for taken together, Jews and Gentiles comprise the whole of humanity.<sup>5</sup> The whole of humanity is alienated from God due to sin (Rom 1:18–3:20), and similarly, the whole of humanity has been redeemed by Christ (Rom

4. Ian S. Markham et al., eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Anglican Communion* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pts. 1 and 3; Chapman, Clarke, and Percy, *Oxford Handbook*, pt. 3.

5. This is expressed elsewhere in the Pauline literature (for example, Gal 3:1–29 and Eph 2:11–3:6). See also James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Garwood P. Anderson, *Paul's New Perspective: Charting a Soteriological Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* 3:21–31). The redemption of humanity through the death of Christ (Rom 5:15–21) establishes the catholicity of the faith. All are united because, in a singular act of salvation, all have been saved (at least in principle).<sup>6</sup>

For this reason, the church is one because its redeemer is one. There is “one body and one Spirit” because there is “one hope of [our] calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4–6). Yet this unity is not monolithic but rather expresses itself in diversity. Immediately following the call to maintain a unity grounded in its common Lord, faith, and baptism, Paul speaks of the diversity of gifts that have been bestowed upon and within the church for the community’s common good (Eph 4: 7–16). This is a common feature of Pauline ecclesiology, which insists upon the diversity of gifts in service of the common good (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:1–31), and indeed, upon welcoming diversity of conviction on matters moral and theological within the parameters of a common confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom 14:1–15:6; 1 Cor 8:1–13). The famous Pauline image of the church as a body or even the body of Christ is deployed to express this dialectic of both unity and diversity. The body is one but comprised of many members, none of whom are dispensable.

To a certain extent, these biblical foundations represent nothing especially unique to Anglicanism. They are, simply, the common inheritance of all Christians.<sup>7</sup> And that is precisely the point because, at its best, Anglicanism recognizes that it is charged not with bearing any unique message but rather with the one gospel of Jesus Christ entrusted to the church for the good of the whole world. The gospel is not ours to modify, nor is our existence as a church one over which we have liberty. It is held in trust and belongs not to us but to all.

### **The Lambeth Quadrilateral and Conference**

For a time in the twentieth century, it was a commonplace for Anglicans to claim, perhaps somewhat high mindedly, that Anglicans have no doctrines of our own but only what belongs to the church catholic.<sup>8</sup> This viewpoint has, rightly, fallen by the wayside.<sup>9</sup> As many have observed, we do indeed have some doctrines of our own. Beyond that, Stephen Sykes has argued persuasively that if nothing else, Anglicanism

6. Recently, the question of the actuality and certainty of universal salvation has reasserted itself with David Bentley Hart’s *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) as a touchstone in the debate. My own sympathies are more broadly aligned with Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014), but my statement above is not intended to imply anything beyond the statement that Christ’s death suffices for the salvation of all and that any salvation that does occur will be the result of his saving act, not necessarily that all will certainly be saved, which I believe to be an affirmation we cannot responsibly make, even at an epistemological (to say nothing of a theological) level.

7. So also Paul D. L. Avis, *The Vocation of Anglicanism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 102.

8. For example, Neill, *Anglicanism*.

9. Avis, *Identity of Anglicanism*, 39–55; Sykes, *Integrity of Anglicanism*, 36–61.

must have a distinctive ecclesiology in order to make any kind of sense of itself. In the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, to which I shall turn momentarily, we state that the Nicene Creed is the “sufficient statement of Christian faith,” but not everyone agrees on what a sufficient statement of the faith would be. Yet here we claim to be able to adjudicate the matter. At the very least, then, in this regard, we claim some competency for our church that is not shared by all.<sup>10</sup>

And yet this criticism of the view that Anglicans have no doctrines of our own notwithstanding, there is a genuine theological insight in that viewpoint. It recognizes that we are not alone in the endeavor of being Christian, that there is indeed a catholic deposit such that we are not at liberty to simply make things up as we go along, and that we belong to the catholic fullness to the church and not to our provincial expression of it.

This was the vision that animated the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which was adopted first by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in 1886 and then (in modified form) by the Lambeth Conference in 1888.<sup>11</sup> The Quadrilateral insists on four indispensable elements for any reunion among the divided Christian churches: the Old and New Testament Scriptures; the Nicene Creed “as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith”;<sup>12</sup> the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, using the proper form and matter; and the historic episcopate, adapted according to the needs of local contexts.<sup>13</sup>

The version of the Quadrilateral adopted by the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops is quite clear. These four elements are insisted upon because they belong to “the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and his Apostles to the Church.” For this reason, they must be insisted upon, not as cherished features of Anglicanism but as indispensable elements of apostolic and catholic Christianity. Moreover, beyond these elements, the bishops expressed the Episcopal Church’s readiness “in the spirit of love and humility to forego all preferences of her own.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the only elements of the Episcopal Church’s life that were indispensable were those that it understood not to be distinctively Anglican but rather

10. Stephen Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 102–20.

11. Mark D. Chapman, “William Reed Huntington, American Catholicity and the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral,” in *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, ed. Paul Avis and Benjamin M. Guyer (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 84–106; Robert B Slocum, “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Development in an Anglican Approach to Christian Unity,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33, no. 4 (1996): 471–86; John F Woolverton, “Huntington’s Quadrilateral: A Critical Study,” *Church History* 39, no. 2 (1970): 198–211; Woolverton, “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Lambeth Conferences,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 53, no. 2 (1984): 95–109; J. Robert Wright, “Heritage and Vision: Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral,” *Anglican Theological Review* 10 (1988): 8–46.

12. That is, anyone who professes the Nicene faith can be and ought to be regarded as a Christian.

13. “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979 ed. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1983) 877–78 (cited as “CLQ”).

14. “CLQ,” 876–77.

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* simply Christian. The bishops further specified that their intent was not “to absorb” other churches but instead to enter into cooperative relations with them.<sup>15</sup>

The vision of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, then, is of a church reunited on the basis of a common faith in Christ with no other criteria imposed. While Christians from non-episcopally ordered traditions might demur that the insistence upon the historic episcopate is precisely an additional imposition, this is not the intent, as will become clearer as we consider the flowering of this ecclesiological vision in the Lambeth Conferences of 1920, 1930, and 1948.

The 1920 Lambeth Conference is the high-water mark of twentieth-century Anglican ecclesiological and ecumenical reflection. The Lambeth Conference, one of the Anglican Communion’s four instruments of communion, alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council, is a roughly decennial gathering of all bishops of the Anglican Communion, which had its beginning in 1867.<sup>16</sup> Because the Anglican Communion is comprised of autonomous yet interrelated national churches (provinces), the Lambeth Conference’s statements are not binding upon the Communion’s member churches in any formal or juridical sense. They are, though, intended to be expressive of the mind of the Communion.

At the 1920 Lambeth Conference, the bishops undertook to address themselves to “All Christian People,” explaining that they considered all who have been baptized to be members of the catholic church, which is properly understood as “an outward, visible, and united society, holding one faith, having its own recognized officers, using God-given means of grace, and inspiring all its members to the world-wide service of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup> This is the meaning of catholicity, then: to be in visible communion with all baptized Christians in all their diversity.<sup>18</sup>

While this visibly united “Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all ‘who profess and call themselves Christians’ . . . is not visible in the world today,” nevertheless, it is not a fiction.<sup>19</sup> Rather, “The unity we seek exists. It is in God, Who is the perfection of unity, the one Father, the one Lord,

15. “CLQ,” 877.

16. Stephen Pickard, “The Lambeth Conference Among the Instruments of Communion,” in Avis, *Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, 3–22; Norman Doe, “The Instruments of Unity and Communion in Global Anglicanism,” in Markham et al., *Wiley-Blackwell*, 47–66; Robert W. Pritchard, “The Lambeth Conferences,” in Markham et al., *Wiley-Blackwell*, 91–104; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 46–50.

17. 1920 Lambeth Conference, “Appeal to All Christian People,” in *The Six Lambeth Conferences, 1867-1920*, ed. Randall Thomas Davidson and Honor Thomas (London: SPCK, 1929), 26–29. All citations of the 1920 Lambeth Conference refer to this volume and are cited as 1920 Lambeth Conference; Charlotte Methuen, “The Making of ‘An Appeal to All Christian People’ at the 1920 Lambeth Conference,” in Avis, *Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, 107–31.

18. So also Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 49.

19. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 27.

the one Spirit, Who gives life to the one Body. Again, the one Body exists. It does not need to be made, nor to be remade, but to become organic and visible.”<sup>20</sup>

Echoing the preambular material included in the 1886 version of the Quadrilateral, the letter stresses that “terms of reunion must no longer be judged by the success with which they meet the claims and preserve the positions of two or more uniting Communion, but by their correspondence to the common ideal of the Church as God would have it to be.”<sup>21</sup> It is this vision of the catholic church, rather than any denominational identities or particularities, that ought to drive all concerns. Rather than being maintained for their own sake, these elements of denominational heritage need to be “made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> This vision applies to the churches of the Anglican Communion as well, of which they note, “As the years go on, its ideals must become less Anglican and more Catholic. It cannot look to any bonds of union holding it together, other than those which should hold together the Catholic Church itself.”<sup>23</sup>

It is in this context that the Anglican commitment to the episcopacy can be seen not as an additional imposition adding to the baseline criterion of common belonging to Jesus Christ. The Appeal to All Christian People reaffirms the Lambeth Quadrilateral, but with a key modification to the final point on the episcopate. The church’s visible unity will involve adherence to Scripture and creed, celebration of the sacraments, and “a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.”<sup>24</sup> Then, in the next paragraph, they offer, “May we not reasonably claim that the Episcopate is the one means of providing such a ministry?”<sup>25</sup> The Scriptures and creeds mark out the boundaries of Christian faith, while the office of bishop allows the unity of all Christians to be visibly expressed.

### **Catholicity and Incompleteness**

This understanding was echoed some sixteen years later in Michael Ramsey’s classic *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Taking as his watchword the Pauline phrase, “One died for all; therefore all died” (2 Cor 5:14), Ramsey articulates his vision of the “Catholic Church” as the saving union of all with all in Christ.<sup>26</sup> The church’s ground is in the gospel of Jesus’s death and resurrection, and its purpose is to be expressive

20. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 12.

21. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 12.

22. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 28.

23. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 137.

24. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 28.

25. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 28.

26. Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1990), 17–42.

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* of this saving union.<sup>27</sup> All of those elements that pertain to its polity and order, its liturgy, the sacraments, episcopal office, do not exist for their own sake but in order to give expression to this more fundamental and organic reality.<sup>28</sup> They express the unity and catholicity of the church.

In a tour de force, though not one without its flaws, Ramsey surveys the church's history, noting the ways that this catholic vision was expressed in the New Testament and the church fathers, at times obscured and distorted, sullied by divisions, but never lost.<sup>29</sup> The Protestant Reformation was a summons for the Catholic Church to once more attend to and find its *raison d'être* in the gospel, not in the sense that it had lost the gospel but in the sense that it had lost the vital connection between its catholic substance and the gospel that animates it. The reformers recovered the saving gospel but failed to recognize the vital connection between that gospel and the structures in which it naturally belongs.<sup>30</sup>

The English Reformation both stood at the Wittenberg door to hear once more the gospel summons and also maintained such catholic elements as the episcopal office.<sup>31</sup> While we might expect Ramsey to parse this in somewhat triumphant terms, with Anglicanism as the Goldilocks who has gotten the mix "just right," he avoids this. Anglicanism has also obscured the vital connection between the gospel and Catholicism, whether by an Erastianism that aligned church and state too closely or by the so-called "Branch Theory," which sees the church catholic as existing within the three branches of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism but fails to recognize the deleterious effects of church division or by what Ramsey saw as a renewed clericalism within the Tractarian movement.<sup>32</sup> Instead,

While the Anglican church is vindicated by its place in history, with a strikingly balanced witness to Gospel and Church and sound learning, its greater vindication lies in its pointing through its own history to something of which it is a fragment. Its credentials are its incompleteness, with the tension and the travail in its soul. It is clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to commend itself as 'the best type of Christianity,' but by its very brokenness to point to the universal Church wherein all have died.<sup>33</sup>

27. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 3–9, 43–50. See further Rowan Williams, "The Lutheran Catholic," in *Glory Descending: Michael Ramsey and His Writings*, ed. Douglas Dales et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 212; Williams, "Theology and the Churches," in *Michael Ramsey as Theologian*, ed. Robin Gill and Lorna Kendall (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 11.

28. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 55–67.

29. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 139–80.

30. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 181–203. Compare Avis's overlapping yet distinct attempt at parsing Anglicanism's character as both catholic and reformed. Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 101–28, 145–67.

31. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 204–20.

32. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 217–18.

33. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 220.

This is the essential point: the Anglican understanding of catholicity demands that we recognize our own incompleteness. Yes, we are a portion of the catholic church confessed in the creed. Were we not, it would be incumbent upon us to abandon the Anglican project altogether and align ourselves with a church that is indeed expressive of the one catholic church.<sup>34</sup> And yet we also recognize that we are not ourselves the entirety of this church. Moreover, we recognize that there are other portions of this church with whom we are not and yet with whom we should be united. If the church catholic is the union of all with all in Christ, we cannot be content with less than its full realization.

As a result, we are incomplete and even wounded. Ramsey notes that all churches stand in need of the restoration of the episcopate, even those who have retained it.<sup>35</sup> Episcopal office is meant to express the church's catholic unity, and so to the extent that the church is divided, this purpose is thwarted. All of us possess the episcopate in a wounded form.<sup>36</sup> And so there is no room for triumphalism. At its base, this understanding of catholicity is a recognition that we all need one another because Christ has saved us together and not separately.

This vision of catholicity led the 1930 Lambeth Conference to aim for “nothing less than the Catholic Church in its entirety,” and to suggest that

The Anglican Communion is seen in some sense as an incident in the history of the Church Universal. It has arisen out of the situation caused by the divisions of Christendom. It has indeed been clearly blessed of God, as we thankfully acknowledge; but in its present character we believe that it is transitional and we forecast the day when the racial and historical connections which at present characterise it will be transcended, and the life of our Communion will be merged in a larger fellowship in the Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup>

Strikingly, then, the Anglican Communion's bishops understood the particular vocation of the Communion as one to eventually disappear, not through attrition, nor through abandonment of its ideals, which they insisted were simply the common inheritance of the Christian faith, particularly as instantiated in those items articulated by the Quadrilateral,<sup>38</sup> but through a transcendence in a wider catholic reality: the union of all with all in Christ. This transcendence would not be the loss

34. Avis underscores this point well. Avis, *Identity of Anglicanism*, 2–8; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 78.

35. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 223.

36. Ramsey, *Gospel*, 85, 174, 219–23; Douglas Dales, “‘One Body’—The Ecclesiology of Michael Ramsey,” in Douglas Dales et al., *Glory Descending*, 227; Louis Weil, “The Liturgy in Michael Ramsey's Theology,” in Gill and Kendall, *Michael Ramsey as Theologian*, 146–47.

37. 1930 Lambeth Conference, *The Lambeth Conference, 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops: With Resolutions and Reports* (London: New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Macmillan, 1930), 153. All citations of the 1930 Lambeth Conference refer to this volume and are cited as 1930 Lambeth Conference.

38. 1930 Lambeth Conference, 154.

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* of Anglicanism but rather its fulfillment, for Anglicanism is not ultimate, only the one holy catholic and apostolic church is.

### **The United Churches**

This conviction also led to the formation of various united churches of the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century. The Church of South India was initially formed as a merger of Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian bodies, which were amicably released from their mother churches in order to pursue this venture in 1947. The resulting church was not Anglican, Methodist or Presbyterian, but an expression of catholic Christianity within the South Indian context: “A distinct province of the Universal Church.”<sup>39</sup> Similar united churches in North India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were formed in the 1970s. The united churches were an attempt to transcend denominational limitations in the pursuit of a catholic fullness.

The 1920 Lambeth Conference had noted,

This ideal cannot be fulfilled if these groups are content to remain in separation from one another or to be joined together only in some vague federation. Their value for the fulness of Christian life, truth, and witness can only be realised if they are unified in the fellowship of one visible society whose members are bound together by the ties of a common faith, common sacraments, and a common ministry.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, the catholic fullness at which the united churches aimed could not be found in affirmations of an “invisible” catholic church underlying the outwardly divided churches, or in mere friendly cooperation between them.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing this, the united churches sought to give visible expression to it.

Reflecting from the midst of these developments, the 1948 Lambeth Conference was bolstered by a vision of Anglicanism being transcended for the sake of something greater, and yet with a recognition that there remained a positive vocation for the Communion: “If we were slow to advance the larger cause, it would be a betrayal of what we believe to be our special calling. It would be equally a betrayal of our trust before God if the Anglican Communion were to allow itself to be dispersed before its particular work was done.”<sup>42</sup> In this regard, they were not unique; the

39. 1930 Lambeth Conference, 27. See also Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Beyond Anglicanism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 27–51, 147–71; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme*, Revised ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960).

40. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 12.

41. See Avis’s assertion that an “invisible church” is “a contradiction in terms.” Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 125.

42. 1948 Lambeth Conference, *The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops, Together with Resolutions and Reports* [London: S. P. C. K., 1948], 22–23. All citations of the 1948 Lambeth Conference will refer to this volume and are cited as 1948 Lambeth Conference.

1920 and 1930 Lambeth Conferences were also clear that they were not calling for a disparagement or dismantling of the Anglican tradition even as they recognized its provisionality.<sup>43</sup> And yet, now, in 1948, with the Church of South India a fait accompli, and plans for the other united churches already under consideration, the bishops seem far less sanguine about the prospect of such self-transcendence. I shall return to this momentarily.

### **The Vocation to Disappear**

First, though, we must consider this special calling and particular work that the Anglican Communion felt bound to maintain faithfully. In 1948, the Committee on the Unity of the Church suggested that it lay, at least in part, in the Anglican comprehensiveness mentioned above. They note the tensions and internal difficulties that this breadth creates: for instance, divergent views on the nature or relative necessity of episcopal orders, and hence, evaluation of nonepiscopal ministries, and hence, plans for reunion with nonepiscopal churches. At the same time, they recognize that it is precisely by virtue of this diversity “that the Anglican Communion is able to reach out in different directions, and so to fulfil its special vocation as one of God’s instruments for the restoration of the visible unity of His whole Church.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, having a Catholic wing allows Anglicans to interface with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches on the one hand while having Evangelical or Reformed wings allow for engagement with various Protestant bodies.<sup>45</sup>

While there is perhaps some truth in this, at least in principle, it still falls short of persuasion and has been rendered obsolete by the modern ecumenical movement.<sup>46</sup> Since the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*,<sup>47</sup> the Catholic Church has shown itself to be perfectly capable of carrying on dialogues with the range of Protestant bodies without any mediatory assistance from

43. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 12; 1930 Lambeth Conference, 112.

44. 1948 Lambeth Conference, 50–51, (quote on 51). See the rather extensive analysis of the history of Anglican assessments of nonepiscopal orders in Avis, *Anglicanism and Christian Church*, 1–58.

45. This vision is also articulated in E. S. Abbott et al., *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1947).

46. Avis, *Identity of Anglicanism*, 23.

47. Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (November 21, 1964), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* Anglicans,<sup>48</sup> and bilateral and multilateral dialogues continue apace.<sup>49</sup> If we are to discern a particular ecumenical vocation for the Anglican Communion, we shall need to look elsewhere.

I would propose that this vocation and role lies precisely in the Anglican understanding of catholicity, the full visible unity of all baptized persons with one another and with Christ, and its corollary, the recognition of our own incompleteness and provisionality. Of course, in this regard, all the Christian churches are incomplete and provisional; Anglicans hardly have a corner on this market.<sup>50</sup> However, insofar as we have been able to recognize both the ideal of an all-embracing catholicity and our own provisionality in the face of it, we can and should take the stance of inviting all other Christian churches to inhabit this vision as well. All of the churches stand in need of the others, and, insofar as Anglicans are clear-sighted about this, we are positioned to offer this vision to the others. Were we to simply forgo our own unique identity and be absorbed into some other Christian body, we would have failed to maintain this trust because our dissolution would perhaps advance Christian unity in some limited sense, insofar as we would no longer be divided from that church into which we had been assimilated, but it would still fall short of the ideal of the union of all with all in Christ. Unless and until we are united with all other Christians, ours remains the task of calling all others to embrace their incompleteness in service of that catholicity in which alone we shall finally all be complete.

### **Barriers to Catholicity**

The greatest barriers to the pursuit of such a catholicity lie within Anglicans themselves and can be distilled into two broad tendencies. Even here, though, we are not unique. These issues are prominently on display within the Anglican Communion, but, in reality, they pervade the human condition.

48. Indeed, the greatest achievement of Catholic-Protestant dialogue, the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (October 31, 1999), more or less inverts this vision of Anglicans as the ideal brokers between the Protestant and Catholic worlds. The agreement was reached by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation, with the Anglicans later signing on (Anglican Consultative Council, Resolution 16.17). If anything, the Lutherans provided the mediation. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

49. For a compendium of dialogue texts and agreed statements, see World Council of Churches, *Growth in Agreement*, vols. 1-4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and World Council of Churches, 1982–2017).

50. Avis, *Identity of Anglicanism*, 2; Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 107; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 78.

### **The Problem of Provisionality**

The first is the challenge that faces any institution faced with its own provisionality and involves two facets. To be told that your calling is, ultimately, to disappear is a hard saying, and who can hear it (John 6:60)? It is exceedingly difficult for us not to make ourselves an end in ourselves. Must we really face the giving up of what has made us distinctive and unique, what has, perhaps, nourished our faith in Christ and life of discipleship? Put in these terms, one can certainly understand why such a calling meets with resistance. Nevertheless, the answer to the question is *perhaps*. The Lambeth Conference suggested that many such elements would be retained within the future united catholic church, though likely in a transformed fashion.<sup>51</sup> But we cannot forecast precisely what form a future reunited church will take, nor can we definitively predict what elements will be preserved and what will be let go.

Tempting as it may be, it is also not for us to clutch these treasured elements of our ecclesial identity and heritage and insist that they be preserved.<sup>52</sup> We are not the masters of our destinies. God is. We can, though, I think, trust that nothing that truly belongs to the church's catholic fullness will be lost. Our provisionality is not a summons towards a loss of identity or principles or heritage but to a greater fullness.

Even apart from this wrenching sense of potential loss, there remains the difficulty of the need to maintain a distinctive identity as long as our task remains incomplete while also not setting ourselves up as a self-perpetuating entity that, in the end, finds it impossible to cede itself to the larger catholic whole. This is, I think, precisely what the 1948 Lambeth Conference—with its more sober assessment of the need to avoid being dispersed before the proper time—was beginning to recognize after the formation of the Church of South India.<sup>53</sup> It was not a weakening of the earlier vision (the bishops made this statement in the context of restating their commitment to it) but rather a recognition that one must tread cautiously, even without holding back.

Here, I have no prescriptions except to suggest that to the extent we keep this vision before ourselves, we will be better equipped for what is ahead. We must maintain ourselves, but for a distinctive purpose, and this is a purpose that prevents us from becoming an end in ourselves. To the extent that we are reminded of this, we will, hopefully, be able to avoid the pitfall of maintaining our distinct identity as an end in itself rather than for the purpose of pursuing the larger vocation to disappear as a distinct identity in the union of all with all in Christ.

51. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 28; 1930 Lambeth Conference, 112.

52. This distinguishes my approach from the otherwise fairly similar one taken by Peter Leithart in *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church*. Leithart is confident in his ability to identify those elements of his own tradition that will certainly be retained in a future reunited church. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016).

53. 1948 Lambeth Conference, 23.

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective*  
**Unwillingness to Maintain Communion Across Disagreement**

The second barrier is instantiated in particular ways within Anglican life but is illustrative of issues faced by all the churches. We tend to live with a forgetfulness of our dependence upon each other, which leads us to resist the call of a catholic communion that embraces all Christian people. Indeed, over the last few decades, Anglicans have had trouble upholding this ideal within our own tradition, to say nothing of embracing other types of Christians.

From the outset, the Anglican Communion has not been characterized by central authority. Instead, “The Churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognizes the restraints of truth and love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship.”<sup>54</sup> This principle was clarified at the 1963 Anglican Congress in Toronto as “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence.”<sup>55</sup> Yet the Anglican Churches have come to value their autonomy more than their interdependence. This plays itself out in somewhat inverse ways. We have lost our sense of even being a Communion, much less our sense of belonging to something that transcends even our Communion.

As intra-Anglican debates over human sexuality and the place of LGBT persons in the church have raged over the past three decades or so, our commitment to catholicity has been sorely tested, and, perhaps, been trumped by other concerns.<sup>56</sup> While the presenting issue has been human sexuality, it is decidedly not the case that questions of sexuality, and certainly not LGBT persons and couples, are the barrier to catholicity. Instead, the problem lies in our difficulties in finding ways to remain in communion, even despite disagreements in these areas. Neither side has been especially keen on discerning the way forward as a Communion. In this regard, we are not unique; all churches are reckoning with the cultural sea change in human sexuality brought about by the past several decades.

Those who take an affirming view of the question have declined to wait for the mind of the Communion. Though the 2004 Windsor Report called for a moratorium on same-sex weddings and the consecration of partnered gay and lesbian bishops,<sup>57</sup> progressives in the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Scottish

54. 1920 Lambeth Conference, 14. See also Pickard, “The Lambeth Conference,” 3–4; Gregory K. Cameron, “The Windsor Process and the Anglican Covenant,” in Avis, *Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, 58–62; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 29–32.

55. Toronto Anglican Congress, “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ,” (Project Canterbury, 1963), [http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto\\_mutual1963.html](http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto_mutual1963.html). See also Jesse Zink, “Changing World, Changing Church: Stephen Bayne and ‘Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence,’” *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (2011): 243–62.

56. For example, see the discussion in Andrew Goddard, “Sexuality and Communion,” in Chapman, Clarke, and Percy, *Oxford Handbook*, 413–26; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 61–98. See also the wide-ranging discussion in the special issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 1 (2011), which was devoted to the issue.

57. Lambeth Commission on Communion, “The Windsor Report” (Anglican Communion Office, 2004), nos. 134, 144, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68225/windsor2004full.pdf>.

Episcopal Church have proceeded with these actions. Here, it is crucial to note that the Windsor Report took no stance on questions of sexuality but rather recognized that the Communion was not of one mind. These moratoria were proposed not to settle the matter but to open up space for Communion-wide discernment. Moreover, and importantly, they distinguished between public liturgies and pastoral care for LGBT persons and couples.<sup>58</sup>

In a similar vein, the Windsor Report also called for a moratorium on cross-border interventions whereby bishops would interfere in the jurisdictions of others.<sup>59</sup> This could happen for a variety of reasons, but the presenting issue was that of traditionalists insinuating themselves into diocese or provinces where progressives were going ahead with same-sex unions or ordinations (and often enough in dioceses where the practice was *not* allowed), and doing so without the consent of the relevant bishop. And, just like their progressive counterparts, these traditionalists refused to abide by the moratoria, demonstrating their own unwillingness to engage in a genuine process of discernment. Taken together, the progressive and conservative flouting of the Windsor moratoria represent the loss of an opportunity for the Anglican Communion to walk together and discern the way forward. Rather than expressing the bonds of catholicity, the two sides have asserted their own autonomy.

Relatedly, in response to the Episcopal Church's decisions to consecrate bishops in same-sex marriages and to celebrate such unions for its members, various Anglican Churches, particularly in the Global South, have announced that they are no longer in Communion with the Episcopal Church and have refused to take part in any meetings of the Instruments of Communion at which the Episcopal Church is represented.<sup>60</sup> Such a move is also a loss of the catholic vision sketched above. If catholicity is expressed in the union of all with all in Christ, then this includes all of the baptized, and we are not at liberty to exclude one another, no matter how serious our disagreements may be. If the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral states that the Nicene Creed is the sufficient statement of Christian faith, then we are obliged to maintain communion with all who profess this faith.

Hence, both "traditionalists" and "progressives" find the idea of a diverse Communion to be an encumbrance to be circumvented rather than an ideal to be upheld. Unable (read: unwilling) to maintain communion with the baptized in our own tradition, we are incapable of realizing the ideal of communion with all of the

58. This is especially important to recognize as it is not lost on me that such calls for delay can sound strikingly similar to the counsel offered by the "white moderates" with whom Martin Luther King expressed such disappointment in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Allowing the time for a Communion-wide discernment must not come at the expense of the mistreatment or exclusion of LGBT persons and couples.

59. Lambeth Commission on Communion, "Windsor Report," nos. 147–55.

60. See, though, Avis's assessment about the ineffaceability of some degree of communion, even in the midst of damaged relationships. He goes on to note in *Vocation of Anglicanism* that such moves from the Global South represent a rejection of Anglican polity. Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 150–55; Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 64, 82–7.

Eugene R. Schlesinger: *Catholicity from an Anglican Perspective* baptized throughout the world. While the 1948 Lambeth Conference feared that premature dispersal would prevent us from fulfilling our calling in service of the unity of the wider catholic church, it turns out that a myopic vision, constricting our gaze to ourselves, has been just as detrimental.

From the outset, catholicity has involved a dialectic of unity and diversity.<sup>61</sup> We must reckon with the fact that the catholic ideal sketched by the Lambeth Conferences will invariably involve us being united with those with whom we have disagreements, some of them potentially quite severe. Thus far, the Anglican Communion's attempts to adjudicate this diversity through formal or structural means have faltered.<sup>62</sup>

In this way, we represent a microcosm of the wider ecumenical reality. The greatest problem is not that we disagree nor any particular issue upon which there is disagreement, but rather our willingness to let our disagreements divide us and our unwillingness to embrace one another across these disagreements. This, though, brings us right back to the foundations of catholicity; it is grounded in the singular redemptive act of Jesus Christ by which he embraces the whole of humanity, not out of agreement but despite hostility and opposition.<sup>63</sup> Our resistance towards adopting the same posture is evidence of our need for ongoing conversion.

## Conclusion

Catholicity, ultimately, means the diverse unity that results from the union of all with all in Christ, who is the redeemer of all and gathers all to be his one body. Any unity that falls short of the visible union of all the baptized also falls short of the ideal of catholicity. In view of this ideal, we must all reckon with our incompleteness and provisionality. At its best, Anglicanism has been quite clear in its recognition of its provisional character, even if its commitment to this vision has been waning. Yet the witness of early twentieth-century Anglicanism still issues its challenge and invitation first to the Anglican Communion, then, by extension, to all churches. The ideal of the catholic church is one worth pursuing at all costs, even the end of our distinct identity. For indeed, this *is* the end of our distinct identity. Our existence is meant to be at the service of this wider catholic reality, and it is high time we

61. See Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 30–32.

62. Chief among these means has been the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant, which, while showing great promise initially, seems to have lost its momentum. See, variously, Avis, *Vocation of Anglicanism*, 61–80; Ruth A. Meyers, “The Baptismal Covenant and the Proposed Anglican Covenant,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 31–41; Timothy F. Sedgwick, “The Anglican Covenant and the ‘Puritan’ Temptation,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 10, no. 1 (2012): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355311000222>; Andrew Goddard, “The Anglican Communion Covenant,” in Markham et al., *Wiley-Blackwell*, 119–33; Cameron, “Windsor Process.”

63. This is the central thesis of Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012). It also informs Eugene R. Schlesinger, *Sacrificing the Church: Mass, Mission, and Ecumenism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 143–50.

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remembered that. Doing so would not resolve the problems faced by Anglicans among themselves or together with or in relation to other Christians, but it would set them within the proper context.

In the meantime, the primary barrier to such catholicity is our own will, for ultimately, it is our refusal to be joined to one another that prevents the realization of the visible unity of all the baptized in Christ. The way forward, then, is conversion, which lies outside our capacity and competence. It is the gift of God and not a human achievement. So, perhaps, the starting point for the pursuit of catholicity is prayer. *Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

## Catholicity in the Lutheran Tradition

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Lutherans want to affirm that the Scriptures are the only source of doctrine and the only standard by which doctrine is to be judged (*sola Scriptura*). At the same time, they recognize the importance of catholicity, or being in continuity with the church of previous ages. In this essay, I will seek to explain how they can do both.

The critical point is that there are different types of authority. The Scriptures have the authority of a judge in that they establish doctrine and serve as the norm by which doctrine is to be judged. The church, on the other hand, has the authority of a witness. This means that the church does not have the authority to invent doctrine, but it does have the authority to point out to future generations what the scriptural teaching is. Therefore, we rely on the early church the way we rely on teachers. The testimony of the church does not establish doctrine, but its lack calls into question the scriptural foundation of a given doctrine. In this article, I will trace how these two kinds of authority are articulated in the Reformation (and the early church) and reflected in the way Lutherans think through issues of catholicity in the specific areas of justification, canon, and infant baptism.

A few biblical examples may serve to clarify the nature of this relationship. John the Baptist was serving as a witness when he pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 [ESV]). This witness did not make Jesus the Lamb of God. Nor did it exalt John above Jesus. Rather, John confessed the truth that had been revealed to him so that his followers may believe (John 1:33). Similarly, when Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), he was not establishing doctrine. Rather, he was confessing or repeating back to Christ what he had learned from the Father (Matt 16:17).<sup>1</sup>

The church, through the ages, confesses as well. The church does not remain silent as it simply reads the Scriptures. Nor does it make theological pronouncements on its own authority. The church, like Peter, confesses Christ in response to revelation. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, for example, are confessions of that scriptural faith. As the twentieth-century Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse

1. This notion of confession is developed by Hermann Sasse in “Jesus Christ is Lord: The Church’s Original Confession,” in *We Confess: Anthology*, trans. Normal Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 9.

observed, no later confession in the church “can and wants to be anything else than a renewal of the original confession to Jesus as Christ and Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

From a Lutheran perspective, those churches who oppose creeds in an effort to maintain the authority of Scripture are losing sight of the necessity for the church to confess. The church must answer Jesus’s question, “Who do you say that I am?” On the other hand, those churches who claim a magisterial authority that operates alongside (or in addition to) Scripture are losing sight of the fact that the church’s confession is always a response to revelation. Recall that Jesus’s response to Peter’s confession was, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 16:17). The church must confess and must do so in accordance with the Scriptures.

The church, however, is not always faithful in carrying out its task of confession. When this kind of error occurs, the church’s confession must be returned to its scriptural foundations because only then is that confession authoritative. One cannot simply appeal to catholicity or to the authority of the church to settle the issues. This view is not only Lutheran but can be found throughout the history of the church. For example, in his treatise *De decretis* (1) Athanasius is trying to win over a group of readers who were offended that the Nicene Creed employed the word *homoousios* (“of the same substance”) to describe the Son’s relation to the Father. They were offended that this word is not in the Bible. Clearly, they did not accord the church or the Council of Nicaea any authority to go beyond the witness of Scripture. And, indeed, the council itself stayed very close to scriptural language. If you examine the Nicene Creed, you see that nearly every phrase is a direct quote from Scripture stitched together to form the creedal narrative. In that context, the term *homoousios* does stand out.

So, how does Athanasius respond to his readers’ commitment to Scripture alone? Does he insist on the authority of the Council of Nicaea? No, he does not. Instead, Athanasius argues that the content of what is being confessed by *homoousios* is the same as the scriptural teaching. He even admits that it would have been better for the council to stay with scriptural language, but he claims they could not do so because of the craftiness of the Arians.<sup>3</sup> Whenever the council fathers would suggest a scriptural word to confess the deity of Christ, the Arians would find a passage of Scripture that uses that word figuratively to describe humans or other creatures, and on that basis, the Arians were willing to use the same word of Christ. For example, when the Nicene fathers suggested that Jesus was unchangeably like the Father in all things, Athanasius reports that the Arians winked among themselves and reasoned that if human beings are in the image of God (1 Cor 11:7), then they could say that

2. Sasse, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” 9.

3. Athanasius, *De decretis*, 32.

the Son is “like” the Father.<sup>4</sup> According to Athanasius, this is what forced the council to adopt a word that is not in the Scriptures.

Now it is possible to question the reliability of Athanasius’s report. One cannot always take factual claims that appear in polemical literature at face value. However, what concerns us here is not the way the council arrived at the term *homoousios* but the kind of authority that Athanasius accords the council in *De decretis*. The fact that Athanasius maintains that the council was forced, almost against its will, to adopt a nonscriptural term supports the idea that Athanasius sees the council as serving as a witness to Scripture.

Here, we see both parts of the pattern of Peter’s confession, as I have explicated it above. First, Athanasius does not concede that we can just have the Bible and dispense with the creed. The church’s confession is necessary. But neither does he appeal to the authority of the Council of Nicaea, as if it had some authority beyond the Scriptures. Rather, he argues that the Nicene Creed has authority precisely because it confesses the scriptural truth.

From a Lutheran perspective, similar issues are in play in the sixteenth century. The simplistic version of the story is that the medieval church’s confession had become muddled by the introduction of errors that overemphasized human merit and that this confession needed to be brought back into conformity with the Scriptures because only the Scriptures establish doctrine. However, that story is complicated by two factors. First, before a controversy occurs, it is often the case that earlier generations in the church did not articulate their doctrine in precise enough terms for one to be able to decide which side they would have been on. The sixteenth-century Lutheran dogmatician Martin Chemnitz pointed this out, and it figured prominently in his evaluation and appropriation of the early church. We will discuss his approach below. Second, there is some variety among Lutherans about the nature and extent of the error in the medieval church. Correspondingly, there is more than one way of looking at the Reformation within Lutheranism.

### **Narrating the Reformation**

The story of the Reformation can be either a bridge or barrier to catholicity, depending on how it is told. There are two main options. Some describe the Reformation as the birth of a new church. Others describe the Reformation as an evangelical reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> Each of these views entails a different

4. Athanasius, *De decretis*, 20.

5. George Lindbeck describes these two ways of thinking about the Lutheran Church in “Ecumenical Directions and Confessional Construals,” *Dialog* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 118-23; Charles Arand, “The Identity of a Confessional Church in Post-Confessional Christianity,” unpublished manuscript, 3-5.

approach to catholicity, which I am here using to refer to continuity with the church or previous ages, and to ecumenism.

In the first view, the Lutheran Church is construed as fundamentally a Protestant church body. The *Augsburg Confession* is the Declaration of Independence from Rome and forms the doctrinal core of a new denomination. This narrative often depicts a medieval church that was in total darkness until Luther came along and discovered the gospel. Consequently, it places little importance on continuity with the past. The Reformation is a break with the past. The ecumenical future of the Lutheran Church lies in dialogue with other Protestant churches since this view portrays the Roman Catholic Church as the antithesis of the Lutheran Church.<sup>6</sup>

In the second view, the Lutheran Church is construed as a reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church, at least until the Lutherans were expelled. The *Augsburg Confession* is not a declaration of independence but an ecumenical proposal. This narrative depicts the medieval church as a church that contained abuses that obscured the gospel but not as one that was in complete darkness. Continuity with the past is an important feature of this view. In terms of ecumenism, the ecumenical future of the Lutheran Church lies in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church because that was the origin of the Lutheran movement in the first place.

There is truth in both views. Historically speaking, the Reformation did give rise to the Lutheran Church as an independent church body, even if that was not its original intent. The differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics do, in fact, form a key part of Lutheran identity today. The three slogans of the Reformation, for example, are witness to this fact: *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Scriptura*. These are not merely summaries of doctrinal positions but are markers of identity. Lutherans are the “faith alone” people.

On the other hand, the Reformation did, in fact, originate as a reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church. Luther drew up the *Smalcald Articles* in preparation for the upcoming Council of Mantua. That council never took place, but Luther was ready to argue his case within the structures of the Roman Catholic Church. The *Augsburg Confession* goes so far as to argue that the Lutherans more faithfully embody Roman Catholic tradition than do their Catholic opponents.

It is not my purpose to decide between these two views. In fact, Lindbeck sees them as “irreconcilable construals” that are not likely to be resolved.<sup>7</sup> However, the basic orientation of the second view may prove helpful for us to uncover what resources the Lutheran tradition has for appreciating catholicity since it places more value on continuity with the past. We turn, then, to the *Augsburg Confession*.

6. Arand, “Identity,” 3.

7. Lindbeck, “Ecumenical Directions,” 123.

### **Catholicity in the Lutheran Confessional Documents**

The *Augsburg Confession* was presented before Emperor Charles V on June 25, 1530. Its purpose was to display the doctrine of the Lutheran Church and to show the emperor that the Lutherans were not some sect but had a legitimate claim to be considered the church. In that context, it asserts continuity with the catholic church of earlier times:

Since, then, this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and is, moreover, neither against nor contrary to the universal<sup>8</sup> Christian church—or even the writings of the Roman church—so far as can be observed in the writings of the Fathers, we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above.<sup>9</sup>

The conclusion of the document repeats the claim of continuity with the universal Christian church and adds that the Lutherans have “prevented any new and godless teaching from insinuating itself into our churches.”<sup>10</sup> From these passages, one can see that the *Augsburg Confession* makes a very strong claim of continuity with the earlier church. Several features of this claim are worth noting.

First, the *Augsburg Confession* claims that the Lutherans, not their Roman Catholic opponents, are the ones who most faithfully embody the Roman tradition. For those who describe the Reformation as a birth of a new church out of the darkness of the Middle Ages, this claim is shocking. It places a high value on the Roman tradition and actively seeks to incorporate that tradition into the life of the church.

Second, the *Augsburg Confession* privileges the early church over the medieval church. The Reformation takes place at a time when there was great interest in returning to the sources (*ad fontes*) in both literature and theology. The reformers also had a view of history in which the world grew increasingly worse since the fall into sin.<sup>11</sup> In this view, it seems natural to assume that the church in the more distant past is going to be purer than the church in the recent past. This meant that the reformers were committed first to a return to Scripture but also to a return to the early church. Philip Melancthon and, even more, his student Martin Chemnitz pioneered the field of patristic studies as they sought to provide the church with resources to better understand and more faithfully employ the witness of the early church. Chemnitz argued extensively in his *Loci Theologici, Catalogue of Testimonies*, and

8. The German word used is *Gemeine*, which is here the equivalent of the Latin word *catholica*. See Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 200), 58n199.

9. *Augsburg Confession*, Conclusion of Part One (Kolb-Wengert, 58).

10. *Augsburg Confession*, Conclusion, 5 (Kolb-Wengert, 104).

11. This is reflected in *Augsburg Confession* 23.14, “Now in these last times and days of which Scripture speaks, the world is becoming more wicked and human beings more frail and infirm” (Kolb-Wengert, 64). The topic here is the marriage of priests.

*Examination of the Council of Trent* that Lutheran theology stands in continuity with the early church.

The importance of the early church is also expressed in the structure of the *Book of Concord*. Assembled in 1580, this book contains all the confessional documents of the Lutheran Church. These documents are the following: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Luther's *Small Catechism*, Luther's *Large Catechism*, the *Smalcald Articles*, the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, and the *Formula of Concord*. These confessional writings exhibit the official position of the Lutheran church.

Two features stress continuity with the early church. First, the fact that it starts with the three ecumenical creeds reflects the fact that the reformers saw the other documents as standing in continuity with those creeds.<sup>12</sup> Second, the sixteenth-century documents often cite fathers like Augustine, Ambrose, Cyril of Alexandria, and many others in support of their positions. This is especially the case in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* and the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*. But what exactly is the nature of this importance, and how does it fit with the Reformation slogan *sola Scriptura*?

### **Judge vs. Witness: The Authority of the Scriptures and the Authority of the Church**

For a more detailed discussion of the function of Scripture in Lutheran theology, we turn to the *Formula of Concord*, which was written in 1577 to address certain controversies that arose within the Lutheran Church. The *Formula* declares the Scriptures to be the only "guiding principle and rule of all teaching." All other writings must be subject to the Scriptures.<sup>13</sup> But, it continues, this does not mean that other useful books are to be rejected. Rather they should be used as "helpful interpretations and explanations."<sup>14</sup> It also refers to such writings as "summaries" of Scripture and maintains that they should be evaluated according to Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

When we reflect, then, on the role of creeds and confessions in the church, we must always see them in relation to Scripture. While the Nicene Creed, for example, does contain doctrine, it would be a mistake to view it primarily as a list of key Christian doctrines. If one were to view it this way, consider the implications. While the Nicene Creed does clearly confess the divinity of Christ because it was drawn

12. The Athanasian Creed is actually a Western creed, probably written in the sixth century, which expresses Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. So it is not quite as ecumenical as the reformers thought it was.

13. *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Introduction, 9 (Kolb-Wengert, 529).

14. *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Introduction, 10 (Kolb-Wengert, 529).

15. *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Introduction, 10 (Kolb-Wengert, 529).

up in response to the Arians, there are many key Christian doctrines not mentioned in the creed, such as justification, to mention perhaps the most prominent one. The Nicene Creed fails if it is supposed to be a list of fundamental doctrines.

It succeeds, however, if it is meant to exhibit the basic plotline of the Scriptures. The Arians strongly argued that Jesus underwent many experiences in the Gospels that are not fitting for God: he was born, he grew in wisdom, he did not know things, he said that the Father is greater than he and that he came to do the Father's will, he received the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan, he suffered and died. How could pro-Nicene Christians possibly confess the deity of Christ in the face of all these passages? The pro-Nicene answer is to place all of these humiliating experiences into the overarching plot of the Scriptures. The Nicene Creed notes that the Son became incarnate before he suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose from the dead. Correspondingly, the Pro-Nicene approach to all these passages is to say that the Son did indeed undergo humiliating experiences unfit for God, but he did so not because of some deficiency in his divine nature but because he humbled himself in the incarnation. That is perhaps the most basic example of how the Nicene Creed functions as a plot summary of Scripture in theological argumentation.<sup>16</sup> And if that is how creeds and confessions function in the church, then it is clear that they do not operate independently from Scripture.

Later Lutheran dogmaticians Chemnitz and Gerhard preserved this commitment to Scripture while finding a way to talk about the importance of the church in previous ages. They made a distinction between two kinds of authority: the authority of a judge and the authority of a witness. Scripture has the authority of a judge. It can render decisions on what is and is not the truth. The church, on the other hand, has the authority of a witness. It can testify to and confess what the Scriptures say, but it has no authority to render judgments independent of Scripture.

One area where this distinction makes a clear difference is in the question of which books belong in the canon. Chemnitz's Roman Catholic opponents were arguing that the church stands over Scripture because it is the church that defines which books are in the canon in the first place.<sup>17</sup> Chemnitz responds by arguing that the church is serving as a witness. While we rely on the testimony of the early church to establish the canon, it does not follow from this that the church of today has the authority to define the canon (as the Council of Trent claimed).<sup>18</sup> That is because the church of today is not in the same position as the early church to serve as a witness. No one in the sixteenth century knew the apostles personally or received

16. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see my article, "The Nicene Creed in the Church," *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 13-22.

17. Fred Kramer, trans., *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 181. All references to the *Examination of the Council of Trent* in this article refer to vol. 1 of Kramer's translation.

18. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 184.

their letters.<sup>19</sup> To say that the church of later ages has the authority to make a decree about the canon is to ascribe to the church the authority of a judge rather than the authority of a witness.

Consequently, the Lutheran church has never gone beyond the testimony of the early church on the question of the canon. Modern Lutherans even preserve the distinction between *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* books, as defined by Eusebius. Eusebius notes that some books, such as the four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul, were confessed (*homologoumena*) by all. Others, such as 2 Peter, James, and 2-3 John, were agreed on by most, but spoken against (*antilegomena*) by some.<sup>20</sup> Chemnitz argues that just as the later church has no authority to add to the testimony of the early church, so also it has no authority to remove the doubt expressed by the early church.<sup>21</sup>

Chemnitz's discussion of the canon shows how the distinction between judicial authority and the authority of a witness functions in the question of which books belong in the Bible. However, the distinction finds broader use in Lutheran theology to distinguish the authority of creeds and confessions from that of the Scriptures. Lutheran systematic theology has adopted the terms *norma normans* and *norma normata* to capture this distinction. Only the Scriptures are the *norma normans* (norming norm). That is, only the Scriptures have normative authority to judge all other writings. Creeds and confessions, in turn, function as *norma normata* (normed norms). That is, they do have normative authority in the church, but that authority does not stand on its own alongside Scripture. Rather it is derived from Scripture. Here the ordination vow for Lutheran pastors illustrates the principle,

P. Do you believe and confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

R. *Yes, I believe and confess the canonical Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.*

P. Do you believe and confess the three Ecumenical Creeds, namely the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, as faithful testimonies to the truth of Holy Scriptures, and do you reject all the errors which they condemn?

R. *Yes, I believe and confess the three Ecumenical Creeds because they are in accord with the Word of God. I also reject all the errors they condemn.*

19. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 176-77.

20. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 179.

21. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 180.

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P. Do you confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true exposition of Holy Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? And do you confess that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord—as these are contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith?

R. Yes, I make these confessions my own because they are in accord with the Word of God.<sup>22</sup>

In these vows, the three ecumenical creeds, as well as the Lutheran Confessions, are affirmed “because” (*quia*) they are in agreement with Scripture. They are not independent sources of authority but derive their authority from the Scriptures. Yet they do have authority. They are not affirmed “insofar as” (*quatenus*) they agree with Scripture. Such a view would accord them no authority at all because no claim would be made about the extent to which they might be in accord with Scriptures. The *quia* subscription, on the other hand, asserts that these creeds and confessions are authoritative in the church precisely because they are in accord with Scripture.

So far, we have discussed the conceptual framework Lutherans use in thinking about the authority of Scriptures and that of creeds and confessions (and by extension tradition more broadly). Now we turn to some specific examples of how that framework might be employed.

### **Catholicity and the Doctrine of Justification**

How does the understanding of the church as a witness play out in evaluating the catholicity of the key doctrine in the Reformation: the doctrine of justification by faith alone? On the one hand, it means that when push comes to shove, the reformers would rather have Paul on their side than the church fathers. On the other hand, if the Reformation understanding of justification turns out to be totally new in the sixteenth century, there is a strong implication that the reformers were interpreting Paul incorrectly.

There are different modern evaluations of this question. Alister McGrath, for example, claims that the doctrine of justification in the Lutheran and Reformed churches after 1530 represents a “radically new interpretation of the Pauline concept of ‘imputed righteousness.’”<sup>23</sup> Thomas Oden, however, compiles evidence to the contrary in his *Justification Reader*, arguing that the Reformation understanding of

22. The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 165-66.

23. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209.

justification is in line with a patristic consensus on the matter.<sup>24</sup> My own view is that this question is complicated enough that McGrath and Oden might both be right! There is both continuity and discontinuity with the church in earlier ages.

There are two aspects of Luther's understanding of justification that I would like to highlight in order to provide a more complete explanation of these continuities and discontinuities. The first is that justification is forensic. That means that the term "justify" refers to God speaking, declaring the sinner to be righteous. Since justification is a speech act, or more specifically a promise, it is received by faith since even in ordinary human discourse, promises are either believed or not, but they are not earned.<sup>25</sup> The other alternative would be to understand justification as sanative. That means that the term "justify" refers to God healing the sinner, transforming the heart by pouring in his grace and the Holy Spirit so that the sinner is able to accrue merit before God. The second aspect is the question of whether cooperation on the sinner's part is required in order to receive the benefits of justification. Luther's view is that justification is completely the act of God (monergism). Another possible view would be that the sinner must cooperate with God in some sense (synergism) in order to receive the benefits of justification.

What is the witness of the early church on these two questions? It turns out that there is some variation. Augustine does, at one point, list the forensic view as one possible interpretation of "justify,"<sup>26</sup> but he overwhelmingly understands justification sanatively in his theology. One of his favorite Bible passages is Romans 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This has shaped Roman Catholic theology down to the present day. Cyril of Alexandria, on the other hand, defines justification as dropping the ancient charges, meaning forgiveness for the curse that God spoke against the human race in Genesis 3: "Dust you are; to dust you will return."<sup>27</sup> Since Cyril understands "justify" to refer to God forgiving sins, not God transforming the heart, his view would rightly be classified as forensic.

On the question of monergism, the situation is reversed. Augustine is the one who looks similar to Luther in that he too thinks that God alone acts when he gives grace, at least in his mature theology. Indeed, because of this similarity, the Augsburg Confession cites Augustine more than any other church father in support of the Lutheran position. Cyril, on the other hand, teaches synergism. He is concerned to distinguish Christian theology from a pagan view of fate, so he feels very strongly

24. Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader*, Classic Christian Readers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

25. *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 4.48-56 (Kolb-Wengert, 128-29).

26. Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 26.45.

27. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. David R. Maxwell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, forthcoming). This is from his comment on Rom 4:2. The Greek original may be found in P. E. Pusey, ed., *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini* (Bruxelles: Impression Anastaltique Culture et Civilisation, 1965), 5:181, lines 1-5.

that he must affirm human cooperation in salvation so that it does not look like our destiny is out of our hands and controlled by the stars.<sup>28</sup>

There are two observations that emerge from this comparison of Augustine and Cyril. First, there is no monolithic patristic understanding of justification. So any claim that one church or the other has departed from what the church has always taught is being a bit careless about what the church has actually taught. Second, there are aspects of both continuity and discontinuity between the Reformation understanding of justification and that of these two fathers. Luther stands in continuity with Cyril but not Augustine on the issue of whether justification is forensic, but he stands with Augustine and not Cyril on the issue of whether it is monergistic.

But lining up sides on different aspects of justification is not the only way to talk about continuity. One's account of the function of doctrinal formulations is relevant as well. Perhaps the most nuanced account of this problem is Martin Chemnitz's treatment of it in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Chemnitz notes that before a controversy breaks out, the terminology of earlier fathers is not as precise before the controversy as after. He cites Augustine, who makes precisely this point in response to the Pelagians finding support for their position in earlier church fathers.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Chemnitz takes the problem of discontinuity and contextualizes it within the history of the church. Christians of all ages have had this problem simply because of the way doctrine is formulated over against the questions of the day.

Chemnitz then notes that regardless of how the fathers articulated their understanding of justification, when they imagined themselves before the judgment seat of Christ, they invariably relied only on God's mercy. He finds this to be the case in such fathers as Augustine, Bernard, Anselm, Bonaventura, and Gerson.<sup>30</sup> When it came to their actual faith (as opposed to their dogmatic articulation of their faith), they actually agreed with the Lutheran position.

From Chemnitz's argumentation, we see that a claim to catholicity is not optional. It is not sufficient to establish doctrine, but if there were absolutely no connection with the church in previous errors, the implication would be that the doctrine of justification would be suspect. Novelties cannot be part of the faith once delivered to the saints.<sup>31</sup> However, that does not mean that the continuity must always involve a straightforward affirmation of unchanging doctrinal formulations. As a patristic scholar, Chemnitz is well aware that doctrinal formulations are shaped in response to particular questions that may not be the same in all ages.

28. See my discussion of this in "Justification in the Early Church," *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 34-35.

29. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 261.

30. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 510.

31. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 258.

### **Catholicity of Infant Baptism**

How does the view of the church as a witness affect how Lutherans think about the practice of infant baptism? If we frame the question as whether the New Testament commands infants to be baptized, the results are inconclusive. After telling the crowd to be baptized, Peter says, “The promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39), but does that refer to infants or simply to descendants? The jailer at Philippi was baptized along with his family, but Luke does not tell us whether there were infants in his family (Acts 16:33).

The witness of the early church on the matter is not unanimous either. Many church fathers do attest and approve the practice of infant baptism, such as Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyril of Alexandria. But Tertullian is an early dissenting voice. He tells us that infant baptism was practiced in the second century, but he does not approve of this practice.<sup>32</sup>

However, even if the witness of the early church were unanimous, that would not in itself be sufficient to justify infant baptism. That is because the early church does not have the authority to institute doctrine, or in this case, establish a means of grace. They only have the authority to testify to what Scripture says. It is fair to observe that the preponderance of the witness of the early church makes it more likely that this is the scriptural teaching, but that is not strong enough actually to establish the practice.

To get beyond this impasse, the question needs to be framed differently. The real question is not, “Does the New Testament command infant baptism?” but rather, “What is baptism?” Is baptism something we do for God or something God does for us? If baptism is something we do for God, such as a confession of faith, then it seems obvious that infants should not be baptized because they lack the intellectual capacity to make such a confession meaningfully. If, on the other hand, baptism is something God does for us, an act which bestows life and salvation, then it seems obvious that infants should be baptized because they are just as helpless and in need of God’s saving mercy as adults who are baptized.

There is much more scriptural data on the question of the nature of baptism than there is on the narrower question of infant baptism. Lutherans would point to passages such as Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:27, Titus 3:5, and 1 Peter 3:21 to show that baptism is God’s saving act. Now it is not my purpose here to make the case for infant baptism per se, but rather to show how one’s view of catholicity affects how one thinks through this issue. In this case, it leads to framing the question in such a way that the question can actually be answered from Scripture and then relying on the witness of the church to support that view. And it turns out that the early church is fairly uniform in its affirmation that God bestows salvation in baptism.

32. See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 362-66.

This is reflected not only in the writings of the fathers but also in the baptismal liturgies themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Before leaving this topic, I would like to address the question of how Lutherans handle the question of whether infants can have faith. There are actually two different approaches to this. One is to argue for the possibility of infant faith. The early twentieth-century Lutheran dogmatician Francis Pieper is an advocate of this view. Drawing on the tradition of Lutheran orthodoxy, Pieper argues that saving faith is precognitive. The dogmatic term is *fides directa*. This means that faith apprehends God's promise, which is given in the word and in baptism, directly, even if the person cannot articulate it. Thus, people who are asleep, mentally disabled, or infants, can have saving faith even though they are not in a position to give a rational account of the contents of their faith.<sup>34</sup>

Martin Luther takes a different approach in his *Large Catechism*. Though he thinks infants can believe, he argues that it really does not matter whether the infant believes or not because baptism is God's work. It is God's word that makes the baptism, not the faith of the recipient. So even if, for the sake of argument, the infant does not believe when he or she is baptized, the church is praying for the infant that he or she may believe later. This is also why Luther says that if someone were to be baptized under false pretenses for ulterior motives and then were later to repent, we would not rebaptize them. The promise of baptism is good for their whole life. If you did not believe it before, we would say, then believe it now.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

These reflections on justification, *sola scriptura*, and infant baptism are intended to illustrate how Lutheran theology relates the authority of Scripture to that of the church throughout the world and down through time, that is, catholicity. Scripture is the judge, and the church is the witness. This means that catholicity plays an important role in the Lutheran tradition. It cannot establish doctrine, but it can confirm our reading of Scripture or raise a warning flag that no one ever read Scripture that way before. The weight of catholicity lies not in majority rule or strength in numbers, but in its ability to function like John the Baptist, pointing to Christ and declaring, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

33. These liturgies may be found in E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1993).

34. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 2:448-49.

35. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* 4.47-63 (Kolb-Wengert, 462-64).



## **“Give Me Thine Hand”: Catholicity in the Wesleyan-Methodist Tradition**

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As I write, the denomination that has been my ecclesial home for thirty years is in the throes of schism. The presenting issue involves conflict over a range of questions related to human sexuality, but the conflict is far deeper and encompasses a variety of theological matters. This essay will not endeavor to sort or solve those problems. My point is to alert the reader that questions of catholicity are very much on the table in the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition. Questions of catholicity often involve how believers in different ecclesial structures acknowledge one another's faithfulness to the ancient Christian faith and contribution to the ongoing development of the universal church. An interest in catholicity also often involves a focus on working partnerships across denominational lines that embody the joint affirmation of the other's commitment to our ancient faith.

The current conflict over human sexuality in my own United Methodist Church, however, has taught us that catholicity also has to do with whether—and how long—Christians in conflict can remain in the same formal ecclesial structure. What is required for continued Christian fellowship and communion? How do we work together when we see mission and ministry in a starkly different light? We United Methodists are not, of course, the first to ask these questions. Indeed, similar questions arose as the early Methodists considered their relationship to the Church of England, and others will undoubtedly wrestle with these matters later. Chances are that readers will have considered similar questions in their own ecclesial context. It will become clear below that part of the problem in United Methodism stems from the assumption that the Wesleyan catholic spirit involves a “think and let think” attitude with regard to doctrinal commitments. This paper will argue, however, that this assumption is a misreading of Wesley's attitude toward catholicity and that a faithful Wesleyan catholicity requires, though is not reduced to, doctrinal commitments that embody orthodox Christian belief. To make that case, the paper turns first to the topic of catholicity in Wesley's writings. The chief document is Wesley's sermon “Catholic Spirit” (Sermon 39). Two other sources are also helpful for understanding the way Wesley and the early Methodists sought to embody the catholic spirit: “On Laying the Foundation” (Sermon 132) and his “Letter to a Roman Catholic.” A close reading of these documents will reveal that Wesley's approach to

catholicity involves both specific doctrinal commitments and a heart abounding in love for other believers. Second, the paper will consider how Wesley's catholic spirit was worked out in the early Methodist movement. Third, the paper will analyze how Wesley has been appropriated more recently in the United Methodist Church's conflict over doctrinal diversity and theological pluralism. The case will be made that emphasizing pluralism by appeal to Wesley's catholic spirit is a misappropriation of Wesley's own approach. Indeed, Wesley offers a generous catholicity that is marked by orthodoxy and prioritizes the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ over personal preference and opinion. To that extent, Christians have much to learn from Mr. Wesley.

### **Catholicity in the Writings of John Wesley**

"Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, then give me thine hand." These words from 2 Kings 10:15 have become something of a slogan for appeals to John Wesley's principle of the "catholic spirit."<sup>1</sup> His sermon by that name was preached on this passage, and it represents an attempt to foster Christian unity despite differences of opinion or varieties of preference.<sup>2</sup> It may be worth noting at the outset a warning that Wesley saved for the end of his sermon. Reflecting on the term: "a catholic spirit," Wesley remarked that "there is scarce any expression which has been more grossly misunderstood and more dangerously misapplied."<sup>3</sup> In an effort then to understand clearly what Wesley meant by "catholic spirit," we will work through the major points of the sermon considering what he believed catholicity did and did not entail. What is required for one's heart to be right with another's heart? What matters should not undermine the catholic spirit? And what errors might misconstrue the catholic spirit? For Wesley, there were three especially significant potential errors: speculative latitudinarianism, practical latitudinarianism, and indifference to the local church. We will come to these below.

#### **Unity in Heart and Hand**

Wesley's doctrine of catholicity was grounded in his belief that Christians owe one another a special love. For Wesley, this special love was one that embodied the commands of scripture, indicating that love is a defining characteristic of Christian fellowship (John 13:34–35; 1 John 3:11, 16; 4:7–11). And while most believers would

1. Unless otherwise noted, all references to the works of John Wesley are from John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).

2. As Thomas Oden notes, "Wesley was concerned here not with Jehu's mixed motives but with the form of reconciliation of human estrangement that is due not to intellectual agreement but to good will"; see Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 1:121.

3. Wesley, *Works*, 5:501.

affirm the importance and necessity of their love for other Christians, Wesley was worried that many did not actually practice this sort of special Christian love.<sup>4</sup> He believed the two great hindrances to this sort of love to be an inability to “think alike” and to “walk alike.”<sup>5</sup> To those who fell susceptible to these hindrances, Wesley famously replied, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.”<sup>6</sup> Matters of opinion would typically involve nonessentials that could be left open to varied interpretations.<sup>7</sup> In Wesley’s mind, the solution to differences of opinion involved humble acknowledgment that everyone errs.<sup>8</sup> And while acknowledging that one cannot hold an opinion and simultaneously think oneself in error, he went on to call upon Christians to offer to one another the sort of freedom of opinion that they would expect others to offer them.<sup>9</sup> As Thomas Oden recognizes, “Disciplined believers honor the legitimate freedom of fellow Christians to hold diverse opinions.”<sup>10</sup>

Along with differences of opinion, Wesley also believed that Christian affection should not depend on preferences with regard to modes of worship. He saw a variety of worship preferences as a correlate to a variety of opinions.<sup>11</sup> Wesley’s own preference was for the liturgy in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In his 1784 *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, he wrote,

I believe there is no liturgy in the World, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid scriptural, rational Piety, than the Common Prayer of the Church of England. And though the main of it was compiled considerably more than two hundred years ago, yet is the language of it, not only pure, but strong and elegant in the highest degree.<sup>12</sup>

4. Wesley, *Works*, 5:493.

5. Wesley, *Works*, 5:493.

6. Wesley, *Works*, 5:493.

7. Compare with Oden, “These ideas often focus on ancillary matters (*adiaphora*) neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture that could be matters of free interpretation without straining the limits of genuine Christianity.” Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings*, 1:122.

8. Heitzenrater notes that Wesley often presumed theological disputes involved matters of opinion, not essentials, and that those in disagreement often meant the same thing but used different terminology; see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2013), 249.

9. Wesley, *Works*, 5:495. Compare Ted A. Campbell, “Negotiating Wesleyan Catholicity,” in *Embodying Wesley’s Catholic Spirit*, ed. Daniel Castelo (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 5.

10. Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings*, 1:122.

11. Wesley, *Works*, 5:495.

12. John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America with an Introduction by James F. White*, Quarterly Review (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 1.

Wesley made only minimal changes to the liturgy used in the Church of England before sending it over to the Methodists who were settling in North America.<sup>13</sup> Despite his love for Anglican liturgy, Wesley came to believe that it was not appropriate to insist others worship according to his preference, though this had not always been the case. In his sermon titled “Catholic Spirit,” he describes how he formerly believed that everyone born in England ought to be a member of the Church of England and worship in the manner prescribed by the Church.<sup>14</sup> He came to see that view as problematic, however, and decided it would be a matter of presumption to impose his preferred mode of worship on another.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley also included matters of ecclesial polity among those things on which different people may hold different opinions. He believed the Episcopal form to be both scriptural and apostolic; nevertheless, his understanding of catholicity meant he could embrace partnerships with those committed to other polities (e.g., Presbyterian, Independent).<sup>16</sup> Here he also includes as a matter of opinion the question of whether infants may be baptized and by what mode baptism should be administered. He sees the question of formal prayer versus extemporaneous prayer in the same way. Wesley sees no reason to dispute over these sorts of matters. Rather, each should act according to the light they have.<sup>17</sup> Whether the question then involved polity or ecclesial offices, forms of prayer, or manner of observing the sacraments, Wesley insisted his only concern was this: “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?”<sup>18</sup>

But what does it mean to have a right heart? For Wesley, it meant having a heart that is right both with God and with neighbor. To have a heart right with God meant that one had both orthodox beliefs about God and evidence of a personal experience of grace. With regard to orthodoxy, Wesley was looking for a belief in God’s being and perfections, which he lists as eternity, immensity, wisdom, power, justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>19</sup> He was also interested in what a person believed with regard to divine providence: “Dost thou believe that he now ‘upholdeth all things by the word of his power?’ And that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory, and the good of them that love him?”<sup>20</sup> But Wesley was not only concerned with whether people could articulate orthodox doctrines, he also looked for evidence that people walked by faith and gave evidence of God’s work in their life. To have a

13. Those changes included: (1) omitting most of the holy days, (2) a shortened Lord’s Day service, (3) omitting some sentences in the services for baptism and burial of the dead, and (4) omitting some of the Psalms which Wesley found improper for use in Christian worship. Wesley, *Sunday Service*, 1.

14. Wesley, *Works*, 5:496.

15. It would appear safe to say that Wesley would not approve of today’s so-called “worship wars.”

16. Wesley, *Works*, 5:499.

17. Wesley, *Works*, 5:499.

18. Wesley, *Works*, 5:497.

19. Wesley, *Works*, 5:497.

20. Wesley, *Works*, 5:497.

right heart also meant explicit belief in Jesus Christ as the crucified Lord. Wesley was looking for an affirmation that Jesus is God. He was also looking for evidence that Christ was being formed in a person. Such evidence includes the rejection of works-righteousness and embraces the reality that the reception of righteousness is through faith. Wesley expounds on faith here as love for God and the seeking of happiness in God alone.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he asks, "Is God the centre of thy soul? The sum of all thy desires? Art thou accordingly 'laying up' thy 'treasure in heaven,' and 'counting all things else dung and dross?' Hath the love of God cast the love of the world out of thy soul?"<sup>22</sup> In addition, having a right heart involved doing not your own will but the will of God. Wesley wanted to see single-minded devotion and surrender. He wanted to see people point to the glory of the triune God revealed in Christ in every action. This meant having a desire to please God in all things—not to earn his favor but instead because you already have that favor. To have a heart right toward God was to hate evil and rejoice in God with reverence.<sup>23</sup> It should be clear, catholicity for Wesley was not merely a matter of affirming the right orthodox doctrinal formulations; he also wanted to see evidence of a living faith that rejoices in the glory, grace, and mercy of Christ.

With regard to a right heart toward your neighbor, Wesley asked: "Dost thou love, as thyself, all mankind without exception?"<sup>24</sup> Drawing on the Sermon on the Mount, he called upon believers to love not only those who love them but to love their enemies also (Matt 5:48). This was to be shown by doing good works toward others: "neighbours or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad."<sup>25</sup> Wesley seemed to perceive that he set a high bar for having a right heart, and so he concludes this part of the sermon extending a welcome both to those who are "thus minded" and to those who are "sincerely desirous of it."<sup>26</sup> To these, Wesley would say, "Give me thine hand."

But what did he mean by the offer of his hand? If it ruled out divisiveness over matters of opinion, including worship mode and polity, what did it include? For Wesley, "give me thine hand" meant four things. First, it meant "love me."<sup>27</sup> And here he had something very specific in mind. Wesley took catholicity to mean that Christians love one another with a special love, a love that is of a higher degree than their love for the rest of humankind: "Love me as a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, and a joint-heir in his glory."<sup>28</sup> This means that believers should

21. Wesley, *Works*, 5:497-98.

22. Wesley, *Works*, 5:498.

23. Wesley, *Works*, 5:498.

24. Wesley, *Works*, 5:498.

25. Wesley, *Works*, 5:499.

26. Wesley, *Works*, 5:499.

27. Wesley, *Works*, 5:500.

28. Wesley, *Works*, 5:500.

extend patience to one another and compassion. Believers should neither envy nor provoke one another. Further, believers should not think evil of one another but should assume the best. Second, the catholic spirit means believers should commend one another to God in prayer. Here, Wesley sees a deep and fervent intercession: “Wrestle with [God] on my behalf, that he would speedily correct what he sees amiss.”<sup>29</sup> Third, the catholic spirit involved believers provoking one another to good works.<sup>30</sup> This meant offering instruction and encouragement on the one hand and correction and reproof on the other, all in a spirit of other-oriented love. The end of this in Wesley’s thinking was greater fitness for God’s use and the advancement of the kingdom. Fourth, to take hands with a catholic spirit meant mutual love not in word only but also in deed and in truth.<sup>31</sup> This was to speak honorably about others and trust that God was at work in other believers, even if there was a difference of opinion on some matters.

### **Catholicity in the Early Methodist Movement**

Wesley believed the success of the early Methodists was tied to their commitment to the catholic spirit. On April 21, 1777, Wesley preached a sermon titled “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel Near the City-Road, London” (Sermon 132). A substantial part of the sermon offered Wesley’s own account of the birth and rise of Methodism from his days at Oxford in 1725 to the spread of the societies through England and into Ireland and Scotland in 1744.<sup>32</sup> In his account of the growth of Methodism, he described the movement in language very similar to the language used to articulate his vision of the catholic spirit. Methodism, Wesley said, was not a new religious movement but as “the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church, the religion of the Church of England.”<sup>33</sup> Wesley went on to say that “the old religion” was characterized by “the love of God and of all mankind.”<sup>34</sup> While many of the early Methodists were also members of the Church of England, Wesley resisted any inclination either to tie his work to the established Church or to set his movement in opposition to it. Methodist societies, classes, and smaller bands were led by members of the laity and did not depend on ordained clergy to maintain them.<sup>35</sup> Rather than giving attention to formal ecclesial status and

29. Wesley, *Works*, 5:500.

30. Wesley, *Works*, 5:501.

31. Wesley, *Works*, 5:501.

32. For Wesley’s time at Oxford, see Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 38-40. See further, Kelly Yates, “Testing the Limits of a ‘Catholic Spirit’: John Wesley, Methodism, and Catholicism” (PhD Diss., University of Manchester, 2018), 105-47.

33. Wesley, *Works*, 7:423.

34. Wesley, *Works*, 7:423.

35. Campbell, “Negotiating Wesleyan Catholicity,” 7.

structure, Wesley focused the Methodist movement on remaining committed to the religion of the Bible, which he saw summed up and unified in the commands to love God and neighbor as the fulfillment of the law.<sup>36</sup> In this way, he aligned himself with the broad stream of Christian traditions that look to the Bible as their scriptures. He supplemented this portrayal of early Methodism with an appeal to the early Fathers, which strengthened his insistence that Methodism was not tied to a single ecclesial expression but rooted in the apostolic faith.

Wesley also highlighted the difference between the early Methodists and their contemporary religious movements that were aimed at renewal but resulted in little effect. He specifically names Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, and Quakers.<sup>37</sup> The revivals associated with these groups were considerable in Wesley's view, but their impact did not last.<sup>38</sup> He attributed this to their sectarianism, which distanced them from their constituencies. By separating from the established church, they were unable to continue in ministry with those who did not separate with them. In fact, he notes many who remained developed prejudice against the groups that broke from the established church. The result, according to Wesley, was that "national reformation was totally cut off."<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, the Methodists made a point not to separate and form their own ecclesial body. This decision did not come without deliberation and debate.<sup>40</sup> Some insisted on the necessity of separation, but the Methodists maintained their resolve to remain and do their work from within the Church of England. This kept them from becoming sectarian and opened the door to ministry with a broad range of people.<sup>41</sup> "This," Wesley remarked, "is the peculiar glory of the Methodists: However convenient it might be, they will not, on any account or pretence whatever, form a distinct sect or party."<sup>42</sup> Their focus on the love of God and neighbor and their resistance to define themselves by polity or worship style—that is, their catholicity—kept them connected with the larger population and strengthened the revival.<sup>43</sup>

Wesley's interest in catholicity across normal ecclesial boundaries also arises in his "Letter to a Roman Catholic."<sup>44</sup> While Wesley was critical of potential abuses

36. Wesley, *Works*, 7:424.

37. Wesley, *Works*, 7:427.

38. Wesley, *Works*, 7:427.

39. Wesley, *Works*, 7:428.

40. The 1755 Conference was particularly crucial as the Methodists worked to develop their identity in relation to the Church of England; see further, Ryan Nicholas Danker, *Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 161-75.

41. Compare with Collins, *John Wesley*, 161.

42. Wesley, *Works*, 7:428.

43. For Wesley's attempts to promote unity among the growing societies, see Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, 194-96.

44. Wesley, *Works*, 10:80-86.

in the Roman Church, his trip to Ireland in 1747 led to the discovery that Roman Catholics often attended Methodist preaching services.<sup>45</sup> His “Letter to a Roman Catholic” was written within months of the sermon on the “Catholic Spirit” and is marked by an irenic tone that models the vision of that sermon.<sup>46</sup> The letter was written in response to violent anti-Methodist mobs, which erupted in Cork in 1749 and was aimed at cultivating tolerance toward Methodists whom Wesley portrayed as only differing on matters of opinion.<sup>47</sup> The letter begins with the complaint that Catholics and Protestants often think poorly of one another with the result that they are rarely willing to work together, instead behaving quite often with malice and unkindness. He then proceeds to outline in some detail the range of doctrines and teaching on which the two groups agree (trinitarian theism, the person and work of Christ, virginal conception, apostolicity of the Church, and so on).<sup>48</sup> After these carefully articulated doctrinal formulations, Wesley turned to the now-familiar marks of the catholic spirit. He argues that a true Protestant embraces the “old religion” and loves not only God and neighbor but the enemy, too. He eschews the “endless jangling about opinions” and commends provoking each other “to love and to good works.”<sup>49</sup> He declares his hope to see the recipient in heaven before using language similar to that used in his sermon on the catholic spirit: “Then if we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike.”<sup>50</sup> The letter concludes with an invitation for author and recipient to be resolved not to do, say, or think evil of each other, but instead to help and strengthen each other’s ministries. To be clear, Wesley was not advocating a return to Rome, but he was interested in expressions of the catholic spirit to cultivate peace and charity across the lines carved by the Reformation.<sup>51</sup>

### **Wesley’s Three Warnings**

We return now to the three warnings mentioned briefly above: speculative latitudinarianism, practical latitudinarianism, and indifference to the local church. Attention to these warnings will provide a more thorough understanding of Wesley’s attitude toward catholicity and prepare the way for the discussion of contemporary

45. Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings*, 1:126.

46. Campbell, “Negotiating Wesleyan Catholicity,” 4.

47. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, 193-94.

48. See further, Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, 4-5.

49. Wesley, *Works*, 10:85.

50. Wesley, *Works*, 10:85.

51. Even with his emphasis on catholicity, Wesley nevertheless gave evidence of bias against Roman Catholicism, which was typical in the Church of England of his day; see his *The Advantage of the Members of the Church of England over the Members of the Church of Rome* (London: 1756). See also Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, 194, 304-5; Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings*, 1:126. Compare Henry Rack’s comment on Wesley’s letter: “It was the product of a special situation and not at all characteristic of Wesley’s writings on Catholicism.” Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 2002), 310.

appropriations of Wesley in which the question of worship is at issue. The warnings highlight the potential for misappropriating the notion of a catholic spirit and invite care and thoughtfulness when appealing to it. Wesley saw these as misapplications of catholicity and urged that they be avoided. By speculative latitudinarianism, Wesley meant "an indifference to all opinions."<sup>52</sup> Catholicity should not be understood as waffling back and forth with regard to one's views. Wesley rebuked those who confused the catholic spirit with "muddy understanding" and insisted that a lack of settled principles was to miss the point of catholicity altogether.<sup>53</sup> By practical latitudinarianism, the founder of Methodism meant indifference with regard to public worship. He had no patience for those who might neglect the practice of worship and call it an expression of the catholic spirit. Instead, the person who indeed has a catholic spirit will be committed to the form of worship he or she has chosen. That choice will be both reflective and rational, born out of a deep commitment to worship God in spirit and truth. The third warning that Wesley issued involved an indifference to choosing and committing to a local congregation. Wesley expected the person who exhibits the catholic spirit to be committed in every way to one local church where he or she would receive the sacraments, attend the ordinances of God, join other believers in public prayer, and rejoice in hearing the gospel. Wesley saw participation in the Christian community as essential to healthy Christian growth. Wesley took these three commitments—fixed principles, thoughtful worship, and committed to a congregation—as essential to the catholic spirit.<sup>54</sup> These were the means whereby his or her heart would be strengthened in love for God and others.<sup>55</sup>

### **Catholicity and Conflict in Today's Methodism**

Two very different approaches to Wesley's "catholic spirit" have emerged in present-day Methodism. For some, the catholic spirit continues to be a way of highlighting doctrinal unity with the Great Tradition of the Christian Church. This paper has argued throughout that this was Wesley's own position. For others, the catholic spirit has come to mean "think and let think" with much less emphasis on doctrinal commitments shared with other Christian denominations. Ted A. Campbell recognizes this when he says, "A consistent trait of the Wesleyan heritage and the Methodist churches has been a notable liberality or openness on doctrinal issues."<sup>56</sup> Campbell explicitly associates this "liberality or openness on doctrinal

52. Wesley, *Works*, 5:502.

53. Wesley, *Works*, 5:502.

54. See further, Yates, "Testing the Limits," 50-52.

55. Oden notes Wesley's resistance to the presence of latitudinarian tendencies among some in the Church of England in his day. They were disinclined to focus on doctrinal definitions, the sacraments, and church discipline; instead, they emphasized irenic pluralism, doctrinal ambiguity, and minimalism with regard to Christian teaching. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings*, 1:124.

56. Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 19.

issues” with Wesley’s catholic spirit.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, from 1972 until 1988, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* explicitly affirmed that “theological pluralism should be recognized as a principle,” and goes on to observe that “some would wish traditional doctrinal statements and standards recovered and enforced; others demand that they be repealed; some would urge they be perfected; others would insist they be superseded.”<sup>58</sup> To that point, not all agree that the Methodist identity is grounded in doctrinal diversity. An alternative approach is expressed in the introduction to *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* by now-retired Bishop William Willimon, “I’ve heard people say, ‘What I like about being a Methodist is that you can believe fairly much whatever seems right to you.’”<sup>59</sup> Willimon responds, however, that such a view is “dead wrong, a scandal to the religious movement that is the lengthened shadow of John and Charles Wesley.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise, William Abraham has argued that United Methodists have long been plagued by “doctrinal amnesia” and “have systematically forgotten the place of Christian doctrine in their life and service to God.”<sup>61</sup>

The issue of doctrinal indifference in relation to Wesleyan catholicity is addressed in detail in an essay by D. Stephen Long, who argues that “the Wesleyan catholic spirit has not been, perhaps never was, ‘catholic.’”<sup>62</sup> He continues, “In its very identification of a putative ‘catholic spirit’ as a Wesleyan distinctive, Methodism sacrifices catholicity.”<sup>63</sup> The problem, in Long’s view, is the notion of essentialism; that is, the idea that catholicity involves boiling Christianity down to its essential doctrinal core. Drawing heavily on Hans Urs von Balthasar, Long argues that

57. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine*, 19. Campbell recognizes that Wesley affirmed doctrinal essentials in his understanding of the catholic spirit but nevertheless indicates that Wesley’s catholic spirit was the source of doctrinal openness as the Methodist tradition developed. So Thomas A. Langford, “Wesleyan theology, as it has advanced beyond Wesley, has exhibited characteristic qualities of thought more than it has adhered to distinctive doctrines. Consequently, John Wesley has been a guide to theological reflection more than a definitive doctrinal source.” Langford, *Practical Divinity*, vol. 1, *Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1983), 248; compare with John B. Cobb, Jr., “Is Theological Pluralism Dead in the U.M.C.?” in *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 162-67.

58. United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1972), 69-70. In 1988, the language commending theological pluralism was removed, and the place of scripture as “the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine” was affirmed. United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 81.

59. William H. Willimon, *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), xiii.

60. Willimon, *United Methodist Beliefs*, xiii.

61. William Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 12.

62. D. Stephen Long, “The Non-Catholicity of a Catholic Spirit,” in *Embodying Wesley’s Catholic Spirit*, ed. Daniel Castelo (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 51.

63. Long, “Non-Catholicity,” 51.

catholicity "is not about minimal essentials but about the fullness of Christian faith."<sup>64</sup> While Christianity certainly has a doctrinal core, the Christian faith cannot be reduced to that core.<sup>65</sup> Such a reduction creates separation between the minimal number of doctrines to be believed and other aspects of the Christian faith like worship and practices. The latter are considered matters of opinion on which people should "think and let think."<sup>66</sup> Long sees this tendency as "a quintessential Protestant endeavor" that actually undermines catholicity instead of cultivating it.<sup>67</sup> Catholicity should be about the fullness of the Christian faith, which is not limited to doctrines but includes practices. The problem is the focus on finding the bare minimum required to qualify as Christian.

Long sees this problem emerging from Wesley's sermon on the "Catholic Spirit." Wesley himself remained a member of the Church of England and drew on its robust sense of catholicity.<sup>68</sup> For Long, the narrow focus of "Catholic Spirit" on doctrinal essentials and a heart abounding in love for other believers was fine so long as Methodism existed as a movement within the Church of England. However, Long argues, the doctrinal minimalism that marked the sermon left it unable to serve as a foundation for robust and sustained catholicity as Methodism transitioned from a movement to an independent denominational church.<sup>69</sup> Over time, instead of connecting Methodism to the larger Church, Wesley's "catholic spirit" (with its strong focus on the "think and let think" attitude) came to be seen by some as a distinctive mark of Methodism and as an alternative to the "confessional" traditions.<sup>70</sup> This left the door open to the sort of pluralism and indifference that Wesley so vigorously opposed.<sup>71</sup>

The widespread notion that Methodism is not confessional is curious in light of the twenty-four "Articles of Religion" that locate Methodism within the historic and orthodox Christian tradition. And a nonconfessional Methodism is certainly not what Wesley envisioned. As we have seen, the "think and let think" attitude that worries Long is not the attitude that Wesley takes with regard to Christian doctrine. Wesley repeatedly insists that the catholic spirit includes a thoroughgoing commitment to orthodoxy and to worship in the context of a local church, even if the worship style was considered a matter of opinion. Long critiques what he sees as Wesley's doctrinal

64. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 52.

65. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 53.

66. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 51.

67. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 51.

68. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 57; compare with Campbell, "Negotiating Wesleyan Catholicity," 2.

69. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 57.

70. Long, "Non-Catholicity," 57.

71. As an example of this, Long points to the continued good standing of United Methodist Bishop Joseph Sprague, who affirmed an adoptionist Christology based on an interpretation of the catholic spirit as theological pluralism and an alternative to confessionalism; see Long, "Non-Catholicity," 53-55, 57-59.

minimalism, but that very critique highlights the point that Wesley was committed to a set of doctrines and that his understanding of catholicity included a commitment to that defined set of doctrines. Thus, any faithful appropriation of Wesley's catholic spirit will embody those same doctrinal commitments and eschew a "think and let think" attitude when it comes to those doctrines.

As Methodism moves forward, if it is to be catholic, it must recover an understanding of the catholic spirit as that which unites it to the Great Tradition, not that which serves as an alternative to it.<sup>72</sup> Even now, the United Methodist Church is in schism and appears to be drawing ever nearer to formal division. The misappropriation of Wesley's catholicity as doctrinal laxity has been insufficient to hold the denomination together.

### **Conclusion**

The paper began with Wesley's warning that the term "catholic spirit" has been misunderstood and misapplied. The conflicting interpretations in our own day would suggest those problems continue, and that the warning should be heeded once again. In my view, Wesleyan catholicity cannot be taken as indifference toward doctrine. This paper has made that case through close attention to Wesley's writings on catholicity. When it comes to the doctrines that have characterized the Christian church throughout its history, we are not at liberty to "think and let think." These beliefs define us. They are essential to our identity. They must be guarded and maintained. And those who do not share them locate themselves beyond the bounds of the Christian Church. Christian doctrine is not available to be reinvented, though it will be explained and applied to new contexts in creative ways.

This paper has considered Wesley's own approach in light of the way Wesley has been appropriated in contemporary United Methodism. His vision of the catholic spirit was not one in which doctrine was devalued or underemphasized, though some have misused it in that way. To be clear, present-day attempts to undermine doctrine in the name of Wesleyan catholicity misrepresent Wesley's own view. On the contrary, he insisted that catholicity depended on shared doctrinal beliefs. But neither was catholicity for Wesley a matter of mere intellectual assent. Rather, he wanted to see doctrinal commitments enlivened by a heart filled with love for God and neighbor. Wesley's catholic spirit was theologically robust and actively engaged in the Christian community and witness. That combination allowed the early Methodists to avoid the appearance of and tendency toward sectarianism. It facilitated shared ministry across ecclesial boundaries. If the people called Methodists are to be our best going forward, that double focus on shared belief and shared ministry must be front and center.

72. See further, Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*, 74-98.

## Catholicity in Presbyterian Perspective

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As a member of the reformed tradition, Presbyterianism draws from a distinct theological well in its articulation of catholicity. As a connectional polity, Presbyterianism gives distinct expression to its catholicity. Both theology and polity contribute to a Presbyterian confession of the church's catholicity. In this article, I will explore both of these manifestations of catholicity within a presbyterian perspective.

By far, the most space will be given to the theological distinctives that shape a presbyterian catholicity. I will demonstrate that the two classically understood ways of understanding the church's catholicity—extensive and intensive—mark a presbyterian understanding. This will be preeminently seen in the confessional expression of Presbyterianism found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter WCF). There are other ways, however, that the theological heritage of Presbyterianism inflects catholicity. I will focus on election and covenant, the mediation of Christ, and an eschatology where covenantal blessings are bestowed presently yet not fully until Christ returns. Before concluding with some thoughts on the proper pursuit of catholicity within a presbyterian perspective, I will argue that the polity of the Presbyterian church facilitates a conciliar character that provides a compelling expression of catholicity.

### A Reformed Foundation

#### Introduction

While Presbyterianism is within the reformed tradition, the tradition gladly inherits the broader classical Christian tradition of the attributes of the church. What is confessed in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) serves as the basis for what the reformed tradition, broadly speaking, predicates of the church: she *is* one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.<sup>1</sup> Together these predicates identify the essence of the church of Jesus Christ. In other words, these are the constituent materials Christ uses to build his church (Matt 16:18).

1. Naturally, standard reformed theological texts on the church from the Reformation era to present touch on these attributes to one degree or another. "Holiness" and "catholicity" are also present in the Apostles' Creed.

These materials are not only constitutive, and thus *gifts* of the builder—they are also a calling. That is, Christ’s people are obligated to pursue unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity in the church. Blessedly, that obligation is fueled by Christ’s greatest gift, the Holy Spirit, who causes what the church is as a body to grow up into its head, Christ. As the Spirit leads and empowers, then the church becomes more of what it is in Christ as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. To the point of this article, catholicity is both a gift and calling of the church.<sup>2</sup>

But what, precisely, is the gift and the calling? This is to ask, what is the catholicity given to the church that it is to pursue? Scripture provides no immediate answer.<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for “catholic” is utilized very early in extrabiblical literature, but not always with clear meaning beyond a generic universality.<sup>4</sup> As G. C. Berkouwer noted, “The word seems too general—i.e., it does not seem to be concrete enough to be of service to us.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, its historical usage and conceptuality have two general emphases germane to this article.<sup>6</sup>

First, catholicity has been understood to refer to the universality of the church as it extends throughout space and time, “comprehending all the diversities of places, times, persons, and states, and as denoting the whole family of God, whether now

2. J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema have a helpful discussion of the church’s attributes as gift and obligation in their 2008 work on the topic. G. C. Berkouwer uses the language of “gift and task.” That is, the church is called to be what it is. Like the Apostle Paul’s ethic outlined in his epistles, there is an imperative that follows the indicative. van Genderen and Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 707-25; Berkouwer, *The Church: Studies in Dogmatics*, trans. James E Davison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 120-25. On the imperatives that follow a confession of the church’s catholicity, see also Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 261-67.

3. The adverb καθόλου occurs in Acts 4:18 but not in relation to the church. In this verse Peter and John are commanded by the Sanhedrin not to speak or teach “at all” in the name of Jesus. While on the word level catholicity is absent from Scripture, the substance of it is found in both the Old and New Testaments. This is especially the case in the New Testament as the church distinguishes herself from Judaism in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This obedience was repeatedly put to the test and culminated at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Herman Bavinck judged that the church’s catholicity was “saved” at the Council of Jerusalem, which upheld the mystery that Gentiles are “heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6). Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 225. See pages 222-28 for an insightful investigation of catholicity in Scripture.

4. The earliest extant usage was AD 110 in Ignatius of Antioch’s “To the Smyrnaeans” 8.1.2: “Let the congregation be wherever the bishop is; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there also is the catholic church (ὅπου ἂν φανῆ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος, ἐκεῖ τὸ πλῆθος ἔστω, ὡσπερ ὅπου ἂν ᾤ Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, ἐκεῖ ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία).” Bart D. Ehrman, ed. and trans., *Letters*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1:304. The fact that Ignatius does not qualify his use of the term, and assumes general reader familiarity, suggests it was already known prior to his use.

5. Berkouwer, *Church*, 105.

6. Several works can be consulted for a history of its usage and understanding. See especially Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 13-29, 181-86. Hans Küng notes that there was an early apologetic use of “catholic” in order to distinguish what was orthodox from various heresies. This was codified into law under Theodosius in 380. Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 298.

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or formerly sojourning on the earth, and dispersed through all ages and quarters of the world.”<sup>7</sup> This is the external and quantitative manifestation of catholicity, which speaks to the breadth of the Gospel mission and reception: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The central confessional document of Presbyterians, the WCF, twenty-fifth chapter is on the church, and articulates this dimension of catholicity in 25.2:

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Second, catholicity has been understood as having reference to the church’s wholeness, which has to do with the depth and completeness of its parts.<sup>9</sup> This is

7. Herman Witsius, *The Apostles’ Creed*, trans., Donald Fraser (Glasgow: Khull, Blackie, 1823), 2:359. It was tempting to distinguish one aspect of this dimension of catholicity: its extension in time. During the Donatist controversy Augustine wielded the church’s geographic extension against the African provinciality of the Donatists. Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 162-73, 287-305; Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

Roman Catholic writers of the sixteenth century re-appropriated this charge against the Protestant Reformers. The Reformers responded by stressing the church’s extension throughout time and demonstrating continuity between their teachings, the apostolic witness, and the theology of the early church. Esther Chung-Kim has recently explored this polemical appeal to the Church Fathers through the Reformation’s eucharist debates. Though less polemical in motivation, today’s Reformed Catholicity movement is keen to reflect upon threads of continuity between the reformed tradition and the catholic consensus of the patristic era (as well as other eras in the Christian tradition). However, this is less motivated by polemics against Roman Catholicism than it is a methodological ethos and theological sensibility contributing to spiritual and theological renewal. Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); also see Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

8. J. T. Dennison, Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 4:264. Also, the Westminster Larger Catechism (hereafter WLC) question 62 asks, “What is the visible Church? A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.” *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 209.

9. The first extant articulation of this dimension of catholicity was in the fourth century by Cyril of Jerusalem in his “Catechetical Lectures,” XVIII, 23. *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, ed. William Telfer, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 4:186:

The Church, then, is called Catholic because it is spread through the whole world, from one end of the earth to the other, and because it never stops teaching in all its fulness every doctrine that men ought to be brought to know: and that regarding things visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth. It is called Catholic also because it brings into religious obedience every sort of men, rulers and ruled, learned and simple, and because it is a universal treatment and cure

the internal and qualitative manifestation of catholicity. It is not mutually exclusive from its external manifestation. Indeed, depth should follow breadth: “Go therefore and *make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). The WCF articulates this dimension of catholicity in 25.3:

Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the church’s catholicity is classically understood to possess interrelated dimensions of external breadth and internal depth. These are both good gifts bestowed by the ascended Christ as he builds his church. As much as they are constitutive gifts, they are also callings—the external breadth manifest in the church’s gospel imperative, and the internal depth manifest in its discipleship imperative. In its chapter on the church, Presbyterianism’s confessional standard articulates both of these classical dimensions as distinguishing the “visible” church.

The authors of WCF 25.1 further write of the “invisible” church as catholic. While the invisible/visible distinction arguably goes back to Augustine,<sup>11</sup> it was an emphasis of the Protestant Reformation as it sought to distinguish the true church in the midst of the dominant visibility of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>12</sup> Presbyterianism’s “grandfather” John Calvin described the invisible church as “that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. . . . [The invisible church] includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world.”<sup>13</sup> That the visible and

for every kind of sin whether perpetrated by soul or body, and possesses within it every form of virtue that is named, whether it expresses itself in deeds or works or in spiritual graces of every description.

10. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 4:264. Admittedly, catholicity as “wholeness” is not as clearly spelled out in 25.3 as catholicity as “universality” is in 25.2. Nonetheless, the emphasis here on the perfecting of the saints by Christ and the Holy Spirit through the church’s ministry speaks to the dimension of depth and maturity that is an internal manifestation of catholicity.

11. According to Augustine and the Reformers, the visible and invisible church are not two separate churches but two aspects of the one church. For a helpful study of Augustine’s evolving thought on the church, see James K. Lee, *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

12. Roman Catholic theology continues to assert catholicity is manifest in a dominant visibility when churches are united to a visible head, the pope. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 75-82.

13. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1021 (4.1.7). On Calvin’s teaching on the

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invisible church are described in the WCF as catholic is a reminder that, while the confession draws on classical dimensions of catholicity, its overall presentation of the doctrine is in the context of a series of emphases drawn from the reformed theological tradition. For example, the invisible and visible aspects highlight, respectively, two doctrines which have received significant attention among reformed theologians: election and covenant.

### **Election and Covenant**

The opening paragraph of the chapter in WCF on the church connects the catholic invisible church with the “whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (25.1).<sup>14</sup> The catholicity of the church, thus understood, is ultimately located in election and is seen only by the eyes of faith (Eph 1: 4, 9, 11; Rom 8:30; 2 Tim 1:9).<sup>15</sup> This effectively disorients the north star of catholicity from the human will or any human institution and orients it supremely to God. Furthermore, theologically it maps catholicity onto Christ.<sup>16</sup> This latter point will be further explored in the next section on the mediation of Christ. At present, it is enough to highlight that in WCF 25.1 there are the lineaments of a distinctly Reformed understanding of the covenant (though admittedly disputed),<sup>17</sup> that is, the covenant of redemption (or *pactum salutis*).

The Reformed theology teaching on election flows from its doctrine of God.<sup>18</sup> God, out of his loving and gracious character, elected before the foundation of the

church, see Benjamin Charles Milner Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1970); and David Foxgrover, ed., *Calvin and the Church: Papers Presented at the 13th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, May 24-26, 2001* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Product Services, 2002).

14. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 4:264. Also, the question is posed in the WLC 64, “What is the invisible Church? A. The invisible Church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are; or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.”

15. Calvin recognized that in order to embrace catholicity, “We need not (as we have said) see the church with the eyes or touch it with the hands. Rather, the fact that it belongs to the realm of faith should warn us to regard it no less since it passes our understanding than if it were clearly visible.” *Institutes*, 2:1015 (4.1.3).

16. On the importance of these foundational theological elements of catholicity expressed in the WCF, see Oliver O’Donovan’s *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 170-71.

17. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Readings its Theology in Historical Context*, The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 235-36.

18. After confessing Scripture in chapter 1, the WCF goes on to God in chapter 2 and then God’s Eternal Decree in chapter 3. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of chapter 3 get to the heart of election:

5. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory out of His mere free grace and love, without any

world all those whom he will savingly unite to his Son, Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4-5). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed theologians increasingly brought together in theological reflection God's electing purposes with his triune nature. The result was what is known as the covenant of redemption. There is an eternal agreement between God the Father and God the Son in which the Son agrees to be the head of a people for whom he will accomplish salvation. This doctrine is not explicitly labeled in WCF, but its substance is alluded to in 25.1 and, more clearly, in 8.1 on the mediation of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The covenant of redemption ensures that the vicissitudes of the visible manifestation of the covenant of grace within the mixed body of the church do not ultimately determine her sense of catholicity; God does. What is more, the source of the covenant of redemption in God's trinitarian electing love shapes our practice of catholicity within the church:

The church of Jesus Christ is a 'chosen race' (1 Pet 2:9). It exists by virtue of the declaration of the Son in which the eternal resolve of the Father is realized: 'You did not choose me; I chose you' (John 15:16). This being the case, the church is characterized by a particular dynamic or movement. This dynamic is its origin in the determination of God the Father, whose purpose is set forth

foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 238-239.

19. While not explicitly stated the WCF or the catechisms, many divines held to the doctrine. WCF 8.1 offers its clearest exposition in the Westminster Standards: "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king, the head, and savior of his church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified" (343). J. V. Fesko notes, "From the earliest days of the reception and interpretation of the Confession, the covenant of redemption was viewed as compatible with it" (165-66). Evidence for this claim appears in *The Summe of Saving Knowledge*, written by David Dickson and appended to the Westminster Standards by the Scottish Church, which explicitly articulates the covenant of redemption. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*; Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); David Dickson, *The Summe of Saving Knowledge with Practical Use Thereof* (Glasgow: Robert Sanders, 1669), head 2, in *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms . . . Appointed by the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland* (Glasgow: Robert Sanders, 1669). For more context on the covenant of redemption and Westminster, see my "Post-Reformation Developments" in *Covenant Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming). For insight on the critical issue of the Holy Spirit's role in the covenant of redemption, see J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception*, *Reformed Historical Theology* 35 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 61-68.

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in the Son and brought to human fruition in the work of the Holy Spirit. Its origin in the divine resolve is what gives the church its specific character and dynamic of *being chosen*. Divine election must not be thought of simply as a background or preliminary reality, perhaps the church's ultimate ground or origin but not an operative factor in giving an account of what the church actually does. Quite the contrary: the dynamic of being chosen determines the modes of common life and activity in which the church is visible. Its forms of life, its principal activities—all the ways in which it disposes of itself in time and space—have to be such that they testify to God.<sup>20</sup>

The object of theological reflection is God and all things in relation to God. Reformed theology ultimately traces the catholicity of the church to the triune God and his eternal covenantal purposes. If reformed thinking on the matter stopped there, however, catholicity would be rendered too abstract. After all, the elect are ultimately unknowable by his people until Christ consummates his kingdom. In the present, there is a historical manifestation of the covenant in the covenant of grace observed visibly in the church. A reformed understanding of catholicity must attend to both the eternal root and the historical fruit.<sup>21</sup> The eternal root of catholicity ensures a divine shape and encourages a focus on “a kingdom that we are receiving rather than one that we are building or approximating through our own discipleship as we seek to mirror the Trinity.”<sup>22</sup> Catholicity is a gift.

The historical fruit of catholicity helps us discern the mixed context in which catholicity is manifest in the visible church. As we will see later, the eschaton is

20. John Webster, “On Evangelical Ecclesiology,” *Ecclesiology* 1, no. 1 (January 2004): 28-29 (emphasis his).

21. One area where root and fruit are brought together in considering catholicity is in the sacraments, which, due to limitations of space, this article will not explore. It is worth mentioning here, though, that it is the holy name of the Trinity invoked in the covenant of redemption that is applied to the subjects of baptism. Baptism thus serves as sort of bridge between eternal root and historical fruit as members of the covenant of grace receive the triune sign of covenantal union. Historically, an indication of the scope of presbyterian catholicity is whether in receiving members the church is willing to accept another church's baptism. For example, American Presbyterians by and large accepted Roman Catholic baptism up until a controversy in the mid-nineteenth century with Charles Hodge on one side and James Henley Thornwell on the other. Since that time, the majority position of conservative Presbyterianism has been to accept Roman Catholic baptism, though a vocal minority favoring rebaptism has persisted. For a detailed account of the historical roots of this debate, see Peter J. Wallace, “The Bond of Union: The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861” (PhD Diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004), 189-258, <http://www.peterwallace.org/bond-union/>.

Likewise, catholicity is demonstrated through the invitation to the Lord's Supper. The reformed do not invite only the reformed to the Table; Christians are invited to the Table. Like baptism, the Lord's Supper bridges the gap between the visible and the invisible in that during communion participants are transported by the Holy Spirit to feed on Christ. This is a transportation of the visible community of the church into the invisible realm, where God and the saints who have passed into glory reside.

22. Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 203.

yet to be fully realized, and not until Christ's return will the catholicity of the invisible church be made entirely visible. In the meantime, God administers his covenant of grace through the ministry of the visible church. She imperfectly yet confidently stewards the means of grace—gathering and perfecting the saints—while acknowledging there will be “false sons in her pale.”<sup>23</sup> It is within the mixed body of the visible church revealed in space and time that God is manifesting the catholicity of the church both quantitatively and qualitatively in the midst of the particular churches (1 Cor 13:12; Rev 2-3; Matt 13:24-30, 47).<sup>24</sup> This manifestation is not a different church than the invisible one. It is, rather, what is known to us and, therefore, answerable to the imperatives revealed in the New Testament. It is within the historical manifestation of the visible church that we can actually pursue catholicity. Catholicity is a calling.

According to WCF 25, the catholicity of the church embraces both the eternal and invisible as well as the historical and visible. The latter is the sign to the former's reality: “[The visible] truly participates in the signified [invisible], but not yet identical with it as one day it will be. ‘For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God’ (Rom 8:19).”<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of the confession of Presbyterianism, the covenant ensures that both the invisible and visible church are equally real.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the dimensions of the eternal root provide the scope for what should be pursued in the historical present, both with regard to the breadth and depth of catholicity. Earlier, the point was made that in the WCF catholicity is ultimately located in election. While true, this is mapped onto Christ. Again, 25.1 reads, “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, *under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in*

23. S. J. Stone, “The Church's One Foundation” in *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1990), hymn 347.

24. WCF 25.4 brings this home: “This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.” Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 264.

25. Horton, *People and Place*, 202-3.

26. In the history of reformed writing on the church, there has been a fear that an emphasis on God's sovereignty and election “can lead to a diminution of the [visible] church's importance in the Christian life.” Henry S. Kuo, “A New Reformed Catholicity: Catholicity and Confessing in Reformed Ecclesiology,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 3, no. 1-2 (2019): 173. This fear was at the center of friction in the nineteenth century between Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary and John Williamson Nevin of Mercersburg Seminary. At risk of oversimplifying the debate, Nevin (and Mercersburg Theology more broadly) emphasized the visible church and Hodge the invisible church. I have sought to make the case that WCF 25 gives due attention to both aspects of the church. See discussion in E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 384-87, 467-81. For a decidedly pro-Nevin take on the debate, see W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009).

all.”<sup>27</sup> The covenant of redemption stipulates a Christological focus to salvation as the Son agrees to be head of a people he joins to himself and makes covenant partners. Life-giving participation in Christ signals the theological source of the church’s catholicity, both with regard to its universality and its wholeness.

### **The Mediation of Christ**

Locating the elect in Christ in WCF pulls together several New Testament themes.<sup>28</sup> The refrain in Ephesians 1 of “in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ)” and “in him (ἐν αὐτῷ)” highlights the people of God’s new home on the cosmic map, a home planned from all of eternity and built in space and time as the Spirit places the Father’s sons and daughters in his Son (Eph 1:5). According to WCF 25.1, the church’s union with Christ entails having Christ as head and, through a series of intimate biblical metaphors: being his spouse, body, and even his fullness. As described, the church’s relationship with Christ is multifaceted. I will follow two facets in understanding the importance of this relationship for the church’s catholicity: Christ as head and ruler of the church, and the church as the fullness of Christ.

Christ as head of the church, which is his body, is drawn from Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18. Christ as head of the church, which is his spouse, is drawn from Ephesians 5:23-32. Both images address an intimate relationship yet an ordered one where Christ is the ultimate authority. As God and Creator, he is head over all things. As the one who mediates salvation to God’s people, Christ is especially head over the church, for he purchased her with his own blood (Acts 20:28) and lives as her royal head (Eph 1:22). The risen and ascended head now gives gifts to the visible church (recall WCF 25.3), gifts designed to gather and perfect the saints (Eph 4:10-13). These include the offices of the church which bear his authority: “Pastors must minister in *his* name . . . elders rule under his oversight . . . deacons serve under *his* care. Christ is the sole head of the church as much as he is its sole Saviour.”<sup>29</sup>

The sole headship of Christ over the church means its catholicity is determined, first and foremost, by him—both in what the church is (gift), and what the church is called to do (calling). Where Christ is, the church is as his body. At the same time, as the church and its officers minister in his name, they serve his purposes. The

27. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 4:264 (emphasis mine).

28. As stated earlier, WCF 8.1 decisively centers election in Christ: “Christ is presented here not only as elected man but as electing God, since the God who chooses and ordains has already been declared to be triune (WCF 2.3), and his decrees are made by all three persons indivisibly.” Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, 237-38. The clarity on this note in WCF 8.1 complicates Karl Barth’s bold accusation that reformed theology lost a Christocentric doctrine of election. *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, ed., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 1-506. See incisive discussion of Barth’s reading of reformed theology on election in Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

29. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader’s Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 336-37 (emphasis mine).

church does not listen to the voice of another, including the compelling alternative catholicities of marketers, sociologists, and politicians that only produce sectarianism in the end. Her ears are tuned to hear her master in the Scriptures. As she follows his call in the Spirit, genuine catholicity will grow: “Catholicity means that the church is Christ’s. We cannot exclude those whom he welcomes, or welcome those whom he excludes.”<sup>30</sup>

The second facet of Christ’s mediation that has a bearing on the church’s catholicity is the description given to her as the “fullness of Christ.” Throughout the New Testament, there is a fullness attributed to the person of Christ (John 1:14; Luke 4:1; John 3:34; Col 1:19; 2:9). But as WCF 25.1 holds in quoting Ephesians 1:23, that fullness is, in part, communicated to the church. Like the previous facet, there is a gift and calling dimension to fullness. Or, as Berkouwer puts it, “In the fullness that the Church received, she is directed towards fullness.”<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, through our irrevocable union with Christ, his fullness is the church’s. We are whole because he is whole. On the other hand, we are not yet fully whole. The language of WCF 25.3 states the church is being gathered and perfected. The gifts Christ bestows are so the church is equipped and enabled to “attain to . . . mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The fullness of Christ provides the depth—or height—for the dimension of catholic wholeness to flourish. That it is the fullness *of Christ* ensures qualitative catholicity “can never be abstracted from Christ himself.”<sup>32</sup>

The mediation of Christ is important for understanding catholicity in the presbyterian perspective because it consolidates where catholicity can be found and pursued. As head, Christ joined to himself a distinct people, the elect, and ensures all he has done for them will be efficacious for their salvation. Roman Catholic conceptions of catholicity, at least since Vatican II, have broadened Christ’s mediation to a universal measure and confused where genuine catholicity can be found. Pope John Paul II was emphatic on this point in his inaugural encyclical, affirming that “man—every man without exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ . . . because with man—with each man without exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.”<sup>33</sup> Whereas older Protestants feared the institutional dominance in Roman Catholic understandings of catholicity,<sup>34</sup> after

30. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 97. Clowney rightly emphasizes the complete absurdity of affirming catholicity while at the same time promoting any kind of racism.

31. Clowney, *The Church*, 113.

32. Clowney, *Church*, 114.

33. Catholic Church and John Paul, *Encyclical Redeptor Hominis* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1979), 14.3. In this and similar affirmations, Pope John Paul II is relying on *Gaudium et spes* 22.

34. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5, *Ecclesiology, the Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 9, 22-23.

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Vatican II, a candid pluralism has sprouted. Rooted in an understanding of a universal incarnational union, the fruits of salvation are now investigated beyond even the Christian church and irrespective of faith.<sup>35</sup> Christ mediating on behalf of the elect safeguards against catholicity transgressing the bounds of Christ. Furthermore, it upholds the distinction between head and members—Christ is Lord—at the same time as it orients members to their head as their source of vitality and growth. To put it differently, for the church to reach further into wholeness, it digs in the depths of Christ alone, for in him is the full catholicity to which the church is called. Yet, as has been previously suggested, this wholeness and universality will not be fully manifest until Christ returns.

#### **Eschatology**

This last section on how reformed theological emphases inflect catholicity briefly focuses on a category suggested in the foregoing—eschatology. In doing so, I will emphasize what is not explicitly present in the teaching of the WCF. WCF 32 and 33 touch on resurrection and life after death, as well as the last judgment, which are the traditional topics concerned with the end of the age. They do not, however, teach what has become known as “inaugurated eschatology.” Be that as it may, notions of inaugurated eschatology can be picked up in what the WCF says about salvation and the church. One way of viewing what I have traced thus far is that there is an eternal, pre-temporal dimension to the catholicity of the church that is stored up in the covenant of redemption centered on Christ (WCF 8.1; 25.1). This extends into space-time history as Christ mediates salvation to his elect as they are gathered and perfected in the visible manifestation of the covenant of grace, the church (WCF 8.1; 25.1-3). What awaits is the consummation of Christ building his church—the telos of his gathering and perfecting—where the full dimensions of the church’s catholicity will be on display (WCF 25.3).

Inaugurated eschatology attends to the historical development of redemption unfolding from Genesis through Revelation and is built on the Bible’s promise-and-fulfillment orientation. It was initially developed in conservative reformed circles in the nineteenth century, especially in the work of Geerhardus Vos.<sup>36</sup> At the heart of understanding inaugurated eschatology is discerning the tension between the

35. Miroslav Volf has noted the irony that, according to Vatican II, Protestant and Orthodox bodies are still considered noncatholic, yet Rome’s catholicity has seemingly moved beyond Christ to include non-Christian religions. Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 263-64. Volf has in mind *Unitatis redintegratio* 13.17.

36. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948); Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972). Building on Vos have been Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study of Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978).

“already” and the “not yet” in the fulfillment of the new covenant that was inaugurated with Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. The church presently lives in the time of “already” (Matt 12:28; 13:1-46; Mark 1:15; Luke 7:22-23; 11:20; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:13-14; Col 1:13) where it has a catholicity in Christ. Yet, in the dynamic of the “not yet,” it both pursues and awaits a fuller manifestation of catholicity in the visible church. The future, according to Vos, is always extending itself into the present as the “not yet” is realized in the “already” (Heb 2:5-9). Nonetheless, until Christ returns, the fullness of the future eludes our grasp.

In some ways, catholicity as gift and calling can be mapped onto “already” and “not yet”: the church has been given catholicity in her union with Christ, yet it is called to a fuller quantitative and qualitative manifestation of catholicity in the present visible church even as it waits for the world to come. The “already” and “not yet” contributes to a present dynamism and a hopeful realism in understanding catholicity. Catholicity is not static. The fullness of Christ is being communicated to his body and bride so that the church, in its catholicity, is increasingly being gathered (breadth) and perfected (depth). But, at the same time, it must be on guard against an over-realized eschatology and its unrealistic expectations. There is a fullness to catholicity that is hoped for—and prayed for (John 17:20-23)—but will not be fully seen until Christ returns. This means, insofar as catholicity is an expression of union, we should expect a measure of diversity in the church in this “already” and “not yet” time.

Herman Bavinck, who inherited and appropriated the perspective of inaugurated eschatology, criticized Roman Catholicism for pursuing an external but hollow unity, believing they sought “a mechanical and external unity that veils the real theological differences within the papal church.”<sup>37</sup> According to Gray Sutanto, in his pursuit of the catholicity of the church, Bavinck argues that “diversity is inevitable: diversity is the result of the church’s current location in various contexts, generations, and its finitude.”<sup>38</sup> Until faith becomes sight, we should not expect the full breadth and depth of catholicity which the church is promised in the covenant of redemption: “The one, holy, universal church that is presently an object of faith, will not come into being until the body of Christ reaches full maturity. Only then will the church achieve the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and only then will she know as she is known.”<sup>39</sup>

37. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Confessional, International, and Cosmopolitan: Herman Bavinck’s Neo-Calvinistic and Protestant vision of the Catholicity of the Church,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (April 2018): 34.

38. Sutanto, “Confessional,” 34. However, see page 39 for a trenchant critique of Bavinck’s vision of plurality that could steer in the direction of a proto-identity theology manifest in pluriform churches. Such a vision, Sutanto judges, “Mitigates against the greater catholicity of the kingdom of God that sees tribes and nations and tongues together singing the one song of redemption” (39).

39. Bavinck, “Catholicity of Christianity,” 251.

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A common critique of reformed theology, especially in light of the topic at hand, is that a focus on election constricts Christian generosity. Accordingly, it would prove deleterious in encouraging a catholicity commensurate with the universal call of Christ (John 3:16; Matt 28:19-20). Of all the churches promoting catholicity, would not the Presbyterians, with their doctrine of election, be most inauthentic? But this is, of course, to misunderstand the reformed position. Unless one is promoting universal salvation, all theologies put some limit on who will be joined to Christ. The question is, whence the limit?

Out of God's free good pleasure, he elects, yes, but, as Augustine said, commenting on 1 Timothy 2:4, "The whole human race is in them" (*omnes genus hominum est in eis*).<sup>40</sup> Election does not envision an eternal holy huddle that the church anticipates through an overweening insularity. Paul, the great apostle of election, taught what Jonathan Gibson calls an "eschatological universalism."<sup>41</sup> R. B. Kuiper writes, "However few or many His people may be today or tomorrow, in the end His people will be the world."<sup>42</sup> Paul believed the ancient promise of the covenant of grace (Rom 4:13): Abraham will be "the heir of *the world*." So long as election is properly seen through covenantal and eschatological eyes, a hopeful catholicity follows where we pray and pursue "thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:10) until "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

Catholicity in the presbyterian perspective must be understood through the foundation of the church's reformed theology. As a confessional body, the signposts for understanding the nature of the church's catholicity are clearly marked in the WCF. The external dimension of quantitative catholicity is held together as a gift and calling with the internal dimension of qualitative catholicity. Together, these are discerned through the invisible-visible church distinction. Yet, these confessional signposts are placed among a number of theological emphases that shape a reformed theology of catholicity. I have highlighted election and covenant, the mediation of Christ, and eschatology. I turn now to what is perhaps the most obvious element of a presbyterian perspective: its polity. After all, the tradition's name is derived from the Greek word for elder (πρεσβύτερος).

40. The whole sentence reads, "*Omnes homines uult saluos fieri, ut intelligantur omnes praedestinati quia omne hominum in eis est.*" *De correptione et gratia* 14.44 (CSEL 92), 272.

41. Jonathan Gibson, "For Whom Did Christ Die? Particularism and Universalism in the Pauline Epistles," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 326-327

42. R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom did Christ Die? A Study of the Divine Design of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 95-96, as quoted in Gibson, "For Whom Did Christ Die?" 327. B. B. Warfield held that reformed theologians have "as important a mission in preserving the true universalism of the gospel . . . as we do in preserving the true particularism of grace." Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1935), 125.

## **A Presbyterian Polity**

Presbyterianism is organized around the risen and ascended Christ's gift to his church of elders.<sup>43</sup> This mark of its ecclesiology informs how local churches, regional bodies, and national denominations are organized. That being said, it is understood that this polity is a temporary arrangement for this "already" but "not yet" time. If the church is ultimately composed of the full number of the elect, they are known in love in eternity by the Trinity (invisible church) and will not be fully manifest until Christ returns (when the invisible is made visible). Until then, Christ rules the visible church through a plurality of elders who represent the people of God.

Though they naturally have arguments for subsequent developments, both the Orthodox Metropolitan Zizioulas and Roman Catholic Pope Benedict essentially argue that the church's earliest form of polity was presbyterian.<sup>44</sup> Presbyterians naturally agree and continue to promote their elder-centric polity as not only what is described in but what is prescribed by the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:1-7; 1 Pet 5:1-2; compare with 1 Tim 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-7).<sup>45</sup> Every congregation should elect elders who rule the local church. Presbyterian polity does not stop at the local level, however. Church government is exercised at higher and wider levels where presbyteries (or synods) are made up of all the churches in a given region as represented through their elders. Presbyterians hold that the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is a biblical example of regional Presbyterianism where a higher and broader assembly handles a local dispute. General assemblies cover national or even international areas. While there can be two or three levels to Presbyterianism, each is interlinked. Local church elders are accountable to their congregations and to other elders in the presbytery and at the general assembly.

Michael Horton believes a presbyterian polity is consistent with a covenantal ecclesiology, which eschews, on the one hand, the hierarchical unicity of a bishop-centric government, and, on the other hand, the independent plurality of congregational forms of government: "At the Jerusalem Council, the unity that the Spirit had established at Pentecost was preserved visibly not by the sacrifice of the one to the many or the many to the one but by the consent of the many as one. The covenant community *functioned covenantally* in its outward and interpersonal

43. According to T. M. Lindsay's classic study of presbyterian government, "elder" is a title of an office and "pastor" and "overseer" describe the kind of work done by holders of that office. *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), 154.

44. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 195; Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 122-23.

45. There are debates in the history of presbyterian polity over exactly how many offices are in the visible church. Are there four (Pastors, Doctors or Teachers, Elders, and Deacons)? Are there three (Ministers or Preachers, Elders, and Deacons)? Are there two and a half (Teaching and Ruling Elders, and Deacons)? Or are there two (Elders and Deacons)? See David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall, eds., *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 140-48.

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government, in mutual submission.”<sup>46</sup> What Horton notes about Presbyterianism as a polity is it promotes a conciliar character where no one person (or personality) or office has supremacy. While there is a hierarchy of church courts from local to regional to national and international, they are composed of representative elders who have equal power—there is always a plurality of elders.

I would argue that this defining characteristic of Presbyterianism facilitates catholicity. Rather than a person or institution arrogating determination of catholicity, or hopelessly determining catholicity through an endless multitude of independent and local churches, Presbyterianism is genuinely deliberative and conciliar. As members are joined to the church, they are not connected merely to a local body but to a church that extends through space and time. What is more, they are spiritually led by those who are accountable and called to steward the mysteries of the faith that they might grow in the wholeness of Christ. When disputes and questions arise, there is room for deliberation and a posture of submission, each to the other.<sup>47</sup> Catholicity is expressed in the midst of a genuine diversity with a posture toward unity. Unity does not seek to swallow up diversity, nor does diversity seek the status quo. Unity is sought through diversity. Presbyterianism’s connectional government ruled by a plurality of elders has unique ecclesiastical mechanisms in order to facilitate homegrown catholicity in the church. This polity is perhaps one of Presbyterianism’s richest treasures. It can offer other Christian traditions in pursuit of catholicity.

## Conclusion

“What is the proper pursuit of catholicity?” is a question each denomination must ask in the midst of its unique history and present challenges. If one were to examine the history of Presbyterianism in America, at least, he or she would be discouraged by the apparent splintering of this one denomination into many (“the split p’s”). There are, of course, many causes for division within various denominations in the modern world. Even among Presbyterians, there are positive reasons for existing denominational divisions.<sup>48</sup> More often than not, though, for confessional traditions like Presbyterianism, denominational splits occur not because the church is becoming more confessional. It is a liquidation of a confessional identity that washes away unity: “Building on a foundational commitment to the authority of Scripture, Calvin and the other Reformers tended to emphasize the core elements of the catholic faith. Creeds and confessions were of vital importance to Calvin. . . . Reformed churches

46. Horton, *People and Place*, 218 (emphasis his).

47. Kevin J. Vanhoozer commends this approach under the label of “strong denominationalism” in his *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 189-90.

48. One thinks of the conviction of Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA) to sing only Psalms in worship. Such a conviction naturally divides them from bodies with a differing conviction on singing in worship.

have always believed that doctrinal truth matters, and Christian unity is founded in the truth.”<sup>49</sup>

The WCF is a robust confession that has, for centuries, brought unity in the truth for Presbyterians throughout the world. With its firm foundation, Presbyterians have had a place to stand together and with others. Because the presbyterian confessional identity is built on the broader catholic tradition, there are deep-down roots common to Christian churches that can be identified in places like the Apostles’ and Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. These roots are likely not sufficient to bring full denominational alignment, but they are sufficiently sturdy in providing a discernable place to stand and talk and, perhaps, partner. As we think of catholicity, especially in terms of the extensive dimension of universality, Presbyterians should be ready and willing partners in gospel initiatives of prayer, evangelism, and mission. While a confession and creeds, such as Presbyterians hold dear, necessarily set limits,<sup>50</sup> they are not barriers but tools for pursuing authentic catholicity in the broader church.

If we are honest, though, the confession has served as a club used to clobber one another in churches, presbyteries, and general assemblies. And if it is used in such a way inside the Presbyterian church, particularly in America, it is likely to be used even more forcefully when facing other churches. Our practice of catholicity starts at home. Presbyterians would do well to scrutinize their native ethos as they seek to submit one to another as elders on local church sessions and in regional presbyteries. Their success at maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2) within these bodies will go a long way in shaping their capacity to pursue catholicity in the larger church. Perhaps the first step in this endeavor is to realize there is a measure of catholicity within a denomination that is both gift and calling. The confession can be seen as a uniting gift through which the church is called to maintain unity eagerly.

I close with what I consider, together with presbyterian polity, one of Presbyterianism’s choicest treasures in the pursuit of catholicity. As the broader church is regaining an appreciation for the intensive dimension of catholicity in pursuit of wholeness, there is an awareness that in the “religious life of the Christian, insofar as it is manifested in the church, an influence must proceed in every area of life, so that everything is Christianized in the noblest sense of the word.”<sup>51</sup> Catholicity can have no depth if the church only knows a Sunday religion.

49. S. Donald Fortson III, *The Presbyterian Story: Origins and Progress of a Reformed Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 207.

50. The limits of catholicity are defined by the internal and qualitative dimension: “The wholeness of catholicity . . . implies parameters of what constitutes truly Christian beliefs. Ancient catholicity has to do with the substance of our faith, as Augustine once cited in a sermon on the Trinity, ‘the true faith, the right faith, the catholic faith, which is not a bundle of opinions and prejudices . . . but founded on apostolic truth’ [Sermon 52.2].” D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 225-26.

51. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:23.

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WCF 21 is concerned with Christian worship and the Sabbath:

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the Gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calleth thereunto.<sup>52</sup>

This gives confessional modulation to the common saying that “all of life is worship.” The confession is more specifically saying that all of life should be permeated by worship. As it is, the depth of catholicity will increasingly permeate the Christian’s soul. In the presbyterian tradition, this daily worship is often aided by Scripture study as well as catechesis. The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms function as built-in ecclesial tools of discipleship based on the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. In other words, the catechisms provide for young and old regular training in Christian belief, practice, and ethics. Presbyterians would do well not to neglect these effective instruments of catholicity in the perfection of the saints.

52. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 259.



## Catholicity from a Baptist Perspective

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Baptists may not be the first group of Christians to come to mind when one thinks of catholicity. Often displaying an aversion to anything that bears the name catholic, Baptists also maintain a fierce commitment to local church autonomy and individual conscience that contributes to a largely individualistic sense of the Christian faith. This can be seen in folk aphorisms such as “When you get two Baptists together, you have three theological opinions.” While these tendencies of Baptist life and thought are notable, Karl Barth offers a reminder that “the church is catholic or it is not the church.”<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising, then, to find a growing collection of literature from some Baptist scholars that have sought to re-discover the church for Baptists, including its catholic nature.

A brief word about this article’s title is necessary. Anyone who has researched Baptists, or even spent much time among Baptists, has noticed that they are a diverse group of Christians. In the United States alone, there are more than thirty Baptist denominations. Some of the fault lines between groups are geographic, but others are caused by the intersection of a variety of theological streams (both old and new) flowing into Baptist life and thought.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it is very difficult for one Baptist to speak for all (or even most) Baptists. This article then presents *a* Baptist perspective, but not necessarily *the* Baptist perspective as another Baptist could certainly present an alternative. Beginning with a brief survey of Baptists’ place in discussions about catholicity, this article will describe several notable historical examples of Baptist affirmation of the concept. After detailing some major present challenges for a Baptist notion of visible catholicity, the remainder of the article will examine a significant contribution from Baptist theologian James William McClendon, Jr. It will be argued that McClendon’s approach, which will be called “radical catholicity,” is thoroughly grounded in Baptist life and thought and allows Baptists to move distinctly into a more catholic future.

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation: Part 1*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 702.

2. A similar recognition is at work in Curtis W. Freeman’s discussion of “Other Baptists” at the outset of *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), ix.

## **Can Baptists Have Catholicity?**

The term “catholic” is derived from the Greek *katholikē* (which was later translated in Latin as *catholica*). While often translated as “universal,” it is perhaps better rendered as “of the whole,” though even that definition will require some additional exploration. In the apostolic period, the word itself first appeared in Ignatius of Antioch’s Epistle to the Smyrneans, stating that “where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church” (8.2). The term is also used in several places in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, notably to refer to the whole church (1.1; 8.1; 19.2; 16.2), though it is also used to refer to the revered bishop’s position in the church. Avery Dulles argues that these earliest uses of the term are open to various interpretations, noting that a more defined sense of catholicity only emerges in the fourth century with Cyril of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

While the term “catholic” does not occur substantively in the New Testament, the idea behind it is certainly present. Acts 1:8 provides a thesis statement for what follows in that canonical book, but it also represents a spatial sense of catholicity when it states that the apostles will be “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NRSV). The Pauline literature similarly encourages the quest for catholicity. Ephesians urges that Christians “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” It continues, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (4:3-5). Paul chastises the church in Corinth for divisions, speaking of the church as a body, an organic and interrelated whole (1 Cor 1:10-13; 12:12-27). Colossians describes Christ as the head of that body (1:18). A link between scattered Christian communities is reflected in Paul’s encouragement to Gentile Christians in places like Corinth and Rome to contribute to an offering for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-27; 2 Cor 8:1-9:5)

Further, Jesus prays for his disciples before his betrayal: “Sanctify them in the truth” (John 17:17). He continues,

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

In this prayer, Jesus intercedes for the sake of all Christians, requesting that they all be one. The unity of the church is certainly present, but there is more. As a prayer

3. Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14. See Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18.23.

of Jesus, it stands as a prayer on behalf of all Christians, but it is also an invitation to all Christians to join in this prayer. To do so is to share in Jesus's prayer for the church as the church.

As part of the Free Church tradition, Baptists do not have many of the visible marks of catholicity that characterize other traditions. They usually do not have bishops that collectively represent local congregations to a larger ecclesial entity and represent the whole church to the local congregation.<sup>4</sup> Many Baptists offer the Eucharist (often called the "Lord's Supper") infrequently (such as monthly or quarterly), while other Christians celebrate communion every week, serving to accentuate the shared and translocal participation of the whole church in this sacramental action. Finally, Baptists are not as likely to recite any of the ancient creeds of the church in their worship services (for example, the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed). In other traditions, this practice extends beyond the local setting to include all worshipers who affirm the *regula fidei* embodied in the creed. That Baptists lack these (and other) features can lead to the conclusion that catholicity is not something valued in the Free Church tradition. As Miroslav Volf wonders after a similar survey, "A catholic Free Church is a contradiction in terms; it understands itself as free precisely with regard to those relationships that would tie it to the whole and thus make it catholic in the first place."<sup>5</sup>

Despite these concerns (both by and about Baptists), catholicity remains an important mark of the church, "One established by Christ and gathered by the Spirit."<sup>6</sup> Fifth-century monastic Vincent of Lérins underscored the significance of shared theological convictions to what is truly catholic, "That faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all" (*Commonitorium* 2.6). To be catholic is to see the Christian faith beyond one's self and to be tied to that faith. Thus, the catholic refers to that which extends beyond the individual congregation and individual believer. In this manner, Henri de Lubac describes it as "social in the deepest sense of the word."<sup>7</sup>

In contrast with the general impression of Baptists' aversion to catholicity, there are moments where Baptists have recognized the value of the church's catholic nature. Several Baptist confessions of faith offer this affirmation. For example, the General Baptist *Orthodox Creed* (1678 [article 29]) underscores the importance of catholicity: "There is only one holy catholick church, consisting of, or made up of

4. A distinct exception to this claim would be the Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia, who not only have bishops, but also a school of iconography. See Malkhaz Songulashvili, *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

5. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 260.

6. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 264-65.

7. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 15.

the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered in one body under Christ, the only head thereof, which church is gathered by special grace, and the powerful and internal work of the spirit, and are effectually united unto Christ their head, and can never fall away.”<sup>8</sup> In the next article of the confession, the church is described as extending beyond its local gatherings: “We believe the visible church of Christ on earth, is made up of several distinct congregations, which make up that one catholic church, or mystical body of Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, at the first Baptist World Congress (1905), Judge Willis, president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, offered welcome to the initial worldwide assembly of Baptists in part with these words, “We believe, and our fathers have believed, in the Holy Catholic Church. The Church of Rome is right in affirming that the Church of Christ is catholic. The catholicity of the Church is not, however, a doctrine of Rome: it is an essential consequence resulting from the principles on which Christ’s Church is founded.”<sup>10</sup> Later at the same Baptist World Congress, Alexander Maclaren, president of the Baptist World Alliance, called the gathering to make a display of catholicity: “I should like that there should be no misunderstanding . . . as to where we stand in the continuity of the historic Church. And I should like the first act of this Congress to be the audible and unanimous acknowledgement of our Faith.” What followed was a recitation of the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>11</sup> While this may have been quite moving and significant to those gathered in 1905, more importantly, it served as a sign to those watching that Baptists valued the catholic nature of the church.

Additionally, Baptists occasionally sing of the catholicity of the church in hymns such as “The Church’s One Foundation,” which could be seen echoing both Ephesians 4 and the words of Ignatius of Antioch:

The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation, by Spirit and the Word:  
From heav’n He came and sought her to be His holy bride,  
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.  
Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth,  
Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses, with every grace ended.<sup>12</sup>

8. William L. Lumpkin, ed., “Orthodox Creed, 1678,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 318.

9. Lumpkin, “Orthodox Creed,” 318-19.

10. J. H. Shakespeare, ed. *The Baptist World Congress, July 11-19, 1905, Authorised Record of Proceedings* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), 2-3.

11. Shakespeare, *Baptist World Congress*, 20. This act was repeated at the centennial Baptist World Congress in 2005.

12. Samuel J. Stone, “The Church’s One Foundation,” in Wesley L. Forbis, ed., *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), no. 350.

British Baptist Christopher Ellis points to hymnody among Baptists as both a catalyst for their embrace of catholicity as well as a sign of it. That Baptists join in signing their faith with other Christian communions (and occasionally by using the same songs) is significant, as is the source of these hymns. Since Baptist hymnbooks include many hymns and songs written by non-Baptists, the hymnbooks themselves represent a certain level of catholicity “through the resources of the wider Church being made available to a local congregation.”<sup>13</sup>

What emerges from these moments is that Baptists can embrace some sense of catholicity, despite their reticence to speak of it. Catholicity resides beneath the surface of their expressed faith, always present, yet never articulated. Moreover, this catholicity has a particular shape. Specifically, catholicity for these Baptists refers to the church’s invisible unity, as the Particular Baptists’ *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677 [chapter 26]) states: “The Catholick or universal Church, which (with respect to internal work of the Spirit, and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the Elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis on invisible unity is important for the sake of catholicity, reminding Christian groups that it can still abide imperfectly despite divisions. However, invisible unity is simply insufficient in light of the scriptural material mentioned earlier. To be sure, there is an eschatological aspect to this sense of catholicity, anticipating full visible unity only at the consummation of the reign of God. Nonetheless, claims of invisible unity leave too much of the present life of the church in an “uncatholic” state, prompting the question: does not this eschatological telos make particular claims on the church in the present? To defer visible unity entirely to the future would seem to deny any relationship between the anticipated eschatological fulfillment and our present situation. Can Baptists claim (and participate in) a more visible sense of the church’s catholicity?

### **Challenges to Visible Catholicity**

Before proceeding to answer the previous question, it is necessary to address two major challenges to the Baptist pursuit of catholicity, whether visible or invisible. First is the fragmented nature of Baptist life. Baptists have been dividing almost since their arrival on the ecclesial landscape in the seventeenth century. Occasionally, some Baptists describe the parting between John Smyth and Thomas Helwys (before Helwys and his congregation returned to England from Amsterdam) as the first

13. Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 158.

14. Lumpkin, “Second London Confession,” 285.

Baptist church split.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, many Baptist denominational groups have a prior (and often painful) rift woven into their history. This was evident when the Southern Baptist Convention broke with the rest of the Triennial Convention in 1845. Based on disagreement with northern Baptists concerning whether slavery was biblically legitimate, a new denomination was born, and the separation between Northern and Southern Baptists remains today, even though both denominations now agree about what initially divided them. New Baptist groups have multiplied over the decades, with each one seeking to differentiate itself from others on the Baptist landscape.

In historical discussions of these developments, some observe a broad diversity of Christians that carry the name of Baptist. A spectrum of Baptist identity is constructed where many people disagree with one another, but they are all Baptists.<sup>16</sup> Here, Baptists represent a broad sense of freedom that has a wide embrace. Even if there is some truth to this description (and a diverse Baptist ecosystem does have its merits), questions remain about what binds these ostensibly disparate Baptist groups together. Because of this, more often than not, the plurality of Baptist groups should be viewed as a sign of deep divisions that do not move toward any sense of unity and, in fact, stand as obstacles to full catholicity. There are many reasons for this. For instance, the pain from previous conflicts (and the frequent description of one's own group over against another) is rarely addressed so that genuine reconciliation can come about.<sup>17</sup> Over time, the depth of the dispute can provoke later anger, or the drifting apart of the two groups can make reconnection difficult even when the original offense has been forgotten. This is compounded by regionalism between Baptist groups, which makes encounters with other Baptist groups infrequent and awkward. For example, American Baptists are less likely to occupy the same space as Southern Baptists or Cooperative Baptists. As a result, even when Baptist groups

15. W. Glenn Jonas, *The Baptist River: Essays on Many Tributaries of a Diverse Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 6

16. See, for example, Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 3. Jonas describes the central Baptist characteristic as "diversity-through-dissent." See *Baptist River*, 3.

17. An example of this is the 1995 resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention where the SBC apologized for condoning racism and slavery. See "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," available at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention>. While this act is very significant, it is worth mentioning that there has been no resolution related to working together with the inheritors of the Northern Baptist heritage, the American Baptist Churches USA, from whom Southern Baptists separated because of slavery.

By contrast, after the Second Vatican Council, the official removal of mutual anathemas by Roman Catholics and the Orthodox (which had stood since 1054) opened up new possibilities for formal conversations and reconciliation, a process which has slowly taken place since 1965.

do encounter one another, they usually do so with caution and even suspicion, even when there is much that they hold in common.<sup>18</sup>

This fragmentation is fed and exacerbated by the growing individualism of contemporary Western culture that surrounds and even influences many Baptists. While this is concerning to some Baptists, many simply embrace it as part of the Christian faith. Faith convictions are privatized or spiritualized as interior beliefs unaffected by political or economic circumstances. Worship becomes about personal preferences, which almost always concern style rather than substance. The Bible is even read in a manner that underwrites this emphasis on the individual's need for personal assistance. The result is that there is very little sense that one participates in a social body that is larger than oneself. Instead, one's private relationship with God is the *summum bonum* of Christian existence. The Christian faith is "Jesus and me" (JAM), with no room for the church. In fact, American Baptist Winthrop Hudson described these circumstances as making "every[one's] hat [their] own church."<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult, if not impossible, to pursue catholicity when drinking deeply from the well of this fragmentation and individualization. The church becomes, at best, an aggregate of individuals rather than a cohesive whole, and any social linkage between persons is tenuous and constantly threatened by new rifts and dissent. At worst, it promotes a desire for uniformity—as seen in certain fundamentalist tendencies—that continually reduces the community of faith to a minuscule remnant of the whole. One distinct Baptist conviction—local church autonomy—becomes the seed of mistrust within any cooperative endeavor, often fostering nothing more than cautious collaboration. What emerges is that Baptists become prototypical examples of what Curtis Freeman calls "the teleology of progressive fissiparation from catholicity to sectarianism."<sup>20</sup> This ecclesial fragmentation can theologically blind Baptists to the social dynamics of sin. Writing about Maximus the Confessor, Henri de Lubac describes original sin as "a separation, a breaking up, an individualization it might be called."<sup>21</sup> Consequently, a "humanity which ought to constitute a harmonious whole . . . is turned into a multitude of individuals, as numerous as the sands of the seashore."<sup>22</sup> What Maximus identified as a sin hence becomes a source of pride for many Baptists.

Second, Baptists have a history of setting themselves over against other Christians. In many ways, early twentieth-century Baptist ecumenism consisted of

18. This is seen often in mission and church planting efforts, where one Baptist group overlooks the presence of another in a given area or holds suspicions about the possibilities of collaboration. A recent exception to this trend occurred in 2007, when the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the American Baptist Churches USA held a joint annual gathering in Washington, DC. At that meeting, they also jointly appointed missionaries.

19. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 142.

20. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 10.

21. de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 33.

22. de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 33-34.

converting the world to be Baptist. In his *Axioms of Religion* (1908), E. Y. Mullins offers a severe critique of Catholicism, but he also extends that criticism to other Christian communions if they resemble the Catholic Church in any way (especially regarding infant baptism or episcopacy).<sup>23</sup> George W. Truett, after stating that the “Baptist message and the Roman Catholic message are the very antipodes of each other,” describes the Reformation as “an arrested development,” incomplete because it retained too many of the errors of Catholicism.<sup>24</sup> Catholicity of any sort is hard to cultivate when the rest of the whole church is described in these terms.

Much of this opposition to ecumenism—like the divisiveness mentioned above—is founded on a Baptist principle of dissent. Dissent, many Baptists declare, stands as a good to be invoked as much as possible. Part of this use of dissent is to argue that Baptists are necessary pieces of the historical picture of Christianity. That is, if Baptists did not exist, the Christian world would lack the convictions that only Baptists could offer. In this mode, dissent contributes to a forgetfulness of the larger Christian tradition in which Baptists participate and from which Baptists have received many gifts. Instead of this approach, Steven Harmon writes that dissent should be viewed as “an ecclesial practice necessitated by the current failures of the church to embody the unity that is an essential mark of the church.”<sup>25</sup> To dissent may be necessary, but it is a tragic necessity.

In the end, Baptist catholicity must have a twofold method if it is to overcome these challenges. First, a Baptist catholicity inside Baptist life is required. This would address the present fragmentation of Baptists and seek to draw Baptists of all stripes to a greater sense of unity in the midst of considerable diversity. While some existing dividing lines might be erased, others might at least be reconsidered in light of further reflection. Second, a Baptist catholicity outside Baptist life is needed, one that embraces non-Baptist Christians as part of the body of Christ. Here Baptist catholicity would not be set against other forms of catholicity. Instead, Baptist catholicity would be seen as a path toward greater ecumenical convergence while still articulating the differences that remain between Baptists and non-Baptists.

### **A Path Forward**

In light of these challenges, Baptist catholicity will need to take a particular shape. Theologians often distinguish between quantitative catholicity and qualitative catholicity. While both have visible unity as their aim, they account for this goal in

23. E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1908), 63-65.

24. George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” in *God’s Call to America and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions* (New York: George H. Doran, 1923), 36, 48.

25. Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 50.

distinct ways. Miroslav Volf describes quantitative catholicity as an extensive sense of the term, focusing either on geographic expansion of the church or the universality of belief.<sup>26</sup> Avery Dulles writes that this aspect of catholicity is “opposed to schism, sectarianism, and whatever would tend to confine or isolate Christians in a closed, particularist group.”<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Volf notes that qualitative catholicity is intensive, attending to the fullness of faith in the church, despite its geographical spread.<sup>28</sup> After all, the church was “already Catholic on the morning of Pentecost, when all her members could be contained in a small room.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, while quantitative catholicity is an important measure, it should not eclipse qualitative catholicity.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, James William McClendon, Jr. discusses three senses of catholicity emerging from the history of the church, each distinguished by its own subscript indicator. First is what he calls “catholic<sub>p</sub>,” where “some Christian network, perhaps venerable but perhaps newfangled, declares that its unity is the *true* Christian unity.”<sup>31</sup> McClendon points out that this form of catholicity has taken various forms, such as in Landmark Baptists.<sup>32</sup> Regardless, the emphasis for catholic<sub>p</sub> is the “claim of one particular *party* to be in itself all-inclusive.”<sup>33</sup> He then argues that “Catholic<sub>u</sub>” is “authentic Christian existence *fully extended* in space and time.”<sup>34</sup> This form of catholicity, according to McClendon, is less an approach and more “the expression of a hope or faith,” a goal that is pursued through various means. As such, he sees catholic<sub>u</sub> represented by much of the modern ecumenical movement.<sup>35</sup> Finally, McClendon labels the third sense “catholic<sub>a</sub>,” which is a corporate wholeness of character that is authentically Christian. In other words, congregations, local churches, Christian groups all “seek to embody the completeness that is found in Christ Jesus and in his true saints ancient and modern.”<sup>36</sup>

Several observations must be made about these distinctions. First, each sense of catholicity is related to Christian identity; that is, what it means to be catholic is bound

26. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 265-66.

27. Dulles, *Catholicity of the Church*, 68.

28. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 266.

29. de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 49. See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 265. Dulles, in *Catholicity of the Church*, adds, “Even if there were only one true Christian in the world, that individual would be Catholic in the qualitative sense” (68).

30. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 266.

31. James W. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 335.

32. Holding that a particular type of local Baptist congregation (closed communion, rejection of other non-Baptist churches) is linked historically by a “trail of blood” to true Christianity, Landmark Baptists stand as a quintessential example of catholic<sub>p</sub>.

33. McClendon, *Witness*, 335.

34. McClendon, *Witness*, 335.

35. McClendon, *Witness*, 336.

36. McClendon, *Witness*, 336.

up with what it means to be Christian.<sup>37</sup> Catholic<sub>p</sub> grounds this identity in membership within a particular Christian communion. Catholic<sub>u</sub> sees this in participation in the worldwide Christian movement, and Catholic<sub>a</sub> centers on the embodiment of Christ by the corporate people of God. Second, while catholic<sub>u</sub> is a goal that all Christians share, the path to this goal is often unclear, producing multiple perspectives and historical examples for how to achieve this sort of unity. McClendon acknowledges that John Henry Newman sought catholic<sub>u</sub> through catholic<sub>p</sub>-style catholicity by seeing his quest for catholicity fulfilled in his conversion to the Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup> With deference to Newman, McClendon argues that this is not the best pathway to Christian unity. Instead, he proposes that catholic<sub>a</sub> catholicity, which centers on the whole church as embodied in faithful Christian witness, offers a superior alternative. McClendon recognizes that catholic<sub>a</sub> catholicity is the oldest sense of “catholic,” though it is also manifested throughout the history of the church. As such, the emphasis of this approach on a gathered church that embodies the authentic character of Christ can encompass a wide diversity of communities. According to McClendon, all Christians who call the church to the root (that is, *radix*) of faithful Christian living share in the baptist vision. As a result, Curtis Freeman rightly describes McClendon’s proposal as “radical catholicity.”<sup>39</sup> For his part, McClendon states that this is a “baptist path to (catholic<sub>u</sub>) Christian unity.”<sup>40</sup>

McClendon’s radical catholicity confronts the challenges mentioned previously. Since it is grounded in the embodied life of a particular community (the church), the community becomes more than simply a gathering of like-minded individuals. As a form of qualitative catholicity, it serves as a witness to the fullness of the Christian faith. This decenters the present emphasis on the individual and the fragmentation that results from it. In many ways, a more biblical sense of God’s relationship with human beings in the world emerges. As Barry Harvey notes, “According to the New Testament, the principal site of the Spirit’s activity is not the individual believer, but the gathered community of disciples who form a distinctive form of commonwealth in the world.”<sup>41</sup> The salvific work of Jesus is not privatized through redeeming individuals. Instead, it is catholic as it centers on the creation of a redeemed people that live corporately in opposition to the fragmentation encountered in original sin.

37. McClendon, *Witness*, 337.

38. McClendon, *Witness*, 336.

39. Curtis W. Freeman, introduction to *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Doctrine*, by James W. McClendon, Jr., rev. ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), xiii.

40. Freeman, introduction to *Doctrine*, 337. For McClendon, “baptist” refers a theological standpoint that emerges from the churches of the Radical Reformation, though the scope of “baptist” need not be restricted to only those communities. See James W. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Ethics*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 19, 33-34.

41. Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 251.

This radical catholicity also elevates tradition as important for Baptist practice and for the pursuit of catholicity. Baptist theologian Mark Medley, following the work of Yves Congar, argues that tradition is “the act of transmission (*traditio*), not just the content handed down (*tradita*).”<sup>42</sup> That is, tradition is the *what* of the Christian faith but also the *how* of passing the faith on. Because of this, tradition is an unavoidable facet of Christianity, and engaging the tradition includes more than simply receiving the deposit of faith. Instead, the practices of reception (Bible reading, praying together, and worshiping together) become crucial to inhabiting the tradition, even as they are constitutive parts of it. Thus, the community of faith is significant for sustaining those practices, which passes on their embedded convictions. As Medley writes, “Thinking about tradition not as ‘things handed over,’ but as ‘socially embodied, interwoven, enduring practices’ suggests that knowing a tradition is a learned, acquired rule-ordered skill.”<sup>43</sup> In short, the knowledge of the Christian faith, which is sometimes seen as the sum total of the catholic faith, is learned and discerned through communal practices embedded in the tradition itself. This insight is crucial for understanding radical catholicity as forming Christian identity through embodying the narrative of the Christian faith. Thus, the *tradita* remains significant, but it stands as “fundamentally the Christian story within which we understand our selves and our world.”<sup>44</sup>

As both *tradita* and *traditio*, tradition establishes a robust sense of continuity for Baptists allowing them to see themselves situated within the sweep of the historic Christian faith. To be sure, dissent remains, but as part of the communication of the tradition through time rather than as an antagonist to the tradition. As Richard Crane argues, dissent “is part of a communal process of seeking the voice of the Spirit in and through the voices of every member of the local community and through the witness of Christians through the ages.”<sup>45</sup> We can recognize that radical catholicity is contested, constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in light of various shifts within the ecclesial landscape. To pursue such catholicity requires engagement with the “Great Tradition” of the church—the church fathers and mothers who birthed, nurtured, and sustained the life and thought of the faith before Baptists arrived on the scene as well as conversations with those non-Baptist communions that have been caretakers of (and participants in) that tradition since the days of the apostles. Thus, as participants in this tradition, Baptists become “a pilgrim community of contested convictions within the church catholic.”<sup>46</sup>

42. Mark S. Medley, “Catholics, Baptists, and the Normativity of Tradition: A Review Essay,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 121.

43. Medley, “Catholics,” 122.

44. Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 187.

45. Richard Crane, “Explosive Devices and Rhetorical Strategies: Appreciation for Steven R. Harmon’s *Towards Baptist Catholicity*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 18, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 370.

46. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 257.

In the end, since radical catholicity is embodied in the witness of the people of God, it is a catholicity that is thoroughly Christological. The embodied witness of the church stands as the ecclesial body of Christ in the world. A catholicity centered Christologically allows us to revisit Ignatius's statement, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church" to observe a fresh dynamic there (*Smyrneans* 8.2). Instead of seeing the whole (or the "catholic") as a social organism or gathering of individuals, the whole church is recognized when the whole Christ is present in the embodied witness of the church.

### **Leaning into Radical Baptist Catholicity**

By pursuing a radical notion of Baptist catholicity, new opportunities emerge for Baptists to discern the whole Christ. These opportunities arise in three primary areas: a *ressourcement* of the Baptist tradition, greater openness to other Christian pilgrims, and a renewed sense of local catholicity.

Despite a tendency to emphasize the local congregation to the exclusion of the rest of the church, Baptists have embraced some sense of historical consciousness. Invocations of Baptist history are certainly used to rule out certain claims (for example, "Baptists have never been a creedal people") or support a particular sort of Baptist future (such as the Founders Ministries within the Southern Baptist Convention). As helpful as this sense of history is, it is often incomplete, lacking a broader sense of Baptist heritage and the ways in which the Baptist tradition is not a self-contained whole. It has emerged from other streams of the Reformation and even retains a great many convictions and even practices from before the Reformation.

Through the radical catholic lens, Baptists can resituate their heritage within the whole Christian tradition. That is, non-Baptist voices in the conversation stand as insiders rather than outsiders. Significant Baptist convictions, such as religious liberty, will not stand over against the rest of the tradition but serve as gifts for the whole church in pursuit of the whole Christ. For example, when the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) states that "the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ," Baptists will locate that within the whole tradition and recognize vestiges of patristic and medieval hermeneutics as well as the church's ancient rule of faith within the statement.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Baptists will learn more about themselves through this process, which will, in turn, contribute to the task of Baptist catholicity within Baptist life described above.

From this new recognition of organic connection with the tradition historically, a new sense of reform comes to the fore. This reform—known as *ressourcement*—involves returning to the sources of the Christian faith, but not with a view to re-pristiniate an old form of Christianity (for example, the so-called "New Testament

47. See Derek C. Hatch, *Thinking with the Church: Toward a Renewal of Baptist Theology* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 88-89; Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 130-31.

church”). In short, the goal is not restoration. Instead, *ressourcement*, as Kevin Hughes points out, “Is not in principle a nostalgic retreat to the theological safety of premodern Christendom. Rather, it is a vital struggle for the proper diagnosis of our present condition and for the proper *pharmakon* that will treat and heal what ails, not only the church but the global cultures which now suffer so many afflictions.”<sup>48</sup> This means revisiting the sources of the faith in order to better understand one’s current context and to move with faithfulness into the future. Because of the vicissitudes of the present moment, *ressourcement* is a task that must “be done and forever done again.”<sup>49</sup>

Fueled by this *ressourcement* impulse, radical catholicity places Baptists in closer engagement with pilgrims in neighboring Christian communions. This occurs via informal interactions at the local level as well as formal ecumenical dialogues. For the majority of Baptists, these happen at the international level through the work of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). In recent dialogues, catholicity has been an articulated point of convergence. In the report from the second dialogue with Roman Catholics (*The Word of God in the Life of the Church*), the joint commission stated,

The universal communion of the church of Jesus Christ may be aptly called ‘catholic.’ Catholicity, deriving from a Greek word meaning ‘wholeness’ or ‘inclusiveness’ is to be understood both as the fullness of God’s self-manifestation in Christ and as the final destination of the gospel message in reaching and transforming all people. Catholicity is thus not a static possession of the church but is actively sought in the mission of evangelization, which aims at the proclamation and reception of the fullness of the gospel throughout time and space.<sup>50</sup>

Later in the report, catholicity is mentioned again, with particular emphasis on the vocation it places on the present church:

Catholicity—understood as wholeness, universality, and inclusivity—implies an openness to the needs and gifts of the world and the expectation that all people are called to participate in the new creation brought about by Jesus Christ and the Spirit. . . . Scripture is read and used in the light of this vision, so that in interpreting scripture it is important to know how churches in different parts of the world and in a variety of social, cultural and political circumstances hear the Word of God addressed to them.<sup>51</sup>

48. Kevin L. Hughes, “The *Ratio Dei* and the Ambiguities of History,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (October 2005), 645.

49. Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon, Sadie Kreilkamp, and Ernest Beaumont (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 58.

50. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance* (2006-2010), §<sup>v</sup>9, <https://bwanaet.org/images/pdf/baptist-catholic-dialogue.pdf>.

51. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §52.

Similarly, in conversations with the World Methodist Council, catholicity was an explicit theme, one seen as expressed through the missionary calling of all Christians, the preaching of Word of God, and the celebration of the sacraments and (or) ordinances.<sup>52</sup>

This commitment to ecumenical engagement concerns more than speaking about the theme of catholicity. It creates space for new discoveries of convergence. For example, in *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, the commission states that their conversations discovered two significant insights. First, Baptists and Catholics were not as opposed to the importance of scripture and tradition to the life of the church: “There is a certain ‘coinherence’ of Scripture and living tradition, in the sense of a mutual indwelling and interweaving of one in the other. They should not be considered as two separate and unrelated sources, but as two streams flowing together which issue from the same source, the self-revelation of the triune God in Christ.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, by linking radical catholicity, where the whole Christ is recognized, to the Scriptures, which themselves witness to Christ, the Christological convergence between Scripture and tradition (as lived out and embodied in the community of faith) is made possible. Second, through some attention to the theme of *koinonia*, the commission recognized a convergence between Baptist covenantal ecclesiology and Catholic communion ecclesiology. Thus, even though differences between the two communions remain, the report stated, “While the phrase ‘communion ecclesiology’ is relatively recent, and is more frequently used by Catholic theologians than by Baptist ones, we both recognize it as expressing the heart of the nature of the church.”<sup>54</sup> These insights are possible because of a radical and expansive sense of catholicity that makes space for fellowship and convergence with fellow Christian pilgrims.

Finally, radical catholicity creates new opportunities for Baptists to claim a renewed sense of locality, but not one set over against the catholic. In *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the recent convergence text from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, we find stated, “The communion of local churches is . . . not an optional extra.”<sup>55</sup> This is instructive with Baptists, especially when locality has fueled the fragmentation described above. Nonetheless, the Baptist gift of locality must not be eclipsed by the catholic. As John Inscore

52. Baptist World Alliance and World Methodist Council, *Faith Working Through Love: Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council* (2018), §§9, 40-41, <https://bwanet.org/images/MEJ/Final-Report-of-the-International-Dialogue-between-BWA-and-WMC.pdf>.

53. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §58.

54. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §11. Later, the report states, “The *koinonia* of the church may also be understood as a ‘covenant community’ although this language is less familiar to Catholics than to Baptists” (§16). For more on *koinonia* in recent ecumenical engagement (including among Baptists), see Derek C. Hatch, “*Koinonia* as Ecumenical Opening for Baptists,” *Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 1-2 (January-April 2019), 175-88.

55. World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper No. 214; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §31.

Essick and Mark Medley note, “The two belong to one another, each rendering the other intelligible.”<sup>56</sup> A radical sense of catholicity can hold both together so that both may fully and mutually flourish.

Essick and Medley define locality as “the place where Jesus is.”<sup>57</sup> This echoes the Ignatian description of catholicity, placing locality and catholicity in a dynamic relation. Catholicity cannot be the sum total of the various local parts, each contributing a piece to the whole church. Instead, each local church is the catholic church, even as each church is not the full extent of the church.<sup>58</sup> With this sense of the local, there is a necessary visibility to catholicity. Therefore, on the one hand, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* stated, “Catholicity is expressed when the message of Christ is proclaimed in a wide variety of languages and thought-forms when the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper is celebrated by peoples of many cultures, races, and nations, and when ministry enjoys and serves communion both locally and at wider regional and world-wide levels.”<sup>59</sup> However, on the other hand, it also declared, “Local churches must be in visible and not only spiritual communion with each other, or else communion will lack fullness.”<sup>60</sup> Through the lens of radical catholicity, Essick and Medley offer a similar summary of this visibility:

Through active and patient listening to the beautiful complexity and diversity of the Christian tradition across space and time, a local congregation learns of the church’s catholic nature. The stories of the saints as well as of the prophetic witness of churches and congregations, past and present, which perform the politics of Jesus, offer, in the hope of the Spirit, compelling depictions of Christian faith that enable Christians to make intellectual and volitional choices about what roles to take up in society.<sup>61</sup>

These “compelling depictions of Christian faith” bear witness to the fullness of Christ to the world in a visible fashion and draw the church in closer communion with one another and with the Triune God.

## Conclusion

All churches, especially Baptist churches, must embrace catholicity. The emphasis on wholeness helps Baptists avoid the hazards of their own theological convictions (such as individualism and privatization). However, this catholicity is more than a

56. John Inscore Essick and Mark S. Medley, “Local Catholicity: The Bodies and Places Where Jesus is (Found),” *Review and Expositor* 112, no. 1 (2015), 51.

57. Essick and Medley, “Local Catholicity,” 58. They borrow this language from Rowan Williams.

58. See World Council of Churches, *The Church*, §31; Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §15.

59. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §30.

60. Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, *Word of God*, §23.

61. Essick and Medley, “Local Catholicity,” 50.

mere sense of the universal church beyond the local. Instead, in light of the insights of radical catholicity, the whole Christ is embodied in the life of the church, permeating the local yet also extending to the translocal. Invisible catholicity, then, is clearly inadequate as it still retains a visibly fractured Christ. To truly seek catholicity requires visible union, or at least efforts in this direction. In short, like the dry bones in Ezekiel 37, the church must be re-membered—put back together in a visible manner. Grounded in the practice of the Eucharist, which Henri de Lubac describes as the sacrament of ecclesial unity, a greater sense of the catholic comes to the fore.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, what emerges in the sharing of the bread and the cup is both the goal of catholicity and its present task. As 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 reminds us that we are one body as we share in the one loaf and the one cup, so Steven Harmon states that catholicity is a “qualitative fullness of faith and order that is visibly expressed in one Eucharistic fellowship.”<sup>63</sup> Baptists must lean into this radical sense of catholicity. As they do, they will not only find fellow Christian pilgrims; they will also find themselves as they journey with Baptists and non-Baptists to bear witness to the fullness of the church catholic.

62. de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 89.

63. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, 204.

## **“We Have Come to Fullness”: Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity**

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At least at first glance, given what many consider essential to the movement, it would be impossible to craft an authentically Pentecostal account of catholicity. But what follows is an attempt to do just that. First, I briefly sketch the sectarianism that has haunted Pentecostalism from the beginning, explaining why Pentecostals should reject it and how they can do that without disavowing the best of their own tradition. Then, in the remainder of the essay, I lay out a theology of catholicity that is recognizably Pentecostal and catholic, true to both Azusa Street and Nicaea, beginning with the claim that belief in the church’s catholicity is nothing less than a confession that the church shares in the fullness of God’s nature, the fullness of which is the hope of all creation. I argue that catholicity is best understood as a summons toward that fullness and that it is not merely to be hoped for. Sometimes, in moments of faithfulness, catholicity breaks through into worldly experience, primarily because of the faithfulness of holy women and men who lead the church in repentance, usually during deeply troubled times. Whenever it does break through, this catholicity is seen in the lives of the faithful as inherently cruciform and missional, a self-denying sharing in the lives of those who seem abandoned by God. In conclusion, I argue that the Pentecostal experience of speaking in tongues bears a unique witness to catholicity as communion with an infinite God, and suggest that this means Christian belief and practice must resist institutionalism and fundamentalism of all kinds.

### **Beyond Sectarianism**

As a rule, Pentecostals, at least those in the classical traditions, have given little thought to the doctrine of catholicity. In fact, given their restorationist concerns and ambitions, it is perhaps closer to the truth to say that they have been opposed to it. Early Pentecostals argued their “latter rain” experience of the Spirit set them apart from other Christians who, due either to ignorance or infidelity, had not (yet?) received the promise of the Father. They believed that because they had been baptized in the Spirit, they enjoyed a fullness of revelation unknown since the apostolic times reported in Acts.

This belief becomes clear, for example, in J. H. King's introduction to G. F. Taylor's *The Spirit and the Bride*. King, then the presiding bishop of the Pentecostal Holiness Church and a leading theological figure in the wider movement, insists that, since divine revelation had been given share by share over a long stretch of time, the truth of the "full gospel" was necessarily "progressive in its unfoldment."<sup>1</sup> He continues:

This progressive discovery of the meaning of truth, as we approach the ultimate completeness, implies limitation individually and dispensationally. No literature belonging to any particular epoch of the Christian Church bears the stamp of perfection. Revealed truth peculiar to each dispensation may to its adherents embrace all there is of truth, and thus present completeness in scope, but subsequent discoveries prove this to be a serious, as well as injurious, mistake.<sup>2</sup>

In King's account of the history of revelation, the Reformers, and especially Luther, had rediscovered long-forgotten truths, as, in their turn, had John and Charles Wesley and, following them, the Wesleyan holiness movements. Each of these epochs, King says, "Produced a vast volume of literature, presenting truth beyond the range of former discoveries," but, in spite of claims to completeness, they nonetheless remained imperfect. King concludes these teachings—in particular, the teachings about justification by faith alone and entire sanctification—brought good-faith believers "into the vestibule of Pentecostal power and fullness, and not into its possession." But Pentecostals do possess the Pentecostal fullness, and so would produce new literature "leading the people out into larger fields of truth, which [would] enrich and empower the soul for better service."<sup>3</sup>

Now, King's restorationist vision is sure to strike most of us as undeniably sectarian and elitist, at least insofar as we are ecumenically minded. And inasmuch as Pentecostals hold to it or one like it, it will prove difficult if not impossible to affirm the Nicene doctrine of catholicity. Of course, not all Pentecostals feel the need to affirm that doctrine. Steve Land, in his seminal *Pentecostal Spirituality*,

1. J. H. King, introduction to *The Spirit and the Bride: a Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestations, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relation to the Bride with Special Reference to the "Latter Rain" Revival*, by G. F. Taylor (Falcon, NC: Falcon Publishing Company, 1907), 7. There were, to be sure, early Pentecostals who criticized the sectarianism and elitism, perhaps most notably, William Hamner Piper, pastor of the Stone Church in Chicago and editor of *The Latter Rain Evangel* periodical. Piper, for example, in one editorial, castigates those who claim a greater revelation than that known by other Christians: "These fellows go into cities or assembles and split everything up with some great revelation they have just gotten from heaven, so they claim; they are far superior to the universally acknowledged leaders of the past. Before their greatness, Luther's divinely inspired message on justification and Wesley's on sanctification pale into insignificance. May God give His people some sanctified common sense and save them from these ravenous and theological wolves." Against these sectarians and elitists, Piper insists, "There are no differences on the great fundamentals of the Gospel among God's people, Pentecostal or otherwise." Piper, "The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace," *Latter Rain Evangel*, June 1911, 15.

2. Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 7.

3. Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 8.

Chris E. W. Green: *“We Have Come to Fullness”*: *Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity* acknowledges that Pentecostals have often been accused of sectarianism and elitism, but he is unapologetic in his response. “When the bored, cynical, and unfruitful [Christians] become renewed, joyful, and fruitful, does that make them elitist?” Surely not, he says. Pentecostals are not claiming a superior understanding of Scripture or greater spiritual maturity, even if they are rejoicing in a distinctive experience of the Spirit. Land maintains they would be elitist and sectarian only if they claimed that all Christians must have the same experience they have had, and in the same way.<sup>4</sup> In the final analysis, then, Land holds that most Pentecostals simply want to carry on living the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life: “When the disinherited and powerless who have become enfranchised and enabled by the gospel in the power of the Spirit hear from non-Pentecostals that they are elitist for teaching a subsequent work of grace, they gladly reply, ‘Yes, of course!’ or simply, ‘Hallelujah!’”<sup>5</sup>

Whatever its virtues as an apologetic, Land’s explanation fails to account for the fact that at least some Pentecostals have claimed a deeper understanding of the truth and higher spiritual maturity. Some Pentecostals do suggest that they are superior to other Christians, not least in their accounts of the ecclesial tradition that by and large describes the church’s past as a history of overwhelmingly anemic spirituality and a mostly failed witness.

On this front, Macchia comes nearer to the truth, I believe. Pentecostals are not wrong, he says, to respond to the call to revival, to pursue “the deeper things of God.” Rightly understood, “There is no necessary contradiction between saying that Christ is all sufficient for the Christian life and maintaining that believers are to seek a greater ‘fullness’ of the Spirit’s working through us from and in Christ.” But elitism and sectarianism—to say nothing of schismaticism—simply have no place in Christian thought or practice and must be rejected in no uncertain terms.<sup>6</sup>

### **Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity**

All that to say, I am convinced Pentecostals need to affirm catholicity; otherwise, God’s faithfulness to his people and to the world is called into question. What it is more, sectarianism frustrates the desire of Christ for all believers to be one (John 17). The question is, can we affirm catholicity in a way that is true both to our own experience and to the Christian tradition? The answer, I believe, is yes. Arguably, it has already been done. Amos Yong, following Yves Congar, contends that it is the Holy Spirit who affords universality to the church, empowering the whole church in the wholeness of charismatic ministry to proclaim the whole counsel of God to the

4. Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 215.

5. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 216.

6. Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 113.

whole world in anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment.<sup>7</sup> Andy Lord draws on Yong's work, but he ultimately takes a different approach. He attempts to articulate a dynamic account of catholicity, one that emphasizes unity-in-diversity and the need to move toward unity via a partnership in mission.<sup>8</sup> Simon Chan is wary of universalizing concepts because catholicity, he argues, has to do primarily with "the wholeness of the *local* congregation that gathers together to share the one loaf regardless of race, culture or sex."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a local congregation that fails to break free from its ethnocentrism fails utterly to witness to the gospel.<sup>10</sup>

Other examples could be given but suffice to say that I agree with much of what these scholars have said, and my own account develops largely parallel with theirs. So, what follows is an attempt to offer a theology of catholicity that is recognizably Pentecostal and catholic, true to both Azusa Street and Nicaea.

First, I would argue that the church's catholicity is not mere universality,<sup>11</sup> still less a synonym for orthodoxy, ideas which reduce the doctrine to triviality,<sup>11</sup> but an actual, mystical at-one-ment with Christ, and just in this way a share in God's own nature, received, again and again, by the community in its many members from the fulfilling fullness of the fulfilling God (Jn 1:16).<sup>12</sup> Catholicity—like oneness, holiness, and apostolicity, the other "marks" of the church—describes the church only because it is a description of Christ, who is the revelation of God: "The church is one in Jesus and holy in Jesus; the church is catholic in Jesus and it is sent in mission in Jesus."<sup>13</sup>

Speaking of the church, it is an ongoing event, a strange occurrence (like the birth of a child or the burning of a house) in which we are all intimately, mutually involved. Although it is difficult for us to conceptualize, God acts on the community as such, on what St. Paul calls the "whole structure." And just so, it is the church, and not the Christian, who "grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21). In other words, the Christian is Christ's precisely in the sense that she lives, moves, and has her being in the event that is the church's entanglement with Christ in his relation to the Father, an intimacy so entire that we are identical with him. "We, who are many,

7. Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 143.

8. Andy Lord, *Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology Shaped by Mission* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 129.

9. Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 102. Emphasis added.

10. This concern leads Chan to underscore the pathbreaking work of William Seymour at the Azusa Street Mission, who sought to establish a fully integrated church-community.

11. Rowan Williams, "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church," (Address to the Third Global South to South Encounter, Ain al Sukhna, Egypt, October, 2005), para. 26, <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1675/one-holy-catholic-and-apostolic-church>.

12. And so, aspiring to catholicity entails a desire to see all believers belonging to one community, a readiness to receive and pass on the wisdom of the church, and to take responsibility for her past failures, doing all that can be done to set them right.

13. Williams, "Holy Catholic," para. 35.

Chris E. W. Green: *“We Have Come to Fullness”*: *Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity* are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another” (1 Cor 12:5). If we are careful, we can even say that God acts *as* the church and not only through or with her.

Second, the church’s teachings and other institutions, as well as the church’s ministries, are faithful just to the extent that they bear witness to and call forth this fullness-in-identity, this share in God’s own life. As John Meyendorff echoes, “The ‘catholic’ Church [is] that Christian assembly which [has] accepted the whole of the divine presence in Christ, the whole truth, the fullness of life, and [has] assumed a mission directed at the salvation of the whole of God’s creation.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, we can speak of this or that dimension of ecclesial life as catholic only insofar as it is Christ-like in the sense that it brings the goodness of God to bear in the world for the good of each and all.

Third, this fullness of life, this wholeness, is by its very nature—the nature of an infinitely gracious, endlessly generative God!—never the community’s possession but always entirely a gift.<sup>15</sup> Never owned, it is truly given—and received. At no point is God under the church’s control. But at every point, God works within and with the community so that whatever is said and done faithfully in Christ’s name is said and done in the power of Christ’s Spirit. As the church “hold[s] fast to the head,” it grows with a growth from God (Col 2:19). As it abides in the vine, it does the very works of God (Jn 15:5).

Fourth, catholicity is best understood as a calling, a summons toward what the Father has prepared for and promises to give to his children—transfiguration into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29)—but is never fully achieved. It is always only a gift, as previously elaborated. But because it is the gift of the God who is love, given to us in and for our freedom, it is given so that it can be desired, pursued, and entered into. The gathered people of God are Christ’s body, “The fullness of him who fills all in all,” but just for that reason, they can and must “grow up in every way into him who is the head” (Eph 4:15).

Fifth, because God is faithful, and the church—at times, on some fronts—is faithful too, catholicity can and does sometimes break through into our this-worldly experience; it emerges or manifests in history so that it can be seen and heard. Jesus did not only pray that the church would be one in him and in the Father, one with each other and with God, but also that they would be one “so that the world may know” (Jn 17:20). Christ desires that the church’s catholicity, which is inseparable from its unity, can be witnessed, experienced, and known. And the Father promises to fulfill all Christ’s desires.

14. John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 7.

15. So Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225. He writes, “Talk of the church ‘possessing’ all grace and virtues in ‘fullness’ is problematic and can lead to assumptions that support a realized eschatology and an idolatrous identification of the church with Christ as the King or the Spirit as the kingdom.”

In Acts, the church is seen and heard as the people of God just as it gives witness to what they see and hear from God. Early in the story, the apostles in Jerusalem maintain, in the face of the threat of persecution, that they “cannot keep from speaking about we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). And, at the turning point of the story, Ananias prophesies to the recently-called and converted and about-to-be-baptized Paul: “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15).

This same motif emerges in Paul’s letters. Years after Ananias’s prophecy, perhaps as many as twenty years, Paul encourages the Philippians to “keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:9), echoing the advice he earlier had given the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). This idea comes through in Hebrews, as well, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). In fact, it is strictly as believers meditate on their leaders’ faithful way of life that they see the constancy of God: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). That is, Christ and his faithfulness to the church is seen and heard precisely in the shared life of the faithful, even—perhaps especially—in their unfaithfulness. Sorrow, repentance, restitution—these can be seen and heard. And so can the anguish that comes in the struggle to set our wrongs right.

We should be careful at this point. Macchia, for good reason, wants to avoid any confusion of the church and the kingdom, and so he emphasizes the “discrepancy between our essence in the Spirit and our actual existence as the church.”<sup>16</sup> He is not entirely wrong to say, “If we possessed fullness already, there would be no need to constantly be filled as an ongoing experience of renewal.”<sup>17</sup> But, as he himself acknowledges, renewal can and does happen. Yes, as he insists, catholicity is fully fulfilled only in the eschaton. However, even here and now, the people of God at times do live (and die) together in ways that speak promisingly of the coming kingdom. Early Pentecostals were wrong to believe the church had been unfaithful through most of its history, and we should not make the same mistake when we think about the church of the present and the future. We should not think either too highly or too lowly of ourselves; instead, we need a sober estimate (Rom 12:3), one that allows us to face reality without despair, naivety, or presumption.

The Scriptures make clear that the church’s visibility—the bodying forth of its oneness, apostolicity, holiness, catholicity—comes to focus in the lives of the church’s leaders (τῶν ἡγουμένων ὑμῶν), the successors to the apostles. For Pentecostals, at least, as a rule, this refers not to an ordained hierarchy but to any and all believers (laity or ordained) who speak the words of God and who do the works

16. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225.

17. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225.

Chris E. W. Green: *“We Have Come to Fullness”*: *Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity* of God.<sup>18</sup> Pentecostals, at least many of them, can agree that ordained ministers serve the community as living signs—sacraments—of God’s faithfulness. But they want to insist what matters most is that there are people (laity or ordained, well-educated or poorly trained, experienced or not) whose ministries are truly the work of the Spirit. Leaders in the church, then, are those who embody in small what is true of the church at large. They, in their maturity and faithfulness, do not stand above or outside the community; rather, they stand with and for it.

Sixth, and by implication of the former point, the church may sometimes prove faithful by following the way of life of these leaders in such a way that the fullness of God breaks into our lives. The rest of the time, catholicity is about remaining as faithful as we can be to those times in which fullness has broken through—above all, to the apostolic church as witnessed in the Scriptures—and so to the hope that another breakthrough is possible.

Pentecostals, including Pentecostal scholars, often focus on the New Testament, and Luke and Acts in particular, reading these texts too optimistically, or at least too one-sidedly. They sometimes focus on the faithful lives, the miracles, the growth of the congregations, and the mystical experiences to the neglect of the unfaithfulness and suffering that is also unabashedly described.<sup>19</sup> But the true witness to the apostolic church is given in the whole of Scripture, in the highs and lows, the light and the shadows. Therefore, it is important that we rediscover how, say, Numbers, rightly read—that is, read figurally—has as much to say about who the church is, has been, and shall be as does Luke and Acts.<sup>20</sup> The Laodicean community (Rev 3:14-22), even as it lives in the moment under judgment, is no less Christ’s—no less the church—than the Philadelphian community (Rev 3:7-13). Christ declares it plainly: he loves them both (Rev 3:9, 19), and in the end, because they are loved, just as we are, we need the Laodiceans and their story every bit as much as we need the Philadelphians and their story. Many Pentecostals, like “come outers” in other traditions, have tried to be Philadelphian by distancing themselves from the Laodiceans. But Scripture and the apostolic tradition make it clear that this grieves the Spirit, which is to say it does violence to the body, and to Christ himself.

I do not want to downplay how the church has been Philadelphian. But most of the time, far more often than not, the church has been Laodicean, falling out

18. Most Pentecostals, I think, would agree with John Webster’s view of ordination and ecclesial office: “apostolicity has less to do with transmission and more to do with identity or authenticity, with the ‘Christianness’ of the church’s teaching and mission. . . . ‘Authenticity’ cannot by its very nature be ‘transmitted,’ because it is not capable of being embodied without reside in ordered forms. Forms cannot guarantee authenticity, simply because forms are themselves not immune to the critical question of their own authenticity.” Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 208.

19. See Martin M. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

20. See my *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: Centre for Pentecostal Theology Press, 2014).

of step with the Spirit and failing to walk worthy of its calling. Even so, I remain convinced that we can learn to carry that failure honorably. Only a few of us will be saints, even if many of us can, from time to time, be saintly. But all of us can live with our unholiness in ways that testify to the patience and kindness of our God and our neighbors, including our neighbors of other faiths or no faith at all. In this way, the tax collector of Luke 18 is as important to us as is the Mother of God. We are called to say, "Let it be." But when we fail to say that, we can still say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" The church needs mercy. There is much that the church has done wrong, both to those outside its number beginning with the Jews, and to those inside, primarily "the least of these," the socially marginalized and neglected—namely, women and children, the abused, the disabled and mentally ill, the spiritually immature.

Seventh, therefore, catholicity is necessarily a cruciform and kenotic self-offering (which is not the same as self-negating). It is dedicated to caring for others. It is easy to say but nonetheless true that the church is most like Christ when she is concerned not for herself and her own fullness but for those she is bound and freed to serve. And that means catholicity is possible only where the church is committed to what Rowan Williams calls "catholic mission":

The whole human person is touched, healed, and transfigured by the Gospel and the catholic church is the church which is able to address every level of human being; heart, mind, and body. A church which promises healing for our material lives, which addresses poverty and disease, both in work and in prayer. A church which does not suppress, but nourishes and purifies the life of the mind. A church which touches our emotions and disciplines and sanctifies them. [At] every level, the whole person is transfigured.<sup>21</sup>

Catholicity is the outworking in our shared life of the nature and character of the God who was, is, and promises to be all in all. As such, catholicity is necessarily always and everywhere concerned with everyone and everything. The church is unified, holy, catholic, and apostolic precisely in the sense that it bodies forth the holiness of God for the common good, the good of communities beside the church, in anticipation of the future of creation with and in the one and at-one-ing God.

Some have suggested the church should exist "ahead of the world as the bearer of signs and promises."<sup>22</sup> But I suspect it is better to say that the church exists beside the world as a midwife, caring for the world as God labors to birth the world into the destiny he purposes for it. Moreover, as often as not, the church is behind the world, running to catch up. It is not without significance that a centurion is the one whose faith most impresses Jesus: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Luke 7:9). Again, at the cross, it is a centurion who acknowledges that Jesus

21. Williams, "Holy Catholic," para 27.

22. Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 54-55.

Chris E. W. Green: *“We Have Come to Fullness”*: *Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity* is indeed God’s Son (Luke 23:47), and not Peter or one of the other apostles. As in the Gospel, so in Acts; it is Roman soldiers, not the apostolic community, who run to Paul to save him from the angry mob outside the Temple (Acts 21). This is the lesson the Evangelist teaches us: sometimes, maybe even most of the time, “they” see and hear—and so, say and do—what “we” cannot.

Catholicity, as mentioned, sometimes breaks through in times of great suffering, not only during times of persecution and martyrdom, in which the church is forced into suffering by her enemies but also in times of personal and social trouble (as we see, for instance, in the systematic abuse of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, the protests in Hong Kong, the separation of families at the US border, the cartel wars in Mexico, or the ethnic conflicts in Kosovo), in which the church voluntarily enters into the suffering of others—the poor, the homeless, the sick, the abused, the dying, the godforsaken, the forgotten.

Whether suffering alone or with others, believers are tempted to take or offer false consolations, some of which even seem to work, at least for a few people for a little while. However, this false consolation inevitably confuses good with evil and evil with good. The church is catholic, however, just as it refuses all these false consolations, refuses to try to calm sufferers with half-truths about their moral responsibilities or the mysterious purposes of God, and instead simply remains with them as Rizpah remained with the bodies of her children, all the while holding out hope against all hope that God will do exactly what he has promised to do.

Therefore, we must not encourage a cult of suffering, either by making it seem (as so much contemporary theology does) that God suffers in himself or by making it seem that suffering itself is a sacrament. We have no right to romanticize death or dying, pain or loss, misery or tragedy. The catholic church suffers, no doubt, but she suffers not because suffering is good but because goodness refuses to let suffering keep her from helping those in need. We might say, then, that God wills us not to go through suffering but to go to the people who suffer.

Eighth, and finally, catholicity, precisely because it is communion with the infinite—an anticipation of the future God has prepared in Christ for creation, a future that comes as *eschaton*, as the transfiguration and fulfillment brought about in what Bulgakov calls the “cosmic Pentecost”<sup>23</sup>—requires the church to hold itself always open to the other and the stranger, the novel and innovative, the unexpected and inexplicable. A church that seeks to make the future merely conform to the past, that reduces it to a repetition of what has already happened, is not truly catholic. Because it is eschatological, the call to catholicity “should warn the church in history against demanding uniformity in any of its concrete forms of life, liturgy, and leadership.”<sup>24</sup> And for the same reason, the call to catholicity forbids any

23. See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 400.

24. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 54.

stifling rigidity about the charismatic life and mystical experience, as well as any fundamentalism about doctrines.

This message, in my judgment, Pentecostals and charismatics desperately need to hear, at least as much as those who deny or remain suspicious of the mystical and charismatic. Conversion, sanctification, baptism in the Spirit, calling, anointing—these and other similar experiences must never be routinized or reduced to predictability. All Christians are baptized in water, following the story of Christ, reenacting his obedience and receiving his communion with the Spirit. But life in the Spirit (the working out of the reality signified and effected in baptism in our lives) cannot be scripted or managed. The creation is not yet whole, and God is infinite, so, as early Pentecostal evangelist Elisabeth Sisson puts it, we must always be ready to “consecrate our consecration, [to] trust God to sanctify our sanctification.”<sup>25</sup> We have to be delivered from our experiences, so to speak, if they are to do the work in us that the Spirit intends them to do. And this is why Sisson says that prayer leads toward and into “isolation . . . muteness . . . [and] a blessed dumbness.”<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with Sisson’s reflections, the most recognizably Pentecostal sign of catholicity is perhaps speaking in tongues, both as *xenolalia*, “missionary language” supernaturally afforded, and as *glossolalia*, ecstatic utterance, the breaking down of language under the pressures of bringing to speech the unspeakable. The former, witnessed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), testifies to the church’s calling to and giftedness for all people, as well as the need to speak the native language of every person, every community. The latter, honored by Paul (Romans 8), testifies to the Spirit’s intercession on our behalf when we do not have the words or the heart to voice them, either to console others or to share ourselves. Only after we have come to blessed dumbness, only after we know that we do not know even how to speak to God, much less to others, are we able to hear what needs to be heard or say what needs to be said.

This blessed dumbness needs to come to expression not only in the day-to-day speech of believers but also in ecclesial orders and structures, leading us to turn away from the “idolatry of the institution,” which, Donald MacKinnon says, ends in abuses of all kinds. Young women and men are “mercilessly exploited,” their energies and talents consumed in ultimately needless service of the institution, exploitation which does “lasting spiritual damage” to them.<sup>27</sup> This abuse is deemed to be necessary by the establishment and powers. MacKinnon sees these powers personified in the character of Caiaphas, who, unlike Jesus, the good shepherd who leaves the many to save even one lost sheep, is willing to sacrifice this or that person for the continuity of the people. That is, these powers devote themselves to achieving security and

25. Sisson, “The Epaphras Spirit: A Strong Plea for Intercessors,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, March 1909, 3.

26. Sisson, “The Epaphras Spirit,” 3.

27. Donald MacKinnon, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Suffolk: Chaucer Press, 1969), 27.

Chris E. W. Green: *“We Have Come to Fullness”*: *Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity* stability at all costs, and just so set themselves radically against the Spirit of God, who interrupts, unsettles, and disquiets the people of God so that their lives are always being opened up, deep and wide as the mercy of God. Therefore, defending the establishment (that is, preferring the security of the institution to the lives of the people the institution exists to serve) is for MacKinnon the sign of apostasy.<sup>28</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that MacKinnon believes institutions—dogmatic, liturgical, and official—should, or even could, be done away with. And it does not mean that low church is inherently superior, less dangerous, or more promising than high church. Informality and extemporaneity are not somehow more fitting than formality and intention. The Spirit does not need for us to leave room for him, even if some of our neighbors do. God does not work in the gaps of our work. God works within our work. Therefore, these doctrines, these songs, these prayers, and these offices may be lived out in a manner that actually works well in the world, challenging and consoling the world with the hope of the gospel. This is the hope that God, in the end, will set all things perfectly right, filling everyone and everything with his fullness so they are finally fully themselves.

## Conclusion

In the preceding, I have argued that a Pentecostal theology of catholicity—one that remains true both to Nicaea and Azusa Street—is not only possible but also necessary. And I have suggested that such a theology regards catholicity as nothing less than a share in God’s own nature. As a result, belief in catholicity names the response to a summons toward ever fuller communion with God and with one another in God. But this should not be taken to mean that catholicity is kept only for the future. Sometimes, this fullness breaks through into worldly experience, often through the witness of courageous men and women who lead the church into faithfulness, and almost always in times of great suffering. Above all, and through all times and in all places, the church is called to be the community of the cross. Believers are to be conformed to the image of the crucified, identifying with those who suffer most because the world is not yet what it shall be when God is all in all. In this sense, catholicity is inherently missional, concerned not only with enjoying God but also with caring for everyone and everything that God has made. Finally, I have insisted that because catholicity is a share in the divine life, a reality signified by the charism of speaking in tongues, we must at all costs resist the abuses of institutionalism and too-rigid accounts of the spiritual life.

28. MacKinnon, *Stripping of the Altars*, 33.



# PART II

Baptism – A Gordian Knot for Catholicity?  
An Extended Dialogue Between Peter J. Leithart and R. Lucas Stamps



## Paedobaptism and Catholicity

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Though not a biblical term, “catholic” appears early in Christian history. The earliest uses give only tantalizing hints of the word’s meaning,<sup>1</sup> and the letter describing the martyrdom of Polycarp is the first to use “catholic” in the way that has since become standard, as a descriptor of the church’s universal extension in space. The letter is addressed not only to the congregation of Philomelium, but to “all the congregations of the Holy and Catholic Church in every place” (Mart. Pol. 0:1).<sup>2</sup> Just before Polycarp rides into the city on a donkey to be executed, he offers a prayer for “all that had at any time come in contact with him, both small and great, illustrious and obscure, as well as the whole catholic church throughout all the world” (8:1).<sup>3</sup> Like Jesus, Polycarp loves and prays for the entire company of disciples throughout the *oikoumene*, the imperial world. When one of the executioners stabs Polycarp, a dove flies out and the gushing blood extinguishes the fire. These miracles ensure that all who witness Polycarp’s martyrdom know they have seen the death of “an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic church” (16:2). After his death, the letter assures its readers Polycarp went to heaven to glorify the Father and the Son, who is the “Savior of our souls, the Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world” (19:2).<sup>4</sup>

Over the centuries, other meanings are extrapolated from that original geographic sense. All believers from Abel to the end of time, writes Gregory the Great, are members of the catholic church, a single church throughout all ages.<sup>5</sup> What

1. Writing to the church at Smyrna, Ignatius encourages the members to imitate Christ by following the bishop, as Jesus follows the example of the Father. Nothing ought to be done in the church without a bishop, he adds, including the Eucharist, which is to be administered “either by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it.” Baptisms and love feasts also require the presence of a bishop, whose approval is tantamount to God’s own approval. In sum, “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church” (*Epistle to the Smyrneans*, 8). For Ignatius, catholicity depends on the presence of Jesus; the catholic church is where Jesus is. But it is equally clear that the church cannot function, in Ignatius’s view, without an *episkopos*. The catholicity of the church is dependent on the authority of the bishop as a representative, perhaps even as a mediator, of Christ’s presence to the church. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of patristic texts are from [newadvent.org](http://newadvent.org).

2. “ταῖς κατὰ πάντα τόπον τῆς ἀγίας καὶ καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας παροικίας.” Greek text at [ceel.org/lake/fathers/martyrdom.htm](http://ceel.org/lake/fathers/martyrdom.htm).

3. “ἦς κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας.”

4. “ποιμένα τῆς κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας.”

5. *Forty gospel Homilies*, 19, quoted in *Lumen gentium*, 1.2 (available at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)).

the universal church declares to be true is catholic doctrine, and thus, “orthodox” and “catholic” become virtually synonymous in some contexts. The catholic faith meets the test of the Vincentian Canon: what has been taught everywhere, at all times, by everyone (*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*). As Thomas Oden notes, in response to heresy, the church began to use the term “catholic” to describe the “wholeness of received doctrine,” with “wholeness” defined as all that is necessary for salvation.<sup>6</sup>

The church is catholic also in its mission because it carries it out to all peoples and places. If we may be permitted terminology that is anachronistic in a patristic context, the catholic church is cross-culturally adaptable. She takes root in diverse cultural settings and expresses the gospel in the forms of that culture, transforming them along the way. This, Oden says, cultivated a catholic spirit in the church, a spirit of patient tolerance: “Since the church is called and sent into every cultural context, it has engendered tolerance toward cultural varieties wherever it has remained most true to its catholic mission.” Catholic tolerance is not rooted in Enlightenment optimism about human nature but is “grounded directly in the gospel of God’s love for all. It is gentle and patient because it seeks to reflect God’s own gentleness and patience.”<sup>7</sup> By the fourth century, when “catholic” is used in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creedal, it had been enriched by these further meanings.<sup>8</sup>

These various threads come together in Cyril of Jerusalem’s often cited 18th Catechetical Lecture:

The Church, then, is called Catholic because it is spread through the whole world, from one end of the earth to the other, and because it never stops teaching in all its fulness every doctrine that men ought to be brought to know: and that regarding things visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth. It is called Catholic also because it brings into religious obedience every sort

6. Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Life in the Spirit* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 338.

7. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 342.

8. “Catholic” captures this multi-dimensional meaning better than the alternative term, “universal.” Writing on Catholic education in a 1990 essay in *America*, Walter Ong addresses the issue of Catholic identity by raising the question: What is the “catholicity” of “Catholic”? “Catholic,” he observed, “is commonly said to mean ‘universal,’ a term from the Latin *universalis*.” But this does not fit the linguistic history: “If ‘universal’ is the adequate meaning of ‘catholic,’ why did the Latin church, which in its vernacular language had the word *universalis*, not use this word but rather borrowed from Greek the term *katholikos* instead, speaking of the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’ (to put it into English) instead of the ‘one, holy, universal and apostolic Church?’” Ong turns to etymology: “The etymological history of *universalis* is not in every detail clear, but it certainly involves the concepts of *unum*, ‘one,’ and *vertere*, ‘turn.’ It suggests using a compass to make a circle around a central point. It is an inclusive concept in the sense that the circle includes everything within it. But by the same token it also excludes everything outside it. *Universalis* contains a subtle note of negativity.” By contrast, “*Katholikos* does not. It is more unequivocally positive. It means simply ‘through-the-whole’ or ‘throughout-the-whole’ - *kata* or *kath*, through or throughout; *holos*, whole, from the same Indo-European root as our English ‘whole’” Ong, “Yeast,” *America*, April 7, 1990.

of men, rulers and ruled, learned and simple, and because it is a universal treatment and cure for every kind of sin whether perpetrated by soul or body, and possesses within it every form of virtue that is named, whether it expresses itself in deeds or works or in spiritual graces of every description.<sup>9</sup>

For Cyril, the church is catholic because it encompasses the world; it is geographically extended to all parts of the world and exists in all times. Her doctrine is catholic because she teaches the fullness of all truth regarding things visible and invisible; she is intellectually universal. She is catholic because she encompasses all sorts and conditions of men; she is socially and politically catholic. She is catholic because she has a single treatment and cure for all sorts and conditions of sin, and because she contains all forms of virtue. She is morally catholic.

With this complex definition in mind, I devote the remainder of the essay to arguing this claim: Paedobaptism best expresses the multidimensional catholicity of the church. Negatively, I argue that credo- or believer's baptism is necessarily subcatholic. I do not make judgments about Baptist individuals or churches, which often breathe a generous catholic spirit. My argument is about Baptist theology of baptism, and the ecclesiology it implies.

Before making that argument, I need to establish a prior claim: Baptismal theology and practice decide the boundaries of the church.

## **Baptism and the Church**

In the New Testament, baptism is the mark of inclusion in the Christian church, the "rite of passage" from outside to inside. John preaches a baptism of repentance, and those who submit to the sign become part of a community of the penitent who awaits the Messiah to come. Jesus sends his disciples to the Gentiles to baptize them into communities of disciples, where they are taught everything he commands (Matt 28:18-20). At Pentecost, three thousand are baptized, and so, added to the original company of one hundred twenty (Acts 2:41-42; compare with Acts 1:5). Ananias greets Saul as "brother" just before laying hands on him and baptizing him into the brotherhood (Acts 9:17-18).

Paul's statements on baptism are consistent with this. His theology of two Adams (Rom 5:12-21) is immediately followed by an exhortation that points to baptism (Rom 6:1-11). Baptism marks the transition from Adamic humanity under the dominion of sin and death into a new life in the Last Adam.<sup>10</sup> Israel was "baptized into Moses" in the Red Sea, a phrase that echoes Paul's language of "baptism into Christ" (1 Cor

9. William Telfer, ed., *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 4, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 186.

10. Baptism at least marks the transition. I believe Paul's language is stronger: Baptism effects the transition from Adam to Christ. Pursuing that line of thought, however, would distract from the aims of this essay.

10:1-14). As a baptism, the sea crossing signified a departure from Egypt into the torturous wilderness journey toward the promised land.<sup>11</sup>

Baptists and paedobaptists both affirm that baptism is a visible mark related in some fashion to membership in the church. There is a significant divergence between the two in their understanding of that relationship. The 1689 Baptist Confession does not include the claim in the Westminster Confession of Faith that baptism solemnly admits the baptized to the visible church.<sup>12</sup> For Baptists, by regeneration and conversion, the Spirit brings a person into the fellowship of believers.<sup>13</sup> Yet, because Jesus commanded baptism, the converted should be baptized. For many Baptists, baptism is a sign of membership and a necessary prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper. I discuss recent Baptist debates about baptism and church membership below, but those complexities are not germane to my opening argument. Even if we assume that the baptized is, in some way, a member of the church before baptism (as many paedobaptists do), baptism still functions as a visible mark of the boundary of the fellowship of Jesus's disciples. For Baptists and paedobaptists, membership of the church consists (ideally at least) of the baptized.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, baptism always implies an ecclesiology. The nature of the church is bound up with the character and practice of baptism, and the larger import of the debate between Baptist and paedobaptist lies in this ecclesiological realm. If, as Baptists claim, only professing converts can be validly baptized, then the church consists of those who are capable of making such a profession. On a strict interpretation, not only children but all "childlike" adults are outside the church. If, as paedobaptists claim,

11. There is dispute about whether 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of water baptism. Whatever the referent, it is significant that Paul uses the verb "baptize" to describe the incorporation into the body; we are baptized by one Spirit into one body, the body of which Paul speaks throughout the remainder of 1 Corinthians 12.

12. *Westminster Confession of Faith* 28.1 states, "Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world." The *London Baptist Confession* (29.1) states: "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life."

13. John Gill takes the extreme position that baptism "is not an ordinance administered in the church, but out of it, in order to admission into it, and communion with it; it is preparatory to it, and a qualification for it, it does not make a person a member of a church, or admit him into a visible church; persons must first be baptized, and then added to the church, as the three thousand converts were; a church has nothing to do with the baptism of any, but to be satisfied they are baptized before they are admitted into communion with it." Gill, *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Philadelphia: Delaplaine and Hellings, 1810), 541.

14. This is the position, for instance, of editors Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, "In Scripture baptism is regularly linked with admission into the people of God – the church of Jesus Christ" Schreiner and Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 1-2.

children of church members should be baptized, then the church will necessarily include many who have not and cannot make such a profession. These obvious differences imply the deeper and broader ecclesiological divergences I discuss below.

### **Temporal and Geographic Catholicity**

Baptists and paedobaptists agree in principle that there is one church throughout all time, stretching back to the earliest moments of the human race. Baptist theology, however, undermines that affirmation at a fundamental level.

At the heart of the Baptist-paedobaptist debate is the question of the relationship between the old and new covenants. Paedobaptists often rest their argument on an analogy between circumcision and baptism, arguing that infants should be included in the church and marked with a covenant seal as they were included in Israel and infant boys were marked with circumcision. Baptists stress the discontinuity of the covenants, implying that the church is not merely a different community but a different sort of community from Israel.

In a powerful essay in *Believer's Baptism*, Steven Wellum insists there is one people throughout the old and new covenants.<sup>15</sup> The church is the same people as the sons of God in the line of Seth, the family of Noah on the ark, Abraham's household, and the nation Israel. There is but one people of God at all times. Wellum is right to insist there are radical changes along the way, and right also to criticize paedobaptists for letting the theological construct of the "unified covenant of grace" take the place of exegetical argument.

But Wellum mistakes the discontinuity of old and new at a crucial point because he assumes Israel's national identity is dependent on blood ties. This is doubly erroneous. Wellum rightly says that being a member of Abraham's family is no longer tied to "any kind of physical links to other believers." But, as Wellum himself realizes, that was already true of Abraham's original household, which included hundreds of unrelated circumcised slaves.<sup>16</sup> Further, Israel came from Egypt with a "mixed multitude" (Exod 12:38), who were later circumcised with the descendants of Jacob. Israel's peoplehood was never a matter of genetics, and that means that the absence of physical ties is not a difference between old and new.

Wellum also errs in the way he links national identity with typological foreshadowing.<sup>17</sup> On his understanding, the nation of Israel foreshadowed the church,

15. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants," in Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 97-162.

16. Wellum, "Baptism," 123.

17. He regularly connects national with typological and contrasts this combination with "spiritual" realities. The former are associated with the old order, the latter with the new (pages 110, 117, 118, 123, especially 155). In criticizing Wellum on this point, I am dissenting from the typical Paedobaptist move that stresses the spiritual character of the promises to Abraham. Rather than spiritualizing the old covenant, I wish to nationalize the new.

which is not a nation. But the church, like Israel, is a people and a nation (1 Pet 2:9), a nation bound by no blood but the blood of Jesus, a nation that was not a nation (Rom 9:23-26) until God called it into being—yet a nation. Wellum sees nationhood as a point of discontinuity. Peter and Paul see it as a matter of continuity.

Wellum may agree in principle, but then he must explain the oddity of an ecclesial people and nation without children, a people and nation constituted solely by consent and choice rather than by birth and nurture, a very modern nation. If, on the other hand, he denies that the church is a nation, the problem is even worse, for then it is hard to see how there is one people at all, since on those premises the peoplehood of the people of God will have disappeared in the new covenant.

Paedobaptism highlights the church's continuity of nationhood through all time more fully than Baptist theology and therefore affirms that the church is catholic through all time.

Of course, paedobaptists do confess a single church exists throughout the entire New Testament era. Baptists agree verbally, but that agreement is hard to sustain on Baptist premises. Baptist theology implies that for most of church history, valid baptism was entirely absent from most of the church. Late-baptized church fathers qualify as baptized, but for the first millennium and more virtually no saints, monks, teachers, priests, theologians, nuns, hermits, or ordinary Christians were baptized. One might wonder whether the church could have existed during this period at all. Some resolve the dilemma by tracing a trail of blood, discovering the "true church" on the persecuted margins of Christendom. There is, I suppose, temporal catholicity of a sort in that mythology. Catholic-minded Baptists want to claim St. Anthony, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and hundreds of others as their religious ancestors. Thus, they lay claim to a heritage of unbaptized heroes who carried on their work in a church-without-baptism.

Baptist theology runs aground in a similar fashion in affirming the geographic universality of the church. By Baptist criteria, most professing believers today are unbaptized members of churches-without-baptism. There are some 2.2 billion professing Christians in the world,<sup>18</sup> of which 1.3 billion are Roman Catholic,<sup>19</sup> 260 million are Orthodox,<sup>20</sup> 85 million Anglican,<sup>21</sup> and 47 million officially designated as Baptist.<sup>22</sup> Accurate numbers for baptistic nondenominational churches and New

18. Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christians," December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

19. Agenzia Fides, "Vatican – Catholic Church Statistics 2018," October 20, 2019, [http://www.fides.org/en/news/64944-VATICAN\\_CATHOLIC\\_CHURCH\\_STATISTICS\\_2018](http://www.fides.org/en/news/64944-VATICAN_CATHOLIC_CHURCH_STATISTICS_2018).

20. Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century," October 7, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/>.

21. Pew Research Center, "Global Anglicanism at a Crossroads," June 19, 2008, <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/19/global-anglicanism-at-a-crossroads/>.

22. Baptist World Alliance statistics, available at <https://www.bwanet.org/statistics#total>.

Christian Movements are nearly impossible to come by, not to mention underground believers in persecuting countries like China. Let us (generously) estimate that baptistic Christians are as numerous as the Orthodox. Even at a quarter of a billion, Catholics outnumber baptistic Christians by a billion, and the Christian church as a whole exceeds the number of baptistic believers by nearly two billion. On this guess, baptistic believers constitute a little more than 8 percent of the Christian population in the world.

In no way is my point to belittle Baptists, whose zeal for foreign missions has been unequaled. The point is to highlight the fact that Baptists must, at best, hedge in acknowledging these churches as churches and these professing believers as believers. After all, 90-plus percent of today's Christians are not baptized and are thus disobedient to a central gospel demand.<sup>23</sup>

The problem is more fundamental than these statistics indicate, and it becomes evident in recent debates about the relation of baptism to church membership. Baptists disagree among themselves concerning the necessity of baptism for church membership.<sup>24</sup> Writing in 1851, the Methodist writer Freeborn Garretson Hibbard observed that Baptists and paedobaptists “agree in rejecting from communion at the table of the Lord, and in denying the rights of church fellowship to all who have not been baptized. Valid baptism they consider as essential to constitute visible church-membership.” The disagreement, however, does not have to do with the necessity of baptism but with the definition of a valid baptism. It appears that Baptists pass “a sweeping sentence of disfranchisement upon all other Christian churches,” but Hibbard rightly concludes that Baptists “have only acted upon a principle held in common with all other churches, viz.: that baptism is essential to church-membership.” Thus, “the charge of *close communion* is no more applicable to the Baptists than to us; inasmuch as the question of church-membership is determined by as liberal principles as it is with any other Protestant churches – so far, I mean, as the present subject is concerned, *i.e.*, it is determined by valid baptism.”<sup>25</sup>

Bobby Jamieson has recently defended the position Hibbard describes.<sup>26</sup> Baptism is valid only when a confessing believer is immersed, and thus, Jamieson argues, anyone baptized by a different mode or as an infant must be barred from membership and table fellowship at a Baptist church. Jamieson's book is a rebuttal to

23. I am admittedly ignoring complications. Some non-Baptist and non-baptistic churches immerse. Nearly all paedobaptist churches baptize adult converts upon profession. Thus, Baptists would acknowledge the presence of some valid baptisms within paedobaptist churches. That qualification does not, however, undermine my main claim.

24. These Baptists, incapable of consensus! They should learn from the harmonious, charitable, and universal consensus among paedobaptists, especially Presbyterians. . . . Oh, wait. Never mind.

25. Freeborn G. Hibbard, *Christian Baptism, Part First: Infant Baptism* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), 171, 175.

26. Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B&H, 2015); see also the Gospel Coalition interview with Jamieson at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-baptism-required-church-membership/>

the view espoused by John Piper, who accepts the paedobaptized as church members and participants in the Supper. For Piper, this is a matter of “tolerating an invalid baptism.” He acknowledges it is an “imperfection,” but says it does not weigh as heavily as “saying to a son or daughter of the living God, ‘You are excluded from the local church.’” Piper agrees that infant baptism is not baptism, and that valid baptism is necessary for full obedience to Christ, but he rejects what he calls the “preemptive excommunication” of the paedobaptized.<sup>27</sup>

To my paedobaptist mind, this leaves the Baptist in a catholic no-man’s-land. Jamieson’s position is more “catholic” in that it defines the church by visible markers. On this point, Piper makes valid baptism optional, and thus Piper leaves us with the anomaly of unbaptized church members and unwashed table companions. Yet Piper adopts this position out of “catholic” instincts, to express his conviction that the catholic church is bigger than the Baptist churches. Jamieson, in fact, agrees. Baptists and paedobaptists should commune and “cooperate as Christians, and as churches” as much as possible.<sup>28</sup> But that generosity only weakens Jamieson’s original “catholic” credentials. Like Piper, he has a category of “unbaptized Christians,” though he would not let them join a Baptist church. He even has a category of “churches-without-baptism.” Baptists, I assume, recognize that the New Testament never entertains such a possibility.

Both sides make the foundational error of viewing baptism as an act of obedience rather than an act of Jesus Christ, authorized by the Lord and mediated through the church. Augustine was able to distinguish the validity of Donatist baptism from its efficacy because the former depends entirely on Jesus. Thus, on Augustine’s account, baptisms can be faulty in many ways without becoming invalid.

Baptists cannot clear up this tangle concerning catholicity unless they accept the validity of infant baptism. So long as they insist that most of the Christian world is a baptism-free zone, they will oscillate among various unattractive options: Piperian generosity-without-ordinances or Jamiesonian ordinances-without-generosity, both of which assume an untenable class of churches-without-baptism.

Paedobaptists have had our own struggles over temporal and geographic catholicity. Differences among Presbyterians were expressed most sharply during nineteenth-century debates concerning Roman Catholic baptism. James Henley Thornwell debated Charles Hodge on the floor of the Presbyterian Church’s General Assembly and subsequently in various publications. According to Thornwell, the

27. John Piper, “Response to Grudem on Baptism and Church Membership,” *DesiringGod*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/response-to-grudem-on-baptism-and-church-membership>. Grudem once shared Piper’s position, but was later convinced that valid baptism was required for church membership. For Piper’s other writings on the subject, see <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/baptism-and-membership>.

28. Matt Smethurst, “Is Baptism Required for Church Membership?” *Bible and Theology*, The Gospel Coalition, September 17, 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-baptism-required-church-membership/>.

Roman Catholic Church added rites, such as anointings, to the biblical rite of water baptism. As a result, what Catholics call baptism is not baptism, but “part of the magical liturgy of Rome.” That Catholics use the Trinitarian formula is irrelevant. What is needed is not merely a form of words but faith. A unitarian cannot validly baptize using the Trinitarian formula, and similarly, Catholic corruptions of the gospel invalidate even formally correct baptisms. Roman notions of the covenant are heretical. Catholics are not taught to look beyond the rite to the thing signified, or to depend on the action of the Holy Spirit, but to trust the water rite itself. The Reformers robustly rejected the Catholic idea that sacraments are physical or mechanical causes of grace.<sup>29</sup>

For the Catholic, Thornwell charged, not Jesus but sacraments are “the Saviors to which millions of her deluded children cling for acceptance before God.” Catholics look for nothing beyond “empty pageantry of ceremonial pomp,” and so “their hopes are falsehood and their food is dust.” In the Catholic Church, “The Holy Ghost has been supplanted by charms, and physical causes have usurped the province of supernatural grace.” Roman and Reformed sacraments are in “essentially different categories,” as different as “action and passion.” Reformed baptism does not penetrate the soul but washes “only the flesh, while our faith contemplates the covenant of God, and his unchanging faithfulness.” While Rome’s baptism does the work simply by being done, “Our baptism represents what the blood of the Redeemer, applied by the Eternal Spirit, performs upon the souls of the believers.” Reformed sacraments are “vain without the Holy Ghost.” For the Roman Church, the sacraments are “all the Holy Ghost she needs.”<sup>30</sup>

Drawing on the Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin, Hodge offers a more complicated assessment of the Roman Catholic Church. Hodge observes that for Turretin, a true church is one that is orthodox and pure; however, true does not mean real. Turretin can thus judge a church as “not true” and yet also insist it is really a church. Turretin acknowledges that the Catholic Church continues to profess Christianity and retains evangelical truths, and on that basis, “She may still be called a Christian Church.” This is the case not only because some of the elect are within the Roman Church but because in its “external form,” the “vestiges” of Christianity are “still conspicuous.” These vestiges include “the word of God and the preaching thereof,” as well as the “administration of the sacraments, especially baptism, which

29. This paragraph draws on the summary found in William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128-29.

30. See Shea, *Lion and the Lamb*, 128-29. Thornwell’s treatise on the invalidity of Catholic baptism is available as *Sacramental Sorcery: The Invalidity of Roman Catholic Baptism* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2006).

as to its substance is there retained in its integrity.” Hodge concludes, “Turretin says that Romish baptism is valid.”<sup>31</sup>

A church that professes “fundamental error” may, Hodge argues, still have “the essential truths of religion.” He cites the example of first-century Israel, which “by her officers, in the synagogues and in the Sanhedrin, and by all her great parties professed fundamental error . . . and yet retained its being as a church, in the bosom of which the elect of God still lived.”<sup>32</sup> Hodge agrees with Thornwell and his allies that if a church has wholly abandoned the truth of the gospel, it cannot have valid sacraments; a nonchurch can only have nonsacraments.<sup>33</sup> The Roman Catholic Church does not, Hodge claims, fit into this category because it “still teaches enough to save the soul.”<sup>34</sup> And so, its baptism is valid.

Hodge, I believe, has the better of the debate, both theologically and historically, and his view yields a much more robust catholicity than either Baptists or Thornwell offer. On Hodge’s view, everyone who undergoes the water rite in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is baptized. Whether sprinkled, poured-on, or immersed, they are baptized. Whether as infants or adults, they are baptized. Paedobaptists affirm the continuity of baptism in all times; for more than two thousand years, Christians have been incorporated into the church by baptism. Paedobaptists affirm the universality of the global church in the present, affirming the continuity of baptism in all places.

Of course, paedobaptists have to make judgment calls. Is Trinitarian baptism within an apostate church truly baptism? When is a church apostate, and who decides? Is baptism in the name of “Jesus only” valid? Those are challenging questions, but they arise from exceptional circumstances. Paedobaptists confront tangles at the margins of baptismal practice, while Baptists are forced to dance a two-step of catholicity-and-uncatholicity at the very center of baptismal practice. In the vast majority of cases, a simple tautology serves the paedobaptist: Baptism is baptism. And hence the paedobaptist is able to confess, without hesitation or mental scruple, the geographic and temporal catholicity of the church.

### **Socio-Political Catholicity**

Another dimension of the church’s catholicity is its embrace of all classes and groups, all tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples. Natural and social distinctions between male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile are irrelevant to existence in Christ

31. Hodge, “The Validity of Romish Baptism,” in *The Reformed Churches and Roman Catholic Baptism: An Anthology of Principal Texts* (Peru Mission, 2004), 87-88, <https://reformedbooksonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/the-reformed-churches-and-roman-catholic-baptism-an-anthology-of-principle-texts.pdf>.

32. Hodge, “Validity,” 104.

33. Hodge, “Validity,” 88.

34. Hodge, “Validity,” 100.

(Galatians 3).<sup>35</sup> Every member of the body, no matter what his or her social standing outside the church, is a valued and essential member of the body, contributing Spirit-endowed gifts to the edification of the whole. All are needed as much as every organ and limb of an individual's body is needed for the body to function well. Those who are regarded as least respectable, even shameful, outside the church, are treated with even greater honor within (1 Cor 12:14-26).

Political boundaries are dissolved within the body. Every tribe, tongue, people, and nation enter the body (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Because the nations come to Zion, they are pacified, beating their swords to plowshares and their spears to pruning-hooks (Isa 2:1-4). The church takes on the language and some of the cultural flavor of the groups it evangelizes; the church does not speak a single language. But the multicultural, multilinguistic body of the church is a Pentecostal reunion of nations.<sup>36</sup>

Of all this, baptism is the sign. Baptism is linked explicitly to the union of social and natural groups within the body: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28). Baptism invests all the baptized with the same Christic clothing. Paul's discussion of the one-and-many body is preceded by the declaration that we are baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor 12:13). That baptism also marks the reunion of nations is implicit in the Great Commission. Jesus sends His disciples to disciple the gentiles through two means, baptism and teaching (Matt 28:18-20). If we connect this commission with Galatians 3, we can infer the nations are baptized into one body because they are all clothed in Christ. Thus, there is neither Afghan nor Australian, neither Congolese nor Croatian, neither Venezuelan nor Vietnamese, neither Mexican nor Moroccan. All have been clothed in Christ, and so are one in Christ.

Baptists confess this. In a discussion of "equality before God," Wayne Grudem cites Galatians 3 and comments, "Paul is here underlining the fact that no class of people, such as the Jewish people who had come from Abraham by physical descent, or the freedmen who had greater economic and legal power, could claim special status or privilege in the church."<sup>37</sup> Grudem goes on to emphasize that there are no "second-class citizens in the church." Sex, economic status, race, health are irrelevant. Importantly, he insists that it does not matter if one is "strong or weak, attractive or unattractive, extremely intelligent or slow to learn," since "all are equally valuable

35. These distinctions, especially that between male and female, are not erased in every respect. Elsewhere, Paul makes it clear that the created order of Adam and Eve continues to have relevance with regard to leadership in the church (1 Tim 2:9-14).

36. I am speaking of ideals here. In reality, of course, Christians and churches often retain the sectarian of their national and tribal heritage. Christians have often gone to war against Christians.

37. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 458.

to God and should be equally valuable to one another.”<sup>38</sup> In the body, “old hostilities disappear, sinful divisions among people are broken down, and worldly criteria of status no longer apply.”<sup>39</sup> As a visible mark of church membership, baptism is a mark of membership in this body, where old distinctions are subverted.

Baptists affirm that the church consists of all sorts and conditions of men, but to some degree, baptismal practice is at odds with Baptist ecclesiology. In practice, certain individuals are excluded from baptism, not because they are unconverted but because of their immaturity or disability. A Reformed Baptist might well admit God is fully capable of regenerating a two-year-old child and would insist that this child is a member of the church by virtue of that regeneration. Until the child has the mental and linguistic capacity to confess, however, he cannot receive the visible mark of membership. In God’s eyes, he is a beloved child; in the eyes of the church, he is an outsider—beloved certainly as a child, but an outsider to the people of God.

What is temporarily true for infants is true permanently for certain severely mentally handicapped people. Helen Keller could not have been considered for church membership, no matter what the Lord was doing in her soul, until she was able to articulate it satisfactorily. To be sure, Baptists make allowance for severe handicaps, but it is revealing to see how this allowance is made. For example, Jason Whitt contends that since “baptism accomplishes something – namely, the conferring of membership and belonging to the community of faith – withholding baptism from those whom we believe Christ has accepted but who cannot consciously respond entails the Church excluding the most vulnerable in our world.” Therefore, “Denying baptism on the grounds that they have not accepted Christ, the clear message is sent: ‘Because you are limited, you can never be fully a member of this community.’” Baptists who take a strict line and insist the mentally handicapped cannot be baptized do not exclude them from God’s care. The Father still loves them. Whitt agrees, but pointedly asks, “What is lost to the community of faith in our refusal to baptize and share the table?”<sup>40</sup>

Whitt thus advocates baptism of severely handicapped people. In the process, he explicitly calls for a modification of typical Baptist standards for admission to baptism: “Christians who practice believer’s baptism already recognize that salvation is something accomplished in us by Christ. The human part is not primary, but it is not insignificant. Perhaps how we account ‘a response to the gospel’ should be reinterpreted in instances where intellectual assent is not possible.”<sup>41</sup>

38. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 459.

39. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 844.

40. Jason Whitt, “Baptism and Profound Intellectual Disability,” *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and ethics* 45 (2012), 64-65, <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/188185.pdf>

41. Whitt, “Baptism,” 64.

I applaud Whitt's move, mainly because I recognize it. It is a paedobaptist move, shifting the emphasis of baptism from the convert's confession to "something accomplished in us by Christ." He also emphasizes, quite rightly, the edifying impact of the presence of handicapped people in the church. God can save and love them without them being at the Table. But can we fulfill Paul's call to show "more abundant honor" to the shameful of the world without welcoming them as table fellows? Can we be fully catholic if we deny the weak are brothers and sisters clothed in Christ by baptism?

Even with this adjustment, the Baptist is left with a quandary. If there is no overt confession of faith, what counts as a "response to the gospel"? How does a church determine whether or not to baptize a disabled person? Does it matter if the person is part of a church family?

Whitt denies that his position entails infant baptism: "Infant baptism is rejected on the assumption that the child will come to an age where the choice for faith can be made. But what if, because of intellectual disability, the person will never reach a cognitive level where that choice is possible?"<sup>42</sup> But the disanalogy breaks down. Whitt makes the permanence of a disability the crucial factor. But how do we know the disability is permanent? Suppose medical researchers finally discover a genetic fix for Down Syndrome. At present, baptizing Down Syndrome people is legitimate because their disability is permanent, but someday baptism will not be legitimate. What if a cure is available, but the parents are unable to afford the cure? Would baptism be legitimate in those cases?

These are marginal, hypothetical, perhaps whimsical possibilities, but they go to the center of Whitt's argument: The baptism of infants is analogous to the baptism of severely handicapped people. If concessions are made for the latter, concessions can be made for the former. If he is willing to adjust the definition of "response to the gospel" to accommodate disabilities, what prevents him from doing the same to accommodate immaturities?

The main thrust of my argument is otherwise. Baptism is the church's welcome of all sorts and conditions of men, of all tribes and tongues and nations. Baptism is the ritual sign that the church is the community of God's weakness, where not many wise, not many high-born, and not many elites assemble so the Father can elevate them as priests and kings in Christ. Baptism is the clothing that covers the shameful members in the glory-robe of Christ Himself. Paedobaptism extends this welcome to the very least—the most needy and vulnerable—and so ritualizes the socio-political catholicity of the church.<sup>43</sup> Paedobaptism thus expresses the socio-political catholicity of the church.

42. Whitt, "Baptism," 64.

43. This does not imply, as often charged, a Constantinian view of the church or baptism (a distorted label in any case!). On what is called a Constantinian view, baptism is not a mark of inclusion in the people of God but a sign of peoplehood or national identity: every English citizen has a right to baptism in the church of England; baptism and German identity are virtually

### **Intensive Catholicity**

Catholicity is not only extensive but intensive.<sup>44</sup> That is, the church is catholic not only in its temporal and geographical scope, but also in embracing, correcting, redeeming, and transforming every aspect of human existence. As the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck explains, the temporal and geographic universality of the church is linked with our vision of the scope of Christianity: “It depends on our concept of this universalism of the Christian religion whether we become narrow or broad in our ecclesiology. How we relate grace to nature, re-creation (*herschepping*) to creation (*schepping*), determines whether our ecclesiastical vision will be broad or narrow.”<sup>45</sup>

In Scripture, the catholicity of the church is “breathhtaking in its beauty.” Whoever thinks the church is confined to a “conventicle” drastically “shortchanges the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit and incurs a loss of spiritual treasures that cannot be made good by meditation and devotion.” A shrunken view of the church is a symptom of “an impoverished soul.” When we are able to discern “the countless multitudes who have been purchased by the blood of Christ from every nation and people and age” is incapable of being “narrow-minded and narrow-hearted.”<sup>46</sup> Catholicity is not only an ecclesial expansiveness but an expansiveness of soul.

Bavinck sees a fateful shift in the medieval development of natural and supernatural schemes, which treat creation and re-creation as “two realities independent of each other. Nothing remains but a compromise between the natural and the supernatural, between God and humanity, faith and knowledge, church and world, soul and body, religion and morality, quietism and activity.” This necessarily changes the meaning of catholicity: “Catholicity of the Christian principle that purifies and sanctifies everything is exchanged for a dualism that separates the supernatural from the natural by considering it as transcendent above the natural,” as Christian faith becomes an “‘add-on’ or supplementary system.”<sup>47</sup>

In this truncated catholicity, “Christianity is exclusively church,” and Bavinck sees this behind medieval Papal theology, which could only conceive of catholicity as an extension of the church’s—and the Pope’s—“hegemony over everything.” Thus “Rome thus maintains the catholicity of the Christian faith in the sense that it seeks to bring the entire world under the submission of the church. But it denies catholicity

synonymous. But paedobaptism carries precisely the opposite implication. From the very beginning of life, infants in paedobaptist churches are claimed for the counter-polity of the church. Baptists, by contrast, leave children, at best, in marginal position, betwixt world and church, until they are converted and can make a profession.

44. The term is from John W. Nevin, “Catholicism,” *Mercersburg Review* 3 (1851): 1-26.

45. Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 220-51. The essay is based on an address delivered in 1888, translated by John Bolt.

46. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 227.

47. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 229.

in the sense that the Christian faith itself must be a leavening agent in everything. In this way, an eternal dualism remains, Christianity does not become an immanent, reforming reality.”<sup>48</sup>

As Bavinck sees it, the Reformation was not only a reform of the church but produced “a radically new way of conceiving Christianity itself.” In place of the “dualistic” Catholicism of the middle ages, the Reformers offered “a truly theistic worldview.” Thus the reformers “attempted to free the entire terrain of the natural from the hegemony of the church.”<sup>49</sup> Simultaneously, they supernaturalized the natural: “The natural order is not something of lesser worth or of a lower order as though it were not capable of being sanctified and renewed, but only suppressed and governed. The natural is as divine as the church even though its origin is in Creation rather than re-creation and derives from the Father rather than the Son.”<sup>50</sup>

Not all the Reformers followed through on this expansive vision. Luther and Zwingli, Bavinck claims, shifted the emphasis of the medieval dualism but remained within the dualistic frame. “The Gospel has nothing to do with worldly matters,” Luther wrote, “A prince can be a Christian but he must not rule as a Christian.”<sup>51</sup> Not surprisingly, Bavinck thinks Calvin got it mostly right. His praise for Calvin is not unqualified, but in Calvin, “The Gospel comes fully into its own, comes to true catholicity. There is nothing that cannot or ought not to be evangelized. Not only the church but also home, school, society, and state are placed under the dominion of the principle of Christianity.”<sup>52</sup>

In this essay, Bavinck discusses baptism as an ecumenical problem, in relation to Rome and heretical sects like the Socinians. He does not connect this intensive catholicity to baptism. The two, however, are closely connected.

Anabaptists were persecuted by both Catholics and magisterial Reformers, and early English Baptists were also dissenters from the established church. As a historical matter, it is not surprising that such persecuted groups would insist on what Roger Williams described as a “wall of separation” between church and state. But the link between the believer’s baptism and church-state separation is no historical accident. There is an inner theological connection between credobaptism and secularization of the political order.<sup>53</sup> Baptist theology, in short, reverts to the nature-grace dualism that the Reformation began to overcome.

48. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 230-31.

49. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 235-36.

50. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 236.

51. Quoted in Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 237.

52. Bavinck, “Catholicity,” 238.

53. At a minimum, “secularization” refers to institutional changes such as the disestablishment of the church or the removal of overtly religious symbolism and ceremony from public life. More deeply, a secular state is one that claims official neutrality with regard to religious claims. A secular state claims to take no position, for instance, on the Christian proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” or the Islamic claim that “Allah is One and Mohammed is his prophet.”

From a Baptist perspective, the link primarily has to do with individual responsibility and accountability in religious matters. That amounts to the primacy of consent. No state has the right to compel belief or impose a particular view of right worship; every individual must be free to make his own decisions concerning religious affiliation and conviction, and any imposition of belief or practice is illegitimate. This demand for consent in the political order is allied with a prioritization of consent within the church. Infants cannot decide for themselves whether to follow Jesus, and it is illegitimate for parents to impose a religious identity and practice on them.

Here there is a close analogy between Baptist theology and liberal order. As Paul Kahn has argued, liberalism cannot reckon with children.<sup>54</sup> It assumes a polity made up of articulate, consenting adult citizens. Baptist theology offers a similar vision of the church. The analogy has historical roots; in colonial America, the rise of liberal order tracks with the dilution of infant baptism.<sup>55</sup>

As a result, Baptist theology does not have the resources to develop a robustly intensive vision of catholicity. As John Williamson Nevin pointed out, humans exist not merely as individuals but within “certain orders and spheres of moral existence.” These institutions are not external to human life but internal, such that “the moral nature of man includes in its very conception the idea of art, the idea of science, the idea of business and trade.” Nothing stands outside the transforming scope of the gospel. The church’s mission is not simply to “subdue” every tribe and nation but to “subdue the arts, music, painting, sculpture, poetry.” This, he recognizes, implies that “the total disruption of Church and State” is “essentially antichristian.”<sup>56</sup> Baptist theology is inimical to the evangelization of institutions and cultural spheres. Even the family cannot be redeemed as a family, since young children are outsiders. Neither a social group nor a national polity can be transformed as a group or polity. Nevin offers a Christian version of Terence’s famous *humani nihil a me alienum puto*, “nothing human is alien to me.” For Nevin, nothing human is alien to the kingdom. For Baptist theology, most of what is human is alien to the gospel.<sup>57</sup>

This does not mean Baptist families are irreligious as families, or that Baptist children before baptism are not being socialized. Baptist families, not merely the individual members, are religious, for good or ill. Baptist children are being socialized, but they are not socialized in a systematically and explicitly Christian manner because they are officially outsiders to the kingdom.

54. Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in its Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

55. See Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). The similarity between Baptist ecclesiology and liberal political order leaves me with a chilling question: To what degree is America’s contemporary contempt for children a bitter fruit of Baptist theology?

56. Nevin, “Catholicism,” 10-14.

57. As I have noted above, Baptists are far better in practice than in theology. Many engage in public and cultural activities, and strive to bring the gospel to bear on those spheres of life. My contention is that their theology gives them scant justification to do so.

Plato viewed pedagogy as the central political question. A polity survives only if it has the capacity to shape ever-new generations to adopt its specific values, habits, rituals, objects of desire, and aspiration. Baptist theology suggests that Christian pedagogy begins at some later stage once a child has consented to be discipled. Baptists are often better in practice than in theology. They teach their children to pray to their heavenly Father and send them to Christian schools. But they have no theological ground for articulating or expecting that families as families will become Christian nor that any group will be transformed as a group by the gospel.

Unchosen givens are inescapable. Baptists are not liberated from such givens. But they refuse to ensure that those givens are the givens of Christ's kingdom. From the perspective of infant baptism, what the gospel announces is not an absolute choice, but an alternative givenness, equally unchosen. Baptism does not liberate us from society, but from Adamic society with all its pathologies, and engrafts us into an alternative society that, like the old society, begins to impose its patterns on an infant as soon as the infant enters it. The Christian life has a trajectory, but this alternative givenness has been reordered and redeemed so that it points (however imperfectly) toward righteousness and life. The order of redemption follows the order of creation; in both cases, we are thrown into situations that are not of our own choosing, and in both cases, our religious identity is initially not a matter of our consent and choice. Paedobaptism is not only more catholic but more real, more attuned to the patterns of created human existence, than credobaptism.

To put it succinctly, paedobaptism affirms that groups as groups are redeemable, institutions as institutions can be conformed to the commandments of Jesus. And that means that paedobaptism confesses intensive catholicity with a clarity and power unavailable within Baptist theology.

## Conclusion

In no respect can a consistent Baptist fully affirm the full catholicity of the church. On Baptist premises, most of the church in most periods of history have been without baptism, and most Christians living today worship in churches without baptism. On Baptist premises, most Christians throughout the centuries have been unbaptized. Baptist theology cannot embrace all sorts and conditions of men without significant adjustment, since it excludes the weakest and most vulnerable from full membership in the body of Christ. Baptist theology cannot affirm the intensive catholicity of the gospel or the church, since it cannot consistently claim human groups and institutions can be subdued to the Lordship of Christ.

Paedobaptism signifies the multiform catholicity of the church. Throughout the past two thousand years, virtually all Christians have been validly baptized, and today, virtually all Christians are validly baptized and worship in churches where baptism exists. Paedobaptism enacts the Lord's embrace of the least of these, the

lowest infant and the most broken and confused. Paedobaptism declares that Christ's grace redeems man as man, man not only as an individual but in his relationships, institutions, and patterns of life.

I end with a provocation, but one, I think, justified by the preceding argument. Baptists cannot consistently confess the catholic creeds, with their statement of belief in "one, holy, catholic, apostolic" church. So long they continue to affirm credobaptism, they should, to be consistent, give up this part of the third article of the creed. Paedobaptists, by contrast, have a theology and sacramental practice consistent with the catholic creeds, and so can confess, without reservation, the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."

## Credobaptism and Catholicity

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*Baptist Catholicity.* To many both inside and outside the Baptist movement, this moniker seems like a contradiction in terms. For some Baptists, catholicity is a kind of swear word, not only because of its association with the Roman Catholic Church but also because certain strands of the Baptist tradition have sought to position themselves as neither Catholic nor Protestant but as a sort of *tertium quid* of restorationist Christianity.<sup>1</sup> For many non-Baptists, the Baptist rejection of infant baptism is especially noxious for any genuine catholicity. To invalidate the baptisms of the majority of Christians across space and time is to give up any pretense to a belief in “one baptism” (Eph 4:5), let alone the “one holy catholic and apostolic church” or a “baptism for the remission of sins” (Nicene Creed). So, for many, Baptist catholicity is a non-starter, or so it would seem.

Despite these headwinds, several different Baptist groups have attempted to wade into the waters (if you can forgive the pun) of an alleged “Baptist catholicity.” A few brave souls among more “moderate” Baptists have staked a claim for a “Bapto-Catholic” vision: an attempt to pave the way for a Baptist identity that avoids the modernist danger of a purely individualistic faith and that seeks a reclamation of a more traditioned Baptist faith for a postmodern age.<sup>2</sup> Others among the British Baptists have sought the retrieval of a more sacramental and liturgical expression of the Baptist movement.<sup>3</sup> Even some conservative Baptists in North America have

1. Though its influence has waned in recent decades, the Landmarkist tradition within the Baptist movement fits this bill. On the history of Landmarkism, see James Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature and Influence of Landmarkism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000).

2. See the programmatic manifesto for Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity (1997) authored by Mikael Broadway, Curtis Freeman, Barry Harvey, James W. McClendon, Jr., Elizabeth Newman, and Philip Thompson. See also Steve R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 27 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006); Harmon, *The Baptist Vision and the Ecumenical Future: Radically Biblical, Radically Catholic, Relentlessly Pilgrim* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic-Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008); Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

3. Many of the volumes in Paternoster’s Studies in Baptist History and Thought highlight this interest among British Baptists, as well as among some North American Baptists. See, for example, Anthony R. Cross and Phillip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 2, 5 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008, 2003); and Stanley K. Fowler, *More than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 2 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2002).

attempted a reappraisal of the Baptist vision as a renewal movement within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.<sup>4</sup> Considering whether or not one could seek to be both Baptist and self-consciously “catholic,” we might offer the same retort a Baptist minister once gave when asked if he believed in infant baptism: “Believe in it? Why, I’ve seen it with my own eyes!”<sup>5</sup>

But the question remains as to whether or not there is any firm ground on which to fuse these two sentiments: Baptist *and* catholic. Despite their best efforts and their potentially noble goals, can those who seek Baptist catholicity actually do so in a way that is consistent with their own Baptist distinctives, let alone any traditional understanding of what it means to be catholic? Whatever other hurdles might trip up these recent gestures towards a Baptist catholicity, the elephant in the ecumenical room, so to speak, is most certainly the distinctive practice from which the Baptists derive their name: believers-only baptism. If baptism is the church’s initiating rite, through which we are made Christians and members of Christ’s body, then the Baptist dissent on infant baptism would seem to forestall any attempts at a coherent catholicity.

This essay will explore precisely this question: can credobaptism and catholicity cohere? A tentative and rather modest answer to the question can be given from the outset: Perhaps. There may be better or worse ways to anchor the Baptist tradition in the broader body of Christ, but part of the problem emerges from a lack of agreed-upon criteria for adjudicating the matter. What is the *sine qua non* of catholicity? If the answer is an unqualified acceptance of the validity of infant baptism for church membership and Table fellowship, then the debate will be quick and decisive. But this answer, compelling as it is, may, in fact, beg the question. So the first section of the essay will examine what other possible answers might be given to the question of genuine catholicity. The second section will then explore some ways in which the Baptist position is indeed consistent with broader Christian traditions on baptism. The final section will investigate some potential Baptist responses to infant baptism, asking whether and how infant baptism might be received by Baptists as anything other than an aberration to New Testament Christianity.

4. The many labors of Timothy George, the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School, are especially noteworthy in an American evangelical context. See also the forthcoming volume: Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020). The efforts of the Center for Baptist Renewal, at which I serve as co-executive director along with Emerson, are also attempting to provide space for an evangelical Baptist Catholicity. See [www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com](http://www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com).

5. Versions of this quip are attributed to various sources, even to Mark Twain!

### Criteria for Catholicity

For many involved in ecumenical conversations, the common acceptance of one another's baptisms would seem to be the price of entry to the table of catholicity.<sup>6</sup> If indeed, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5), then a denial of the legitimacy of another tradition's baptisms would seem utterly inconsistent with any aspirations to catholicity. It would seem to make the denying party hopelessly sectarian if not schismatic. To be clear, some Baptists have shown a willingness to accept the validity (if non-normativity) of infant baptism, as we will explore more below. So not all Baptist groups would necessarily fall prey to this kind of objection to Baptist catholicity. But for those Baptist groups that do deny the validity of infant baptism and do require what would amount to a "re-baptism" in the paedobaptist perspective, the gravity of the objection should not be dismissed lightly. There are also deeply felt personal and pastoral dimensions to this debate. To say to a fellow believer that their baptism, which represents a cherished marker of their Christian identity, is invalid is a grave matter indeed. But Baptists hold their views on baptism, not for some petty or sectarian reason, but precisely because of their commitment to the absolute authority of Holy Scripture, which they believe demands the Baptist position. So, if catholicity is defined in such a way that it precludes Baptists from the outset, then many Baptists will feel compelled to choose Scripture over catholicity thus defined.

But again, this way of defining catholicity (which amounts to *defining Baptists out* of the conversation) may beg the most important question: Is the acceptance of all purported baptisms really the price of entry? It should be noted that Baptists are not the only ones who deny the validity of certain baptisms. Some Presbyterians in an American context also deny the legitimacy of certain baptisms (for example, Roman Catholic baptisms), even if they are administered in the Triune name.<sup>7</sup> Even if this is a minority report among Presbyterians worldwide, presumably, many communions would have reservations about baptisms in other contexts. For instance, is a Mormon baptism administered in the Triune name valid? Surely, most Christian churches would answer in the negative, given the radically divergent understanding of the

6. See, for example, World Council of Churches, *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition. A Study Text* (Faith and Order Paper no. 2010; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011).

7. See, for example, "The Report of the Study Committee on Questions Relating the Validity of Certain Baptisms" (1987), commissioned by the Presbyterian Church in America. The committee's findings claimed that, while a worldwide majority of Presbyterian and Reformed churches have accepted the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms, the same was not true in an American context: "In its historical survey, the Committee found that with one exception the General Assemblies of American Presbyterian churches where making a judgment on the matter have taken the position of non-validity for Roman Catholic baptism." A majority of the committee recommended to the General Assembly a position denying the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms, with a minority report leaving the matter to pastoral discretion. The documents can be accessed here: <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/studies/2-093.html>.

Trinity (and much else besides) between historic Christian orthodoxy and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I do not mean to suggest that Mormon baptisms are equivalent to infant baptisms practiced in Christian churches, but what these examples highlight is the fact that for many Christian traditions, not just Baptists, a water rite administered in the Triune name is not always sufficient for a valid baptism. The administering church, its theological orthodoxy, and its theology of baptism are also significant and determining factors.

Also significant are the practical implications of the Baptist denial of infant baptism's validity. What are Baptists actually denying when they deny the validity of infant baptism? Practically speaking, it amounts to one or both of the following: admittance into church membership and admittance to the Lord's Table. As we will see below, some Baptists are closed-membership but open-communion, meaning they gladly welcome all true believers to the Table but reserve church membership only for those who have been baptized as believers. But in either case, the downstream effects of the Baptist denial of infant baptism have analogs in other communions as well. For example, Protestants are not admitted to the Eucharist in Roman Catholic churches, nor are unrepentant Protestants admitted into their membership. In some Lutheran churches, those who deny the Real Presence are likewise fenced from the Lord's Table. So, despite the uniqueness of the Baptist position (in denying the validity of infant baptism), the practical effects of this denial have parallels in other traditions as well. If Baptists are defined out of catholicity, then other traditions may also be on the chopping block. Even if a common Eucharistic fellowship is a hoped-for goal of ecumenical dialogue, it is not a present reality precisely because of the ecclesiological commitments, not only of the Baptists but of other traditions as well.

We should also observe how differing theological systems render different judgments about the relative significance of baptism for Christian faith. For many Baptists, baptism is non-sacramental in its nature. In other words, baptism is merely an outward sign, a symbol that expresses the believer's public profession of faith and the administering church's affirmation of that faith. Baptism does not necessarily "do anything" of a sacramental nature. For other Baptists, including many of the earliest Baptists in seventeenth-century England, baptism does have a sacramental character: it is the ordinary means of grace that seals the believer's union with Christ.<sup>8</sup> As the church's initiating sacrament, it functions in a similar way to the church's ongoing sacrament at the Lord's Table: it strengthens and confirms the faith of the believer, communicating the benefits of Christ's redemption through the outward sign.<sup>9</sup> But

8. For a detailed historical examination of this sacramental understanding, see Fowler, *More than a Symbol*.

9. The Baptist Catechism, a seventeenth-century Particular Baptist revision of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, followed the broader Reformed tradition in seeing the sacraments as the ordinary means of grace. Answer 93: "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, baptism, the Lord's supper, and prayer; all which means are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

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in both of these cases—both the non-sacramental and the sacramental view of baptism—the Baptist position is sufficiently dissimilar to the theologies of baptism in other Christian traditions that it produces a kind of disconnect in conversations about baptism and catholicity. In both cases, a credible profession of faith is a prerequisite to participation in baptism. But, of course, that is not the theology of baptism held by paedobaptist communions. The incredulity that non-Baptist traditions often express about the Baptist denial of infant baptism may be a function of viewing that denial through the lens of an alien theological system. In, say, a Lutheran theology of baptism, to deny the validity of someone’s baptism would amount to a denial of their status as Christians, a denial of their membership in the body of Christ. But such is not necessarily the case for Baptists. Baptists can gladly accept those “baptized” as infants as fellow believers and can, given certain qualifications, accept paedobaptist churches as true churches. In short, the best context in which to understand the Baptist denial of infant baptism is the Baptist theology of baptism, not the Lutheran, Anglican, or Presbyterian theology of baptism. That may not take the potentially anticatholic sting out of the Baptist position, but it at least serves to understand the position in its own proper context.

All of these considerations leave us with the fundamental question: what constitutes the criteria for genuine catholicity? To put the matter differently, what constitutes the unity of the church across spatial, temporal, and denominational lines? While *catholicity* is distinct from *unity* in the four *notae ecclesiae* confessed in the Nicene Creed, there is a sense in which catholicity is simply unity worked “through the whole” (Greek, *katholikos*: *kata*, “through”; and *holos*, “the whole”). As we have seen, Baptists have good reasons not to see baptism as the *sine qua non* of catholicity, precisely because we wish to affirm the faith of Christians who, we believe, have not been biblically baptized. So, on Baptist terms, the criteria must lie elsewhere. The other candidates for catholic criteria should be obvious: a common faith and life in Jesus Christ as the head of the body, a commitment to Holy Scripture, a commitment to Christian orthodoxy expressed in the ecumenical creeds and councils, a principled attempt to administer the sacraments according to the Lord’s command (even if there remain principled disagreements about these attempts), and the common worship of the Triune God.

Non-Baptists may complain that these criteria are insufficient because they remain only at the invisible level and do not move toward any kind of visible unity. In response, I would, first of all, take issue with the notion that a common profession of faith, common scriptural and creedal commitments, and a common worship are merely invisible. Every time a visible Baptist church gathers to “read, hear, and mark” the Sacred Scriptures, to administer baptism, to observe the Lord’s Supper, to sing the praises of the Triune God, and to confess the faith once delivered—all of which practices we share in common with other Christian traditions—we are bearing witness to the world, to the church on earth, to the glorified saints in heaven, to all the

heavenly hosts, and to the principalities and powers that we stand in solidarity with all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true enough that denying the validity of infant baptism poses a potential roadblock to visible catholicity, but there may be other means of demonstrating visible solidarity with other communions besides open church membership and (or) open communion (which again are the practical implications of denying the validity of infant baptism). Our churches can accept what the older Baptist theologians called “alien immersion,” that is, the immersion of a believer in a non-Baptist church, thus validating the non-Baptist church as a true church (despite their disordered practice on other “baptisms”). We can engage in “pulpit swaps,” inviting non-Baptist ministers to preach on occasion in Baptist churches, thus validating their gospel ministries. We can pray publicly for other churches and their ministries in our worship services. Indeed, we can participate in joint-worship services on occasion. We can be engaged in ecumenical dialogues with other communions. We can partner with non-Baptist churches in certain evangelistic endeavors or social works. In these and other ways, we can express our unity with all true believers and all true churches. For the Baptist, these are the most meaningful criteria for genuine catholicity.

### **Catholic Credobaptism?**

Despite our distinctive rejection of infant baptism, there is much in a Baptist theology of baptism that we share in common with other Christian communions. It is often noted that Baptists are not the only ones who practice believer’s baptism. All Christian churches baptize first-generation converts upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The question of mode arises in this context since most Western paedobaptist churches baptize by effusion or pouring, but it is not unheard of for some paedobaptist churches to practice immersion as well if the believer requests it. And there is some debate among Baptists as to whether or not the mode is essential to a valid baptism. Still, the most common (so far as I can tell) and the most consistent Baptist position on baptism places several demands on a biblically valid baptism:

*Proper subject:* Only one who can give a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is a proper candidate for baptism. Infants and small children are the recipients of God’s love and are certainly open to God’s work in their hearts and lives in whatever ways are appropriate to their stage of development. But baptism in the Baptist tradition functions analogously (though not exactly) to confirmation in other traditions. So, the confirming rite of baptism is withheld, not because Baptists believe God only works in the rationally mature, but because baptism is seen, once again *in the Baptist tradition*, as initiation into the life of willing faith. While the infant children of believers are “sanctified” in virtue of the privilege they enjoy in being raised by at least one Christian parent, that fact alone does not qualify them

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for baptism any more than a “sanctified” unbelieving spouse of a Christian qualifies the unbeliever for baptism (1 Cor 7:14). Yes, Baptists can “talk to their babies” and teach them to pray and catechize them in the faith, but the confirming right of baptism, which signals initiation into the New Covenant community, sealed in Christ’s blood, awaits a willing faith.<sup>10</sup>

*Proper mode:* Baptism means immersion. In the Great Commission, Jesus did not say, “Do something with water to some persons.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, he commanded the apostles to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing (immersing) them” into the Triune name. Again, some Baptist churches may be willing to adjust to other modes of baptism, provided the other criteria are met, but the most biblically consistent position seems to demand immersion as the only proper mode. But even Calvin was forced to admit that immersion was the practice of the primitive church.<sup>12</sup> The early Christian document, *The Didache*, allowed for other modes in certain contingencies, but the preferred mode was immersion.<sup>13</sup>

*Proper administrator:* The church administering baptism also matters for a valid baptism. Baptism is a church ordinance. It is not merely a matter of personal, private profession. The administering church must be of sufficiently similar faith and practice. Here, the church’s theology of baptism becomes important. If baptism is seen by the baptizing church and the baptizand (the one being baptized) as regenerative (as in the Roman Catholic Church) or as absolutely necessary for justification (as in some Restorationist churches), then the purported baptism was not undertaken according to the Lord’s ordinance and is therefore invalid.

This is an admittedly “thick” description of what constitutes a biblically valid baptism. Other traditions content themselves with a relatively thinner demand for baptism: water, administered by whatever mode and by whatever Christian church in the Triune name, constitutes a valid baptism. Other criteria may be seen as improving upon the best *use* of baptism, but its essence is fixed by simpler demand. In this way, Baptists seem hopelessly out of step with the catholic tradition of baptism. But there

10. The supposed inconsistency of Baptist parents “talking to their babies” is spelled out in Peter J. Leithart, *The Baptized Body* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2007), 9-11.

11. I am borrowing this way of phrasing what Jesus did not say from a special address given by Russell D. Moore when I was a student the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

12. Still, Calvin himself found the mode of baptism to be of no real consequence and therefore variable based upon national custom. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1:4.15.19.

13. And the most preferred mode was baptism in “living,” that is, running water, following the example of Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan River.

are aspects of the Baptist position do evince a more “catholic” practice. We note three in particular.<sup>14</sup>

First, believers’ baptism by immersion has precedent in the earliest centuries. Admittedly, arguments from the baptismal practices of the first several centuries are notoriously difficult to make with certainty.<sup>15</sup> Both sides of this debate cite evidence from the early church. In the second century, Tertullian famously denied the validity of infant baptism, but his opposition to it obviously assumes that the practice was not unheard of. Still, it was a common practice for many in the earliest centuries to delay baptism until adulthood (likely owing to the belief that post-baptismal sin placed one in a graver position with regard to salvation). Infant baptism was practiced, often in emergency situations, but it was not universal. For the Baptist, this mixed historical evidence, at the very least, calls into question the assumption that infant baptism was of apostolic origin and was practiced in unbroken continuity with the New Testament from the earliest centuries. It seems that the practice of infant baptism was more developmental, arising perhaps from the contingency of children dying in infancy coupled with a growing belief in baptismal regeneration, which taken together made the baptism of infants a necessity to ensure their salvation.<sup>16</sup> If infant baptism was an apostolic demand, then why did it take the church so long to universalize it? If Baptists are to be accused of arguing for a “Constantinian Fall” of the church from its New Testament origins, then paedobaptists must own up to a similar kind of fall from the first-century practice of infant baptism. The paedobaptist argument must run something like this: the apostles practiced infant baptism as an extension of the pattern of circumcision, but many churches in the early centuries fell from this practice, and it took them several centuries to finally return the apostolic demand. Perhaps this paedobaptist story is a true one, but it is no more historically transparent than the Baptist one. In any event, and at the risk of begging the question, Baptists believe that their practice is grounded in the New Testament itself, which is the deepest root of any claims to catholicity. The Baptist argument from early Christian history is not water-tight, but it is at least a defensible one and one that would give Baptists, arguably, a better claim to the evidence closest to the New Testament era. Thus, no Protestant should dismiss out of hand the possibility that the Baptist position, like the Reformation arguments for a more biblical soteriology, is actually a return to catholic practice from the church’s infancy.

14. For a fuller historical defense of some of these affinities, see Matthew Y. Emerson, “Baptists, Baptism, and the Christian Tradition,” in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds. (Nashville: B&H Academic, forthcoming 2020).

15. On the history, see Everett Ferguson, *Baptist in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

16. Ferguson cites the conclusion of Mark Searle approvingly: “The fact is that ‘we cannot give the name of anyone before the fourth century not in an emergency situation who was baptized as an infant.’” Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 379.

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Second, it should be noted that the seventeenth-century Particular Baptist position on baptism grew organically out of a Reformed understanding of the sacraments. The question of Baptist origins is a disputed one, but the best historical evidence suggests that there were actually two origin stories, not one: the rise of the so-called General Baptists in the early seventeenth century under the leadership of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, with possible ties to the continental Anabaptists, and the rise of the so-called Particular Baptist, emerging from mid-seventeenth-century Congregationalism.<sup>17</sup> The recent work of historian Matthew Bingham is among the best to-date on the emergence of this second category of Baptists.<sup>18</sup> Bingham's central thesis is this group has been anachronistically mislabeled "Baptist," as if there were an already existing pan-Baptist movement at the time (including the so-called General Baptists which had emerged earlier in the century) to which Separatists could naturally join themselves, and that this mislabeling in the historiography of Baptist origins has obscured the theological logic that led many Congregationalists to a rejection of infant baptism. Instead, Bingham argues that the groups we normally identify as "Particular Baptist" at mid-century are better termed "baptistic congregationalists."<sup>19</sup>

This reconceptualizing of the identity of the baptistic Separatists in question helps to illuminate how the logic of congregationalism—a non-national understanding of the church as comprised of local congregations of visible saints—led some congregationalists to the conclusion that baptism was to be reserved only for those who could attest to saving faith in Christ. The Reformed arguments for infant baptism made the church *de jure* (not merely *de facto*, as all would have admitted) a mixed community, made up of both the elect and some who may in time prove themselves not to be regenerate.

Bingham's discussion of the theological genealogy of the baptistic position is particularly insightful.<sup>20</sup> The story runs roughly as follows: The Reformers' rejection of the *ex opere operato* understanding of baptism as guaranteeing regeneration, coupled with their retention of infant baptism, necessitated an understanding of the church as, in principle, a mixed community. Some may be Christians merely externally and federally but not internally and savingly. The Congregationalists eventually came to reject this mixed understanding of the church, and the national church they believed it underwrote. According to the Congregationalists, the visible church is not to be identified with any national church but only with local congregations of visible, that is, internal, Christians. But, importantly, they did not reject the practice

17. On Baptist origins, see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 11-35.

18. Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

19. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 84.

20. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 62-89.

of infant baptism. But this position proved to be unstable, as the Half-Way Covenant controversy demonstrated (in this dispute, the question was whether or not infant-baptized nonchurch members could present their children for baptism). The Baptists, or baptistic congregationalists, simply carried the logic of congregationalism to its necessary conclusion: if the church is made up of visible saints and if baptism is the entryway into the church, then baptism is only rightly administered to those who give credible evidence of conversion. It was not some kind of radical biblicism that led to this conclusion, but instead the logic of congregationalism and, arguably, of Reformed theology itself—at least in terms of its rejection of the late medieval understanding of baptismal regeneration.

It is worth noting how these seventeenth-century developments might map onto or inform contemporary debates about the subjects of baptism. Defenses of infant baptism both among members of the established church and among the Presbyterian churches in the seventeenth century assumed the rectitude of some kind of national church. It was not just the Erastians who conceived of English Christendom in these terms (note, for example, the original statement on the civil magistrate in the Westminster Confession of Faith that was revised in an American context). So, one question a contemporary Baptist might pose to, say, Presbyterians in a modern, pluralistic society is this: what becomes of the defense of infant baptism when the notion of a national church is no longer a reality? Some might be tempted to reprimarinate a sort of “Christian nation” ideal, especially given recent conversations about the so-called end of liberalism. But others might balk at this suggestion and argue instead that a national church was never a necessary component of infant baptism. Paedobaptists might simply argue their covenantal case for infant baptism based on the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant with the New Covenant, admitting that the church is a society separate and distinct from any nation-state. They might further acknowledge the legitimacy of at least part of the “visible saints” ideal of Congregationalism (in either its paedobaptistic or baptistic forms) by means of church discipline. The children of believers are admitted into the membership of the church, but excommunication might still await some of those members, if they prove in their mature years to have denied the faith in doctrine or practice. Whatever we make of the coherence of such a defense of infant baptism, it still must be acknowledged that this precise argument—a denial of the national church and pursuit of a pure church, at least among adults—does not map neatly onto the seventeenth-century defenses of infant baptism in an English context. In other words, we’re all Baptists now.

Further, this development of the Baptist position from within Reformed orthodoxy demonstrates that these sacramental maneuvers are not entirely out of step with a kind of Reformed catholicity. Despite our dissent on the practice of infant baptism, the Baptist position is noticeably Protestant and even Reformed, in a sense. While the magisterial Reformers retained the practice of infant baptism, their theologies of baptism were not entirely consistent with those that came before them.

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In short, Baptists have as much of a claim to catholicity on this front as any other Protestant demurring from medieval notions of baptismal regeneration.

A third and final aspect of the Baptist position that stands in continuity with the catholic tradition involves the close connection between baptism and conversion. While contemporary Baptist theology often treats baptism as a mere symbol or sign of the believer's profession of faith, from the beginning, it was not so. Many of the earliest Baptists held to a much stronger sacramental understanding of baptism, seeing it as a seal (not merely a sign) of regeneration and union with Christ.<sup>21</sup> At the very least, baptism is, for all Baptists, a part of the complex of events involved in one's conversion to Christ.<sup>22</sup> So the close connection between baptism and initiation into the life of faith, into the converted life, is preserved. Baptists, with the broader tradition, can readily admit that baptism is closely connected to the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16); identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6:3-4); incorporation into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13); and, indeed, salvation itself (1 Pet 3:21). If anything, it is those contemporary paedobaptist traditions that tend to sever baptism from conversion—that treat baptism as merely promissory in lieu of future faith—that seem out of step with catholic practice. In a sense, those paedobaptist traditions that explicitly teach the baptismal regeneration of infants—be they Lutheran, Anglican, or whatever—are more in line with the teaching of the New Testament than those who treat baptism as something more like a “wet dedication” of the infant into the covenantal promises given to the church.

Relatedly, Baptists also stand in continuity with the broader catholic tradition on the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper. The most consistent Baptist position maintains, with the broader tradition, that baptism is a prerequisite to church membership and participation at the Lord's Table. The only debated question is when baptism is to be administered (not a small debate, admittedly). But on the order of things, Baptists are in full agreement with the Christian tradition: baptism into church membership and then participation at the Table.

### **Credobaptist Reception of Infant Baptism**

But an important question remains for the prospects of a credobaptist catholicity: How are Baptist churches to assess the practice of infant baptism on the ground,

21. Again, see Fowler, *More than a Symbol*. Also see the essays on the sacraments in the two volumes from Cross and Thompson, *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

22. Commenting on baptism in Luke-Acts, Bob Stein writes, “When [Luke] refers to Christian baptism in Acts (and in his Gospel as well), he describes the experience of baptism as it is related to the process of becoming a Christian.” Baptism, along with faith, repentance, confession, and so on, was one of the “integral parts of the experience of becoming a Christian.” Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts,” in *Believers' Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 36.

as it were, at the level of the local church? Is infant baptism merely a man-made aberration that possesses no validity or meaning? Is it a disordered but somehow still valid practice? Or is it something in between? There is a diversity of practice on these questions among Baptists. The possible positions can be summarized in tabular format.

<b>Position on Infant Baptism</b>	<b>Church Membership?</b>	<b>Communion?</b>
Invalid	Closed	Close
Irregular but Valid	Open	Open
Irregular but Acceptable	Open, under certain conditions	Open, under certain conditions
Invalid but Meaningful	Closed	Open, under certain conditions

According to the first position, infant baptism is invalid in that it cannot be accepted as a condition for membership into a Baptist church or for participation in the Lord's Supper. The person seeking membership into the church would need to be rebaptized (technically a misnomer, since on the terms of this position, it would be the first biblically administered baptism) in order to become a member of the church and participate in the Lord's Supper. Likewise, a visitor to a Baptist church that holds this position would be instructed in the fencing of the Table that only those who have been baptized as believers are welcome to the Table. Communion, in this scenario, is not necessarily closed to nonchurch members, but it is practiced in a close manner, welcoming only those visitors who have been baptized as believers in churches of similar faith and practice. This is the position of the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM) of the Southern Baptist Convention: "Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper."<sup>23</sup> The strength of this view is its consistency, both within the Baptist system of beliefs and with the catholic practice of requiring baptism for church membership and communion. A potential weakness is its exclusion of true believers from the Lord's Table and its possible sectarian implications.

According to the second position, infant baptism is irregular in that it fails in some important ways to match the pattern of the New Testament (as infant baptism would), but it may nonetheless be viewed as a *valid* baptism for the purposes of church membership and communion. This view would accept any Trinitarian baptism as valid, even if the church itself would only practice believers' baptism. This view

23. Baptist Faith and Message (2000). <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>

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also practices *open* communion, extending the invitation to the Table to all believers present. This is the position of Baptist theologians such as Curtis Freeman and Steven Harmon. Freeman describes the position as follows: “Other Baptists are prepared to see infant baptism as a form of baptism derived from the norm of believer’s baptism, while only practicing the normative form in their own communities.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Harmon argues that the church’s “pilgrim journey to the ecumenical future must involve mutual recognition of one another’s baptisms, for not to recognize a person’s baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt 28:19) is to deny Christ as that person’s identity.”<sup>25</sup> The strength of this position is that it completely removes the potential barrier to catholicity that rejecting infant baptism constructs, and it does so without diminishing the significance of the sacrament. But its weakness is that it may give away too much; if infant baptism is perfectly valid, then what remains of the Baptist opposition to it?

On the third position, baptism is seen as irregular but still acceptable as a prerequisite for church membership if the infant baptized person has a deeply held conviction that the baptism is valid. Some kind of water baptism is still required: a nonbaptized Quaker or member of the Salvation Army, for example, might still be excluded. But since baptism, in this view, is not a primary doctrinal issue, convictional differences about the subjects and mode of baptism should be permitted within the local church. The church itself may only practice believers’ baptism, but it may accept other baptisms as the congregation and pastor(s) permit. Such churches would also naturally practice open communion, fencing the Table in such a way that all believers who have been baptized according to their own personal convictions are welcome. This view is only distinguished from the previous view by its hesitancy to accept as fully valid the practice of infant baptism and in that it qualifies its acceptance within narrower limits. This appears to be the position of the John Bunyan and the one proposed by John Piper.<sup>26</sup> The strength of this position, like the second position, is that it removes the barrier to church membership that a stricter Baptist position retains. Its weakness is that it tends to diminish the significance of the sacraments for the sake of unity. It seems to communicate, against the grain of the Christian tradition, that baptism is not all that important.

In the final position, a baptism may be seen as invalid and, therefore, unacceptable as a prerequisite for church membership, but it may still be granted a certain kind of meaningful status by some Baptist churches. At first glance, this view may seem indistinguishable from the first, since it denies the validity of infant baptism and

24. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 373.

25. Harmon, *Baptist Identity*, 238-39.

26. John Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment about Water-Baptism No Bar to Communion* (n.p., 1672). The proposal of Piper and his fellow elders in defense of this position was eventually voted down by his church, but the proposal can be accessed here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/baptism-and-church-membership-the-recommendation-from-the-elders-for-amending-bethlehems-constitution>

would make believers' baptism prerequisite to membership. But there are two crucial differences. The first difference is more pastoral in nature. Suppose an infant baptized Christian seeks membership in such a Baptist church. What will be communicated to the potential member concerning his or her infant baptism? Perhaps the pastor would say something like this: "I appreciate that your baptism holds great significance for you. Our church understands the reasons your parents brought you forward for baptism as an infant. A similar (though not identical) impulse is what leads many of our churches to solemnly dedicate our children to the Lord after their birth. We respect the biblical and theological reasons why your church extended the covenant sign to you. But we have our own biblical and theological reasons for viewing baptism, not only as a sign and seal of God's covenantal promises (which we gladly affirm!) but also as a profession of faith on the part of the recipient of baptism. That is why we only practice believers' baptism here, and it is why we require all members to be biblically baptized. We understand that this position may be a bar to your joining our church, and we will gladly recommend some biblically faithful paedobaptist churches in the area and send you with our blessings if your conscience does not permit you to submit to our church's practice. We respect the many Christians across space and time who have been baptized as infants too much simply to dismiss infant baptism as something utterly meaningless, but we hold with conviction that baptism means the immersion of a believer upon profession of his or her faith."

To be sure, there is nothing keeping a pastor who holds the first position from offering counsel such as this, but this final position more deliberately wishes to affirm that infant baptism expresses something meaningful for the individual Christian, their parents, and their churches. How else is the Baptist to grapple with the reality that, on our own position, most of the Christians throughout space and time have not been baptized? All Baptists who deny the validity of infant baptism must bite this bullet, so to speak. But we do so acknowledging the potential difficulty that it creates for Baptist catholicity, and we seek to mitigate that difficulty by expressing respect for the position. Now, for many, this may seem like a hollow gesture since infant baptism is still rejected. But all ecumenical dialogue must proceed along similar lines: catholicity does not erase important theological differences, but it provides the field for discussing them in a context of mutual love and respect.

Baptists who hold a position like this might even consider infant baptism as a kind of "baptism of desire." Admittedly, the analogy is not perfect. In Roman Catholic teaching, this category describes those who stand outside of the Christian faith but who may still be included in Christ's saving work by responding with faith to the revelation they have.<sup>27</sup> Most biblically faithful Baptists will not wish to espouse such

27. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it: "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity."

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an inclusivist view for those outside the faith, but we might still speak of a kind of Trinitarian inclusivism within the various Christian denominations. Believers who have not been baptized as believers because they hold their infant baptisms to be valid are not deliberately disobeying the Lord's command to be baptized. They are not, again, like the Quakers or the Salvation Army, refusing water baptism altogether. They just have a conscientious difference of biblical interpretation on what constitutes a valid baptism. But if they continue steadfast in the faith, owning their own faith when they are of age (perhaps solemnized through some kind of confirmation and first communion), then they too will be the recipients of the benefits of baptism without having been baptized in reality. But the faith and order of the Baptist church would not allow it to extend church membership to such persons unless they were willing to supplement their previous confirmation with believers' baptism.

A second crucial difference between the first and fourth positions concerns Communion. I take it that any Baptist churches who would go out of their way to affirm the meaningfulness of infant baptism would also be willing to extend the Lord's Table to all believers who have been "baptized" according to their own convictions. This admittedly involves a kind cost-benefit analysis on the part of Baptist churches. Do we preserve the catholic practice of requiring baptism as a prerequisite to the Lord's Table? Or do we seek to express more faithfully the meaning of the Lord's Supper, which is, in part, the unity of the Body of Christ, that is, of all true believers? The first position leans more on the first question, fencing the Table from all who have not been biblically baptized. The fourth position leans more on the second, acknowledging that the requirements for membership in a Baptist church are somewhat stricter than those for welcoming visitors to the Lord's Table. Well-meaning Baptists can disagree on this issue.<sup>28</sup> But the open communion view does seem to mitigate against the stricter lines drawn by the first view. In any event, even the first view need not surrender all claims to catholicity. As we have already pointed out, other traditions fence the Table from certain believers, and this need not undermine other expressions of the church's catholicity.

## Conclusion

Can Baptists be catholic? This question is very close to the question: can Baptists be Christians? Can we be members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church? In one sense, the sheer existence of the Baptist movement, its persistence across the last four centuries, and its contemporary vibrancy all point to an affirmative response to these questions. At the risk of sounding rude, we might reply, "We're here, and we

28. While the BFM maintains the "close communion" view, it is interesting to note that most SBC pastors espouse a more open communion position. Carol Pipes, "Lord's Supper: Lifeway Surveys Churches' Practices, Frequency," Baptist Press, September 17, 2012. <http://www.bpnews.net/38730>

are not going away.” A reply like that need not be said in defiance. It is more of a plea. We are Christians. We seek to follow the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected Son of God. We believe in the inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture. We affirm the cardinal doctrines of the faith expressed in the ecumenical creeds and councils. We seek, however fallibly, to organize our churches and regulate our worship according to the Lord’s ordinance. We seek by the power of the Holy Spirit to live holy lives, to love and serve our neighbors, and to evangelize the nations with the good news of Jesus Christ. And, importantly, many of us wish to be in solidarity with other Christian traditions, to find a way to retain our deeply held Baptist convictions but also to be united to the broader body of Christ and to draw on its rich resources. The real question, then, is simply this: will you have us?

The retort will likely be, “Well, you don’t accept *us*, because you deny the validity of our baptisms!” But this article has attempted to lay out what counts as the criteria for catholicity within the Baptist vision, the important resonances between the Baptist position on baptism and the broader tradition, and the possible paths forward for Baptists who wish to be united with other Christian traditions. No doubt, many Baptists and non-Baptists alike will not be content with many of these proposals. The denial of infant baptism may remain a thorn in the side of Baptist catholicity until the Lord returns. We believe that our position on baptism is a great strength of our movement, sensitive as it is to the shape of the biblical covenants and the pattern of baptism in the New Testament. Obviously, our paedobaptist brothers and sisters will see it as a great weakness and as a potential impediment to unity. But the weak and the strong have certain mutual obligations to one another, as the apostle teaches. And all of us on this side of that great day, when the whole church will be one even as the Divine Persons are one, can hope in God’s promise, despite our ecumenical weaknesses: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

## A Response to R. Lucas Stamps

BY PETER J. LEITHART

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My thanks to Lucas Stamps for his suggestive, cogent, and bold paper. I am heartened that “catholicity” is no longer a swear word among Baptists and heartened too by signs of sacramental and liturgical renewal in Baptist churches. I applaud the efforts of Stamps and others to rehabilitate earlier threads of Baptist theology and practice more in keeping with the sensibilities of the universal church.

Can Baptists be catholic? Stamps asks. “Perhaps,” he replies, and then defends his disarmingly modest answer with three lines of argument.

He carves out a place for Baptist catholicity by probing criteria of catholicity. If full acceptance of all Trinitarian baptisms is the standard, then Baptists fail. But this net catches too many fish because, by this criterion, other Christian traditions also fail. Stamps is right that Baptists are not the only ones preventing full Eucharistic communion. As he points out, different Christian traditions not only promote divergent theologies of baptism, but also place baptism differently within their theologies, practices, and piety. From a Baptist perspective, denying the validity of infant baptism does not unchurch a church or de-Christianize a Christian, because Baptists do not believe valid baptism is necessary to mark a true church or a genuine Christian. Baptists should not, in short, be judged for failing to live up to criteria they do not accept in the first place.

Fair enough, but this probably eases the burden on Baptists too much. After all, by Baptist criterion, invalid baptismal theologies and practices do not arise here and there but represent the church’s tradition since at least the fourth century. Invalid baptism has been a *de facto* norm, not an aberration. If infant baptism is an aberration, it is an aberration indeed.

Stamps proposes other criteria of catholicity (common faith and life, commitment to Scripture and creedal orthodoxy, a principled effort to do the sacraments as Jesus commands, and common worship), and he suggests practices to exhibit and enhance the unity and the universal scope of the church.

His second main line of argument is to demonstrate that credobaptism has stout catholic credentials. Baptists have “thicker” criteria of baptismal validity than other traditions, but each of the thickeners has a plausible claim to catholicity. Immersion is the only valid mode of baptism, say Baptists. This is not uncatholic, though, since baptism by immersion was the norm of the early church. The subjects of baptism must be professing believers, say Baptists. This is not uncatholic either, since (on

Stamps's reading) this was the practice of the early church.<sup>1</sup> Baptist theology grew out of Reformed theology, and thus may be characterized as a variant of Reformed catholicity. Stamps's genealogy of Baptist theology is the most arresting part of his paper, and I return to it in detail below.

The final section of Stamps's paper lays out the ways Baptists might treat those who were baptized with regard to church membership and admission to the table, and examines the costs and benefits of each. It is a trade-off of catholicity: Do Baptists insist on the catholic practice of requiring baptism as a prerequisite for the Supper, or do they insist on embodying the catholic unity of the church as fully as possible? What Stamps calls "cost-benefit analysis," I am inclined to call an "impasse," one imposed by Baptists' denial of the validity of infant baptism.

So much for the overall layout of Stamps's paper. In the remainder of this response, I focus on one thread of his argument.

### **Baptist and Reformed**

Following Matthew Bingham, Stamps claims the particular Baptist position arose from the Reformed understanding of sacraments. Reformed theologians rejected the medieval notion that sacraments work *ex opere operato*, that is, that they are effective merely by being performed. Baptism, the Reformed argued, does not confer or guarantee regeneration or justification. Yet they retained infant baptism. That conjunction of continuity and discontinuity "necessitated an understanding of the church as, in principle, a mixed community," divided between members who are "externally and federally" Christians and members who are "internally and savingly" so.

Congregationalists refused to identify with the national church but believed the church existed only in local congregations of real Christians. They rejected the mixed community idea, yet they too retained infant baptism. Stamps says Baptists "simply carried the logic of congregationalism to its necessary conclusion." Baptist theology did not arise from sectarian motives or "radical biblicism" but from within the logic of Reformed theology in its "rejection of the late medieval understanding of baptismal regeneration." Stamps traces this history to show that Baptists are not out of step with Reformed orthodoxy or catholicity: "Baptists have as much a

1. Baptists and paedobaptists both believe the church abandoned apostolic practice at some point. They differ about what the apostolic practice was and when the fall occurred. Stamps's conclusion about the historical evidence is as modest as his overall argument. The paedobaptist fall story may be right, but "it is no more historically transparent than the Baptist one." I tell my version of the story in "Infant Baptism in History: An Unfinished Tragi-Comedy," in Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 246-62.

claim to catholicity . . . as any other Protestant demurring from medieval notions of baptismal regeneration.”

In fact, he goes on; some Baptists have a stronger claim to continuity with the tradition than Reformed paedobaptists. Baptists view baptism as “part of a complex of events involved in one’s conversion to Christ,” linked with remission of sins, union with Christ, incorporation into Christ’s body, and salvation. Paedobaptists who “sever baptism from conversion” and “treat baptism as merely promissory in lieu of future faith” are the ones who are “out of step with catholic practice.” Lutherans and Anglicans who speak of the baptismal regeneration of infants “are more in line with the teaching of the New Testament than those who treat baptism as something more like a ‘wet dedication.’” Baptists are also catholic in making baptism the rite of admission to the Lord’s table.

This genealogy makes a great deal of sense. Though self-identifying as a paedobaptist, I agree that paedobaptist theology is often more Baptist than paedo. Conversely, Lutheran and Anglican baptismal theology are not only more consistent with the catholic tradition; they are also more biblical. No text of the New Testament speaks of baptism as a sign of something that takes place otherwise than in baptism. All texts describe baptism as an effective operative.

To my mind, the way forward is to reaffirm what the Reformed rejected—*ex opere operato* and baptismal regeneration—albeit in a biblically revised form. Baptism accomplishes what it signifies simply by being administered. Once baptized, a person is more than wet. He is *baptized*. That means he wears the name of the Triune God, is claimed by God, is a member of the family of the Father and the body of the Son, and is a living stone in the temple of the Spirit. By baptism, he is sealed, enlisted into the army of Jesus, branded as a lamp in his flock, tattooed as a servant of his house. Those are uncomplicatedly true of the baptized, by the work worked.

That work includes a kind of regeneration. In Matthew 19:28, *palingenesis* does not refer to the irreversible renewal of an elect individual but to the coming renewal of the cosmos. “In the regeneration,” Jesus’s disciples will sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel. When Paul writes to Titus about the “washing of regeneration” (3:5), this cosmic usage lurks in the background. By the washing of baptism, the baptized is inducted into the regeneration, the new age that has dawned in Jesus and his Spirit and will be consummated at the end. The individual baptized begins a new life in the regeneration. He dies to old Adamic flesh with its deadly networks of idolatry and comes to life in communion with the risen Christ.

Making this move accomplishes several things at once. It restores Protestant baptismal theology to the mainstream of the catholic tradition, East and West. In this paradigm, the church is unreservedly the community of holy ones, the body of Christ. It avoids the problems of a *de jure* mixed community. Not everyone baptized into the regeneration is eternally saved; not everyone perseveres in new life. But that is true of Baptist churches as well. In some ways, this model sharpens the

differences between Baptist and paedobaptist, but hopefully, a sharpened boundary is a clarifying boundary.

Finally, this move provides a basis for infant baptism that does not depend on a nation-state ecclesiology. Stamps may well be correct that seventh-century defenses of infant baptism depended on a national church ecclesiology. He issues this challenge: “What becomes of the defense of infant baptism when the notion of a national church is no longer a reality?” Stamps anticipates my response: the case for infant baptism can be rooted in the Abrahamic covenant, with the consequence that “the church is a society separate and distinct from any nation-state.” But since this does not map onto classic defenses of infant baptism, paedobaptists find themselves, uncomfortably, in a Baptist world: “We’re all Baptists now.”

As a factual matter, Stamps is largely correct. Protestants have adjusted their ecclesiologies and ecclesial practices to accommodate the divided and privatized church. Theologically, though, some of us are not Baptists but Protestant Catholics. We find a non-national precedent for infant baptism not in modern Baptist theology but in pre-Reformation, that is, pre-national theologies of the medieval Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Baptism does not mark anyone as an American or Armenian but as a member of a global communion of men, women, and children. As I argued in my initial contribution to this dialogue, paedobaptism strengthens the case for the church as a real-world society separate from every nation-state, since it says the church, like every real-world society, includes children.

### **Conclusion**

Late in the paper, Stamps suggests Baptists might make sense of infant baptism by developing a category of “baptism of desire.” Perhaps we can make progress by positing a notion of “Catholic by desire.” Baptists desire to be in solidarity with the Christian tradition, and Stamps asks, “Will you have us?” It is not up to me, but if it were, I would say, “Yes. Of course. Let’s talk.”

“We’re here, and we are not going away,” Stamps says, not in defiance, but as a plea for acceptance. I wonder. I wonder whether Catholic Baptists can remain Baptists over the long run. Can Baptists remain Baptist as they explore and embrace the overwhelmingly non-Baptist tradition of the church? Can Baptists remain Baptist as their admiration for the church’s liturgical tradition grows? Can Baptists remain Baptist as they abandon their modern, individualistic prejudices for a more churchly form of faith? Can Baptists remain Baptist as they increasingly see the story of Scripture as a single story of the one people of God?

Here’s hoping they cannot.

## **A Response to Peter J. Leithart**

**BY R. LUCAS STAMPS**

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I greatly appreciate the clarity and even the “provocation” of Peter Leithart’s articulation of infant baptism. He has helpfully pointed out some of the potential fault lines that lie between the Baptist vision and claims to catholicity. All of these pressure points can be relieved, as I hope to demonstrate. Admittedly, other tensions may have to remain, and perhaps further dialogue can cast more light on precisely where our disagreements lie, and perhaps where they do not.

### **A Baptist Appreciation**

There are many things that a Baptist can appreciate about Leithart’s vision of the church and its catholicity. He offers a helpful exposition of what the term “catholic” meant in the early centuries. As he argues, catholicity had doctrinal, missional, geographical, intellectual, social, political, and moral implications. In our own way, we Baptists can readily affirm this thick description of what it means to say that the church is catholic, despite Leithart’s belief that we are “subcatholic” in light of this multidimensional understanding of the church catholic. But this rubric for thinking about catholicity at least gives Baptists a starting point for thinking about how and how far we can position our movement as an expression of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

I am also grateful for Leithart’s admission that the provocative claims he makes about the implications of Baptist thought do not necessarily entail that individual Baptists and Baptist churches are completely devoid of a “generous catholic spirit.” Leithart also admits that Baptists even get some things right in raising our children, “socializing” them in the faith, even as he questions whether we have any firm theological ground for doing so. I suppose it is better to be thought inconsistent than unfaithful. These charitable admissions are not inconsequential to my mind. Too often in these discussions, heated polemics tend to crowd out warm-hearted charity. There is no question where Leithart stands on the question of Baptist catholicity: “In no respect can a consistent Baptist fully affirm the full catholicity of the church.” But even if the conclusion is bluntly stated, the manner in which Leithart carries out his argument evinces his own “generous catholic spirit” at many points.

## **Baptism and the Church**

Leithart begins the substance of his argument by exploring the relationship between baptism and the church. As he puts it, “Baptismal theology and practice decides the boundaries of the church.” Leithart acknowledges that both Baptists and paedobaptists see baptism as the initiating rite that functions to incorporate an individual into the visible church. But he worries that by limiting baptism to professing converts, Baptists must exclude children and “childlike adults” (presumably those who have severe mental disabilities) from full membership into the church. Here, it is important to recognize that Leithart admits that Baptists see regeneration and conversion, not baptism *per se*, as the actual entry point into the fellowship of believers. He later acknowledges that Reformed Baptists might readily admit that children and childlike adults could be regenerated by God’s grace. So, they are not entirely barred from membership in the company of believers. But, for Leithart, to exclude certain persons who may be regenerate from baptism and thus from full membership in the church signals a diminution of the church’s socio-political inclusivity, a point that he develops further later in the essay.

Still, as I argued in my opening essay, the best context within which to understand the Baptist rejection of infant baptism is the Baptist theology of baptism, not a sacramental theology of some other tradition. For the Baptist, to delay baptism until a profession of faith is not to utterly exclude the unbaptized, including the children of believers, from what we could call the saving orbit of the church. Baptists believe 1 Corinthians 7:14, too: “Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” Baptists just see baptism as a kind of confirmation, a sign and seal of the grace given to those we have good reason to believe are among the elect. Until that point, Baptists seek to raise their children in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4), acknowledging that God may be at work savingly in their lives before we are able to discern it and hoping that they will personally own their faith in more mature years and thus be engrafted into the New Covenant community of the church, which is comprised of those who give a credible profession of faith in Christ. The question of mentally disabled adults introduces a unique challenge for the Baptist position, but one that is sufficiently dissimilar from the question of infants that it warrants a separate answer later in this response essay.

## **Baptists and Multidimensional Catholicity**

After this opening clarification about baptism and church membership, Leithart then fleshes out his multidimensional understanding of catholicity—temporal and geographic, socio-political, and intensive—and suggests that Baptists fail in every regard to display the full catholicity of the church. It is true enough that the Baptist understanding of the baptism yields a view of the church (and its relationship to the

covenants and the people of God in the Old Testament) that is different than the one envisioned in the paedobaptist traditions. It is not my intention to paper over those differences precisely because Baptists, as a dissenting movement within the tradition, wish to allow those differences to remain both a challenge and a call to the broader body of Christ. As Baptist ecumenical theologian Steve Harmon has described it, the Baptist vision entails a “theology of the pilgrim church”—a theology on the way.<sup>1</sup> We resist any over-realized understandings of the church that identify its perfection with any communion on earth, including our own. We are all marching to Zion and should be open to “more light from the Word.” At the same time, catholic-minded Baptists do not understand this posture of dissent to be something that stands outside the tradition, as some kind of sect or cult. No, we too are a part of the Great Tradition, and simply intend to contest certain aspects of that tradition from within.<sup>2</sup>

So, the brief response that follows is not meant to suggest that we are all saying precisely the same things only in different ways (although the principle of differentiated consensus can be an important concept in ecumenical discussions). Instead, I intend to suggest here that Baptists do not necessarily fail to live up to the multidimensional understanding of catholicity that Leithart so helpfully exposit. We have our own way of being catholic that should at least hearten other traditions that some contemporary Baptists are seeking to avoid the sectarian impulse.

So, first, as to temporal and geographic catholicity, Leithart suggests that Baptists “undermine” these emphases “at a fundamental level.” On geographic and temporal catholicity, Leithart claims that Baptists fail in two ways: (1) by their emphasis on the discontinuity between the Old Testament people of God and the New Covenant people of God, and (2) by their claim that most Christians throughout church history and across the globe today have not been baptized. On the first point, Leithart acknowledges, through interaction with the covenantal argument of Stephen Wellum, that Baptists can claim that there is one people of God across redemptive history. But Baptists often distinguish the Old Testament covenant from the New Covenant by claiming that the former had to do with genetic and national ties, whereas the latter does not. Leithart disagrees on all accounts. The Old Covenant was not merely about genetic ties, since many Gentiles had attached themselves to Israel and had been circumcised. Nor is the national dimension missing from the New Covenant, since the New Testament speaks of the church as a “holy nation,” for example.

In response to the point about genetics, the Baptist claim here is not meant to exclude a degree of ethnic diversity in the Old Covenant (though the New Covenant is more deliberately missiological in its mandate) but to distinguish the multigenerational arrangement of the Old Testament covenantal structure from the

1. Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

2. For more on this emphasis, see Curtis Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

New Testament emphasis on regeneration and conversion as the only entry point into the New Covenant people of God. The Baptist claim is that one could be born into the Old Testament nation of Israel (whether one's parent was an ethnic Hebrew or a circumcised proselyte), but one can only be reborn into the church of Jesus Christ. In the New Covenant, circumcision counts for nothing; a new heart is the point of entry into the church. On the point about the church being a "nation," no Baptist should feel compelled to disagree. Leithart wonders how there can be a nation without children, but surely every contemporary theologian has to admit some discontinuity between what it meant for Israel to be a nation and what it means for the church to be a nation. The emerging nation born from the Abrahamic Covenant involved the people of God taking up arms against the kings of Elam, Gōim, Shinar, and Eliaſar (Genesis 14). Yes, the church is a kind of nation, complete with its own alternative politics of the kingdom of Christ, but the church has no authority from God to enter into wars and treaties with other nation-states the way that Old Testament Israel did. In other words, as Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Thus, the nation established by the New Covenant in Christ's blood is not perfectly continuous with the theocracy of Old Testament Israel. So, it should not surprise us that there are certain discontinuities between them. For the Baptist, one of these discontinuities involves the parties of the New Covenant: God and believers, not God, believers, and their children as in the Old Testament theologico-political nation of Israel.

Leithart rightly sees that the Baptist rejection of infant baptism entails the belief that most Christians across the centuries and around the world are unbaptized. This is admittedly a challenge for the Baptist position, but as I argued in my essay, this rejection of infant baptism must be understood in the context of a Baptist theology of baptism. For the Baptist, what makes someone a Christian is not baptism *per se* (even for those Baptists who see baptism in more sacramental terms, as a sign and seal of God's regenerating grace), but personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ. I also suggested that Baptists might think of nonbaptized Christians as possessing a kind of "baptism of desire." Though the infant-baptized Christian has not received a valid baptism in accordance with the New Testament pattern, he or she can still receive the benefits of baptism—washing, regeneration, incorporation into the church, and so on—without having been baptized in reality. No doubt, this position will sound offensive to paedobaptist ears, but it must be borne in mind that the impetus behind it is the desire to accept as genuine Christians those that we believe have not been biblically baptized without diminishing the significance of the sacrament (as more open membership policies seem to do).

Second, on socio-political catholicity, Leithart worries that Baptists cannot give adequate expression to the boundary-destroying inclusivity of the church, which welcomes people from every nation and from every condition of life. He pinpoints this problem by focusing on the exclusion, not only of infants but also of adults with severe mental disabilities from baptism and church membership. If someone

is cognitively incapable of giving a personal profession of faith, are they to be excluded from full participation in the church and the baptismal rite that marks that participation? Leithart examines the proposal of Baptist Jason Whitt, who suggests that, in the case of severely handicapped persons, Baptists should reinterpret what counts as a response to the gospel and should be open to extending baptism to these disabled persons. Leithart heartily agrees but claims that this argument constitutes a distinctively “paedobaptist move.” If baptism is primarily the work of Christ and if cognitive capacities are not a bar to God’s saving work, then why exclude baptism from infants either? He anticipates the potential objection that infants, who will eventually grow into cognizant adults, are not precisely analogous to adults who lack such cognitive abilities. However, Leithart wonders what would become of that dissimilarity if scientific advances could eventually bring healing to such mental disabilities in adults. But is this hypothetical likely? And should we adjust our baptismal practices with regard to infants because of some hypothetical scientific advance? In any event, I would argue that baptism should never be administered to someone without at least some evidence of consent. Perhaps a mentally disabled adult can understand at a rudimentary level the basics of the Christian gospel and express a desire to give themselves to the love of Jesus. Such a person would be more analogous to a young child receiving baptism than an infant. For those who cannot give even this rudimentary consent, baptism should be withheld. But again, on Baptist terms, this does not absolutely exclude them from the saving grace of the gospel. They, too, might possess a baptism of desire, in ways known only to God, and can thus be welcomed into the saving orbit and love of the church without necessarily receiving the confirming sign of baptism.

Finally, on intensive catholicity, Leithart has in mind the all-encompassing claims of the Christian faith “embracing, correcting, redeeming, and transforming every aspect of human existence.” He cites the Reformed divine Herman Bavinck, who criticized the Roman church for introducing a kind of dualism into Christian thought on this point: the Pope might have “hegemony over everything” but when the natural and supernatural are so starkly distinguished the dualism remains. But Bavinck has to admit also that not all Protestants took the Reformation reintegration of nature and grace as thoroughly as certain sectors of the Reformed movement did. Luther and Zwingli, as well as the Anabaptists, allowed the dualism between the church and the rest of society and culture to remain. Baptists are faulted by Leithart for being too closely allied with liberalism and its doctrine of consent. Individual responsibility and accountability crowd out the ways in which humans are enculturated first and foremost by families. It is true that Baptist political thought, with its emphasis on the separation of church and state, is in some ways closer to Lutheran two-kingdoms theology than it is to certain expressions of the Reformed tradition. In any event, the Leithart-Bavinck critique may prove too much in that it excludes Roman Catholics,

Lutherans, and Anabaptists from such “intensive catholicity.” Are the Dutch Reformed the only ones with a rightful claim to catholicity?

Leithart cites Paul Kahn in claiming that liberalism (with Baptists falling in line and perhaps leading the way) “cannot reckon with children.” Leithart admits that Baptists do socialize their children in the faith, but they do so on principles inconsistent with their own political theology. I have already suggested, both in my essay and earlier in this response, that Baptists do believe that their children are holy, in a narrow but important sense: they have the privilege of being socialized within the gospel orbit of the church and are raised in the instruction and discipline of the Lord, even if their confirmation through the baptismal waters awaits their personal profession of faith. This is, no doubt, a different theology of children than the covenantal Reformed one, but it is not a nonexistent or even an inconsistent theology of children.

Leithart also claims that “Baptist theology is inimical to the evangelization of institutions and cultural spheres.” But surely such a claim would come as a surprise to many familiar with the rich heritage of Baptist prophetic witness in the cultural arena. What are we to make of William Carey’s courageous opposition to the practice of suttee in India (in which widows were burned on their husbands’ funeral pyres) or Charles Spurgeon’s denunciation of slavery or Walter Rauschenbusch’s ministry in Hell’s Kitchen or Carl Henry’s call for evangelical engagement with every aspect of culture or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s civil rights activism or the many ways in which contemporary Baptists oppose the evil of abortion? Can these examples just be chalked up to happy inconsistencies with Baptist thought? No, the Baptist insistence on the separation of church and state and the responsibility of the individual does not necessitate a kind of quietistic withdrawal from culture or a failure to bring the claims of the gospel to bear on all of life.

### **Conclusion**

Leithart’s essay helpfully points out some of the pressure points facing any aspirations to Baptist Catholicity. His objections to such a project provide catholic Baptists with an opportunity to express how our own vision can account for a multidimensional understanding of the catholicity of the church. Our answers to these important questions may be different from the ones Leithart envisions, but they are biblically and theologically defensible answers nonetheless. Contra Leithart, I would argue that in every respect, a consistent Baptist can fully affirm the full catholicity of the church, but in our own unique way, as a dissenting movement within the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Catholicity is ultimately grounded in our common faith and life in Christ Jesus and in the Triune God that he reveals. Our sacramental differences may remain until Christ returns, but those differences should not compel us to define out any Jesus-worshipping, Bible-believing, orthodoxy-affirming communion from the church catholic.

## Final Rejoinder to R. Lucas Stamps

BY PETER J. LEITHART

I am grateful for the invitation to participate in this exchange, and for Luke Stamps's illuminating, careful, and generous interactions. Over the centuries, the church has been immeasurably blessed by the gifts and labors of Baptists, and that blessing will only increase as Baptists more fully live out their conviction that the church is one and catholic.

If I may assign myself the role of scorekeeper: Luke scores several points in his response to my essay. He is right to challenge any implication that Baptists are *outside* the “Great Tradition” rather than a protest movement within. I laughed out loud at his question: “Are the Dutch Reformed the only ones with a rightful claim to catholicity?” As a Christian of German descent, I sincerely hope not, though I may be too not-Dutch to matter much. Luke has reason to protest when I object to Baptist theology for not measuring up to the sacramental theology of other Christian traditions (though see below), and his list of Baptist activists and advocates is an impressive one. Fair points all. Still, as self-appointed scorekeeper, I can report I still hold a comfortable lead.

Let me clarify and reinforce a few lines of argument. I claimed Baptists cannot be “chronologically catholic” because their theology requires them to believe baptism has been virtually (because *some* adults were baptized on profession) or wholly (because of a faulty Catholic and Orthodox baptismal theology) absent through most of church history. Luke answers by summarizing the Baptist theology of baptism. That misses the point. The problem is not simply that Baptists view millions of millions of Christians through the centuries as unbaptized. The problem is more fundamental. Baptists must conclude that the church (nearly or wholly) lacked the rite of baptism *as such* for at least a millennium. Baptists will reply that men and women were still regenerated and converted, and so entered the church. That is not the issue. The question is not: Is baptism essential in the experience of individual believers? The question is: Is the practice of baptism a *sine qua non* of churchiness? Through all those long centuries, was there a church for the regenerated and converted to enter?

As I see it, this leaves Baptists at an impasse. If they say baptism is *not* necessary for the existence of the church, they defy a near-universal Christian confession. If they say baptism *is* of the essence of the church, they have to admit the church was all but non-existent for most of its own history. Either answer puts Baptist catholicity in question. Perhaps Luke will see this as another attempt to judge Baptist theology by another tradition, but the tradition in view here is the catholic tradition that makes “baptism for the remission of sins” a matter of credal orthodoxy. Interesting and potentially fruitful as it is, Luke's “baptism of desire” is too fragile to sustain

the weight of these baptismless centuries. Is there a church at all if there is only baptism-of-desire?

Luke's responds to my claim that "Baptist theology is inimical to the evangelization of institutions and cultural spheres" by naming Baptists who have offered "prophetic witness in the cultural arena" and asking whether these can be "chalked up to happy inconsistencies." Fair enough, though many Baptists today would balk at claiming Rauschenbusch as an ancestor. Though it may require qualification, I believe my claim still stands, and can be sharpened by consideration of the long-standing Baptist advocacy of the separation of church and state. I heartily agree with Baptists that the church should be independent of state interference, but that does not mean the state is outside the purview of Christianity. Psalms 2 commands kings and judges above all to "kiss the Son." In an essay on catholicity, John Williamson Nevin bluntly stated, "The imagination that the last answer to the great question of the right relation of the Church to the State, is to be found in any theory by which the one is set completely on the outside of the other must be counted essentially antichristian."<sup>1</sup> I imagine few Baptists would affirm this strong version of "intensive" catholicity.

Inevitably, we return to the question of the relationship of Israel and the church. Defending the Baptist construal of the Old-New relationship, Luke says "one could be born into the Old Testament nation of Israel" but can only be "reborn into the church." On the contrary, boys in ancient Israel weren't members of the covenant people merely by birth. They had to be circumcised, on threat of being cut off from the people (Gen 17:14). No one is born into the church either; all must be reborn "by water and the Spirit." Luke's reference to treaties and the use of force is beside the point. Naming other discontinuities does not address the issue in view. Many peoples lack political autonomy or the authority to conduct war (for example, the Kurds and the Basque). No living nation lacks children.

Luke will protest: Baptist churches do not lack children either! Neither children nor the handicapped are "entirely barred from membership in the company of believers." From Luke's perspective, I continue to judge Baptists because they fail to conform to an alien tradition. That is true; it is also inevitable. Luke does the same, after all, when he says the mark of a Christian "is not baptism per se . . . but personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ" and when he judges my infant baptism a mere "baptism of desire." We are measuring one another by the standards of our own tradition. Convinced as each of us is of our own correctness, what else can we do? So, we zero in, as we must, on the question: which is true?

Over centuries of debate, Baptists and paedobaptists have each developed our own lines of argument, our own standard responses, proof-texts, and counter-texts. We are well armed, one against the other. I have no illusions about convincing anyone in the final paragraphs of a brief essay, especially with the peculiar argument

1. John Williamson Nevin, "Catholicism," *Mercersburg Review* 3 (1851): 14.

I present below. Still, I'll give it a shot. Perhaps it is peculiar enough to breach the fortress, to get under the skin of the question.

Paul says Israel was "baptized" into Moses in the cloud and sea (1 Cor 10:2). For Paul, this is not a loose analogy. Rather, he sketches an entire sacramental economy from events of the exodus: Baptism into Moses foreshadows baptism into Christ, Israel's spiritual food and drink anticipates the Supper, the wilderness is the postbaptismal world through which the church wends her pilgrim way.

Paul extrapolates from the type, inviting us to do the same. Who was baptized? All Israel (*pas* repeated five times in verses 1-4). Does that include infants? Yes (compare Exod 12:37). And the rescue of infants at that mass baptism is a central aim of the exodus. The book of Exodus begins with an Egyptian assault on Hebrew infants (Exod 1:15-22). Yahweh visits Israel in response to their lamentation over their hard labor and their infant sons (Exod 2:23). No wonder Moses insists that the "little ones" be released along with their parents (Exod 10:8-11, 24). At Passover, the Destroyer distinguishes between Egyptian and Hebrew firstborn, including infants; infant sons of Israel were among the saved (Exod 12:23-27) and were finally delivered from pursuing Pharaoh through water. It would be worse than jarring to imagine Israel's infants would be redeemed from Egypt and death, only to be left behind on the Egyptian side of the Sea.

Then we can take a further step: Exodus is the birth story of Israel. The book begins with Israel multiplying rapidly, with pregnancies and births and midwives. Israel becomes so threatening Egypt resorts to a policy of forced infanticide; Pharaoh seeks to abort Israel in the womb of Goshen. Moses's parents protect him, and he passes safely through the same waters that drowned his brothers. According to Isaiah, the new exodus was a birth from Zion (Isa 54:1; 66:8), modeled on the first exodus, Israel's birth through the labor of plagues out the birth canal of the bloody doorways, so that Israel could be baptized in a recapitulation of Moses's own infant water-rescue. The infant baptism of the head sets the pattern for the corporate baptism of Israel, newborn son of Yahweh (compare Exod 4:22-23). The shape of the book and of the events it records encourages us to see the exodus baptism as an infant baptism.

By Paul's typology, all baptism is infant baptism. Every baptism is a beginning, a new birth. Infant baptism is not an exotic deviation from the norm; baptism of older children or adults is the deviation, albeit a legitimate one. Because Exodus is our baptismal story, written for our instruction.



## **Final Rejoinder to Peter J. Leithart**

**BY R. LUCAS STAMPS**

I am grateful to Peter Leithart for his evenhanded response to my essay. Like his opening essay, his response manages to be both charitable and challenging. Leithart accurately recites the major lines of my original argument and registers agreement with it on a number of points. But the thrust of his disagreement with the Baptist position remains intact: that in denying the validity of infant baptism, Baptists have effectively cut themselves off from the catholic church.

One of the challenges that the Baptist faces when trying to articulate his opposition to the paedobaptist position is that there isn't one. There are many. The practice may be the same, but the theologies undergirding it vary, sometimes widely, by tradition. The Reformed paedobaptist argument, built on the architecture of covenant theology, is not the same argument that a Roman Catholic would make. The Roman Catholic argument is not precisely the same argument that a Lutheran would make or an Anglican or a Methodist. Another unique challenge that a Baptist faces in dialogue with Peter Leithart, in particular, is that his own position is rather idiosyncratic. I do not say this as a criticism. It turns out that Leithart's theology of baptism places him in agreement with some of my own criticisms of the Reformed paedobaptist view, at least as it is currently expressed in certain sectors. I do not have the requisite expertise in intramural Reformed debates to label his view properly (does it still represent a version of the Federal Vision, or has it moved beyond that label without leaving behind all of its trappings?). But it is unique indeed for a theologian emerging from the American Reformed tradition to argue for an *ex opere operato* understanding of baptism, for baptismal regeneration, and for apostasy.

On these points, it seems to me that there are several equivocations at work. Leithart wants to embrace baptismal regeneration, but he conceives of this regeneration rather differently than its usual treatment in Reformed theology. He understands baptismal regeneration through the lens of Jesus's use of the term in Matthew 19:28: the renewal of the cosmos at the parousia. He argues that Paul's usage of the term in Titus 3:5 (the washing of regeneration) has this usage in the background. So, to be baptized is to participate proleptically in the final renewal at the end of the age. Leithart admits that this understanding of regeneration is the not common use of the term found in standard Reformed dogmatics; it is not "the irreversible renewal of an elect individual." His view, then, must entail the possibility of apostasy: "Not everyone baptized into the regeneration is eternally saved; not everyone perseveres in new life." But, again, this is not quite a wholesale denial of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. For Leithart, to be regenerated is not necessarily to be one of the elect. So, Leithart's argument for apostasy is not quite the same one to

found in, say, the Wesleyan tradition. But does this reckoning not leave us in much the same place as the *de jure* mixed community of traditional Reformed theology? Leithart's vision of baptism may ensure regeneration (of a sort) for all who receive it, but it does not ensure salvation. So, the church is still mixed—including both the elect and the potentially nonelect—not as a matter of fact (even Baptists admit that people can make false professions and thus be subject to church discipline) but as a matter of principle.

Furthermore, it seems to me that Leithart's re-envisioning of baptismal regeneration actually undercuts something that he wants to affirm. He writes, "No text of the New Testament speaks of baptism as a sign of something that takes place otherwise than in baptism. All texts describe baptism as an effective operative." Well and good, but the New Testament connects baptism specifically to salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, not merely to a contingently possessed participation in the renewal to come that can be forfeited through apostasy. Baptism is baptism for Leithart, but only because it has been (pardon the pun) watered down to signify and seal something other than salvation, "The irreversible renewal of an elect individual."

It seems that Leithart's main worry about the prospects of Baptist catholicity is that it represents an unstable position. Baptist catholics want to embrace the whole church, but by insisting on believers-only baptism, they effectively unbaptize most Christians throughout time and space. He expresses this concern in a series of questions:

Can Baptists remain Baptist as they explore and embrace the overwhelmingly non-Baptist tradition of the church? Can Baptists remain Baptist as their admiration for the church's liturgical tradition grows? Can Baptists remain Baptist as they abandon their modern, individualistic prejudices for a more churchly form of faith? Can Baptists remain Baptist as they increasingly see the story of Scripture as a single story of the one people of God?

The question about "modern, individualistic prejudices" deserves some comment. Both in his opening essay and in his response, Leithart seems to believe that the Baptist movement and modern liberalism are inseparably joined at the hip. As a matter of historical record, it is true enough that the Baptist movement emerged in the early modern period, seventeenth-century England, to be exact. But it should also be noted that the Baptists began registering their disagreement with infant baptism a century and a half before what we know as democratic liberalism was fully formed. In an American context, the Baptist movement underwent a series of modifications that fit more comfortably within such an individualistic context (but, to be fair, so did other denominational traditions). But Baptists in the seventeenth century flourished in a variety of socio-political arrangements from toleration under the Protectorate to persecution under the Clarendon Code, followed by a return to toleration after

R. Lucas Stamps: *Final Rejoinder to Peter J. Leithart*

the Glorious Revolution. At any rate, the Baptist view is not consigned to a purely individualistic conception of the faith. As I tried to demonstrate in my essay and response, Baptists do have a theology of children, even if it is different from the one to be found in paedobaptist traditions. Further, Baptists, at their best, have always held the individual and the community in balance, as evidenced by the disciplinary role played by the gathered congregation and the accountability structures provided by associations and general assemblies.

What about Leithart's other questions? Can Baptists hope to remain Baptist if they go deeper into the Christian tradition with its insistence (at least after about the fourth or fifth century) on infant baptism? It should be noted that no Protestant can determine doctrinal truth simply by counting noses. The mere historical fact that infant baptism went largely unquestioned from the fifth to the sixteenth century does not necessarily settle the debate about who has the better claim to the apostolic practice and, therefore, to the deepest root of catholicity. Baptists, like all Protestants, should be committed to a strong sense of tradition in the theological task. The Vincentian Canon is still a helpful guide: we ought to believe that which has been affirmed in all times and all places by all Christians. Tradition serves as an authoritative guide to biblical interpretation. But tradition is not infallible. Only Scripture is the infallible rule of faith and practice. Tradition is a contested reality, and Protestants, of all Christians, should know this. Leithart's questions could just as easily be adapted and pressed upon all the heirs of the Reformation: can Protestants remain Protestant as they explore and embrace the overwhelmingly non-Protestant tradition of the late patristic and medieval church? Can Protestants remain Protestant as their admiration for the church's medieval scholastic tradition grows? Can Protestants remain Protestant as they increasingly see the story of church history as a single story of the one people of God, even among those who would have denied the *solae* of the Reformation? Here's hoping that they can. And, here's hoping that the Baptists can as well.



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Boda, Mark J., Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, eds. *Riddles And Revelations: Explorations Into The Relationship Between Wisdom And Prophecy In The Hebrew Bible*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 634. New York: T&T Clark, 2018, pp. xvi + 306, \$114, Hardback.**

The rise of intertextual theory in the last five decades has sparked numerous studies into the relationships between various sections of the Hebrew Bible. Most often relationships are drawn from the Pentateuch to other books (e.g. this is what we find in Michael Fishbane's seminal work *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989]). Pentateuchal priority, however, is giving way to considerations of intertextuality throughout the OT and this collection of seventeen essays is proof of that. Following in the footsteps of similar LHBOTS monographs (e.g. Dell and Kynes, eds., *Reading Job Intertextually*, LHBOTS 574, [New York: T&T Clark, 2013]; Dell and Kynes, eds., *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, LHBOTS 587, [New York: T&T Clark, 2015]), this work seeks to provide a survey of soundings for sapiential and prophetic interplay within the OT. These essays adeptly advance the methodological question and bring new light to how both wisdom and prophetic texts may mutually build upon each other.

A brief editorial preface outlines that the goal of this work is a reexamination of presuppositions and methods regarding the relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy. Russell Meek's opening chapter, the true introduction to the book although not listed as such, outlines the history of methodology concerning prophetic and wisdom interconnectedness from Johannes Fichtner's work in 1949 through the present. Meek highlights that a fundamental issue facing the essayists of this volume is the definition of what constitutes wisdom as a genre. This issue, Meek argues, is not insurmountable, however, and despite difficulties in defining what constitutes a *paideia* or wisdom tradition, form criticism enables scholarship to isolate defining characteristics of wisdom literature sufficiently for the purposes of inner-biblical study. Drawing on the work of Hays, Miller, and Leonard, Meek proposes that scholarship should adapt an author-oriented way to define inner-biblical allusion for comparing wisdom and prophetic passages. The remaining essays flow from this opening and are divided into four sections based on their function. They are (1) Methodology, (2) Wisdom Among the Prophets, (3) Prophecy Among the Sages, and (4) Responses.

For sake of brevity, I will highlight a representative essay from each section to demonstrate the editorial and scholarly aim of the volume. From section one, Will Kynes actively questions whether wisdom as a term is a hindrance since it lacks a clear historical definition. He further doubts if form criticism is the correct starting point for proper methodology seeing as it lacks sensitivity toward the myriad of

ways texts can be defined. In section two, William Osborne highlights that Ezekiel uses מַשַּׁל more than any other OT work. This usage is especially found in Ez 26 to demonstrate the futility of Tyre's worldly wisdom in contrast to wisdom found in the fear of YHWH. From section three, Martin Shields shows that Job and his interlocutors' function as sages for the bulk of the story, but it is only when direct special revelation occurs ("prophecy") that the full point of the story is understood. Through an intertext reading with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, the reader is to see that "Job's author knew that accounting for individual circumstances was well beyond the means of even the most exceptional sage without the benefit of divine guidance" (197). From the final section, Tremper Longman evaluates each preceding essay and concludes that the best question raised by this study in the role of divine revelation within sapiential works and calls for a furthering of this scholarly question.

There is much that is commendable in this volume, but it truly shines in its exploration of methodology. For those new to considerations of intertextuality and its application, Meek's essay is an excellent primer that highlights the significant developments in the field over the past seventy years. His ample references to other works will enable readers to identify and engage with many critical volumes in this field. Similarly, Kynes and Dell's essays, both of which probe the problem of genre classification and the depth of intertextuality as a discipline, are tremendous essays that call future scholars toward a more careful and nuanced approach to this topic. Kynes particularly, drawing on the prior work of James Crenshaw, calls scholars to avoid modern and anachronistic categories in genre but instead to engage with categories as the ancient Israelite would have understood them. The middle of the book, while not up to the stellar bar set by the book's opening and concluding sections, still has several excellent essays. In one of the better entries, Eric Ortlund explores the use and subversion of wisdom themes in Isaiah. Ortlund demonstrates that the prophet skillfully highlights the necessity for wisdom to be tied to YHWH and that separated from Him wisdom becomes merely a part of the spiritual blindness within the people. This view of wisdom, as either moral or immoral depending on its source, concurs with what many of the other essays also conclude.

One persistent difficulty facing this work is that the breadth of disciplines it seeks to engage necessarily limits the depth to which it can engage any discipline. This can be seen by a lack of critical discussion on the distinction between diachronic ("author-oriented") and synchronic ("reader-oriented") intertextuality. Lacking such a section, which could have nicely prefaced the work, the reader is left unaware of the deeper questions and possibilities in intertextual study. Additionally, the problems related to category or genre definition, *viz.* the issues raised by Kynes, are present throughout and are not always adequately addressed by specific essays. The problem of category in another sense can be seen in the inclusion of Andrew Steinmann's essay on Daniel as a prophetic book, a classification that is not without some historical

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problems. Such issues though do not materially restrict the value of this volume, rather they sound a clarion call for further and fuller work to be done here.

Overall, this work accomplishes its purpose in calling a new generation of scholarship to consider and explore critical questions on intertextuality between sage and prophet. These essays advance the question of textual influence between wisdom and prophecy as presented from the texts while keeping the biblical text front and center throughout. A rich diversity of opinion is carefully captured by the editors, and the breadth of collegial discussion within is to be commended. Those interested in wisdom literature, prophetic literature, intertextuality, or all of the above, should benefit from the robust and clear scholarship found in this volume.

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**Greidanus, Sidney. *From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to New Creation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018, pp. 213, \$15.99, paperback.**

The author of *From Chaos to Cosmos*, Sidney Greidanus, retired from full-time teaching in 2004 after serving as a professor at Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, and King's College. Greidanus was also the pastor of two churches. One of his most popular publications prior to this book is *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1999). *From Chaos to Cosmos* is one of nine books making up the *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* series published by Crossway.

Greidanus's main purpose in writing this volume is to demonstrate the presence of a progression from chaos to order in the Bible. He tracks these themes from the first verses of Genesis to the last words of Revelation. The main difficulty in this effort is defining the word "chaos" in a way that does not mistakenly equate the chaotic waters of Genesis 1:2 with evil. After all, these waters were a part of God's good creation. Although Greidanus recognizes that some authors avoid the word "chaos" because of its connotations of evil, he chooses to use this term in an attempt to redefine it. By the end of the text, he successfully clarifies his use of the term. However, there are many points early in the book that are unclear, notably whether Greidanus has confused the good chaos that existed as part of creation with the evil chaos that was a result of sin.

Greidanus' first attempt to avoid this difficulty is to adopt a dictionary definition of chaos: the initial nothingness that preceded creation. This perfectly applies to the chaos that existed as part of God's good creation. However, this is not the chaos that is addressed in the rest of the book. Within a few pages of providing this definition, Greidanus begins using the term to refer to the fallout from sin, without explaining that he has expanded on the initial definition. The result is two vastly different options for what is the opposite of chaos: does the book contrast chaos (meaning initial nothingness) with cosmos (meaning ordered creation) or does it oppose chaos

(meaning the evil effects of sin such as pain and suffering) and cosmos (meaning God solving these issues both now and in the eschaton)? Greidanus attempts to do both, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them.

This problem is most evident on page 55, which provides a brief recap of Chapter 1. Greidanus indicates that 100% good chaos only existed in Genesis 1:2, while 100% cosmos was only present in the Garden of Eden prior to sin. After the fall, he suggests that there is a mixture of evil chaos and good cosmos. Thus, the former chaos is good, while the latter chaos is evil. Readers must continually ask themselves which chaos is being addressed throughout the book. A companion article, “10 Things You Should Know about Chaos and Cosmos in God’s Creation,” is available at the Crossway website. It provides brief explanations that clarify much of the issue and could have served as a useful introductory chapter within the book itself.

Aside from the confusion resulting from this terminology, Greidanus has achieved his goal of introducing the reader to the themes of chaos and cosmos in the Bible. These concepts have rarely been addressed from a perspective committed to the inerrancy of Scripture. Particularly in the early 20th century, biblical scholars were quick to associate them with the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) myths that supposedly influenced the biblical authors. In so doing, many abandoned the doctrine of inspiration. Greidanus’s work is a welcome contribution to the field: he notes the similar themes in ANE mythology without prioritizing them in the same way that earlier scholars often did.

*From Chaos to Cosmos* also includes a helpful guide for teaching a Bible study or sermon series on the chaos-cosmos theme. It suggests outlines for studies of various lengths. But the bible study leader who uses this guide should also anticipate questions about how Christians should interact with ANE myths about the chaotic sea and should seek out other resources that will further equip them to answer such questions.

The series title, *Short Studies in Biblical Theology*, informs the reader that its volumes are not exhaustive but rather introductory in nature. This book could serve as the starting point for a reader who is interested in the cloud of negativity surrounding the sea and chaos in the Bible. Those who wish to delve more deeply into the topic, should consult David Tsumura’s *Creation and Destruction* as well as a number of scholarly writings on the relationship between the Bible and ANE myths, such as the section entitled “Genesis 1–11 and Ancient Literature” in Kenneth Mathews’s commentary on Genesis.

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**Hardy II, H. H. *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, pp. 224, \$19.99, paperback.**

H. H. Hardy is associate professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where he has served since 2014 (back cover). Dr. Hardy earned his PhD at the University of Chicago. Alongside teaching, Dr. Hardy is the author of numerous academic publications.

Hardy wrote *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew* to college and seminary students and former students of Hebrew (xiv-xv). The concept of the book developed in response to students questioning the value of learning Biblical Hebrew (xiii). As a resource to college students, the design of the book follows popular Hebrew grammar structures: nouns, adjectives, verbs, particles, and clause structure (xiv). Hardy suggests that Hebrew instructors use this volume as a weekly supplement alongside a Hebrew grammar to motivate student's desires to learn Hebrew (xv).

The thirty chapters are roughly organized the same. Each chapter receives an introduction, overview, interpretation, and recommendations for further reading. The numerous chapters make listing each chapter cumbersome, but students of Hebrew will have a rough layout in mind from previous studies. The book's first three chapters address the Hebrew language and literature, textual criticism, and word studies before entering into the grammar. Pronouns and prepositions receive two chapters each, verbs receive twelve chapters, and the remaining eleven chapters cover topics such as definiteness, the directive Heh, interrogatives, and clauses. The book includes a scripture index that students and pastors will find helpful when looking for specific Scripture helps.

The grammar surveys a sampling from the entire Hebrew Bible. The reader will notice text selections from the Torah, the Nevi'im, and Ketuvim (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings). Each chapter generally examines a single verse from the Hebrew Bible, but some chapters introduced multiple verses and a single chapter with three verses. The author, at times, splits verses, but on each occasion, the author worked on the other half of the verse in the following chapter.

The book fulfills the promises held with its title and meets the objectives set by the author. The book proves to be a supplement for Hebrew grammar, and the 'gems' within the book can motivate students. The author accurately writes to his target audience of current and former students of Biblical Hebrew and professors using the book as a teaching aid.

The book shows the need to learn Hebrew. Each 'gem' highlighted in the book is a verse that is difficult to interpret without understanding Hebrew. In some cases, the author disagrees with the translators of popular English translations. However, Hardy is not using this book as a platform to set matters straight. The reader will

notice that Hardy provides interpretations that also agree with English translations, and that Hardy provides conclusions for pedagogical purposes.

The book has characteristics in common with intermediate grammars, but the book is better thought of as a bridge between an introductory grammar and intermediate grammar. These intermediate features are, perhaps, the most attractive component of the book and are most prominent in chapters 9, 10, and 12. While these chapters focus on the Hebrew verb, they also discuss clausal syntax, a topic not often discussed in detail in introductory grammars. Hardy introduces instructors and readers to narrative analysis, mainline and offline, and relationships between clauses.

*Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew* has two stumbling blocks to instructors and readers using the book. First, the book introduces weak verbs early. An early introduction of weak verbs exposes the fact that the book does not perfectly align with introductory grammar books. For instance, introductory grammars often teach stative and fientive verbs alongside the Qal Perfect, which is often the first verb form taught in introductory grammars. Hardy includes stative and fientive verbs in the eighth chapter on verbs in chapter 17 (105). Second, Hardy's assumption of the student's knowledge may be too much in some instances. For example, the author assumes some textual critical methods are known to the reader in chapter two (9). Also, not all introductory grammars include vocabulary such as transitive and intransitive, which places a burden on the reader who is unfamiliar with these terms (107).

The reader can overcome the difference in order and the author's assumption of previous knowledge through a professor's instruction. However, the reader whose Biblical Hebrew is rusty may find themselves digging up their grammars or running to the library for additional resources to obtain fuller explanations. However, Hardy has included enough information for any reader to utilize and benefit from this book. The chapters include helpful summaries or refreshers of previous material such as a table for derived stems, "Grammatical Categories of Derived Stems" (119). In several instances, Hardy's summaries present information through a set of fresh eyes.

A fresh presentation of information, the 'gems,' and the intermediate grammar material will motivate students. By providing previously learned material to students in an alternative manner, previous material may become clearer and may finally 'stick' for some students. The 'gems' in the book do demonstrate to students the value of learning Hebrew. Every example assists in interpreting the text and will translate into a better understanding of God's Word and better preaching. Finally, intermediate grammar material gives students crucial tools for interpreting Biblical Hebrew. Introductory grammars often leave the student working at the sentence level. Leaving students at the sentence level creates difficulty interpreting passages of the Hebrew Bible. Providing a few examples of clausal syntax will allow students to translate Hebrew better.

*Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew* is recommended both to professors of Biblical Hebrew and students of Biblical Hebrew. The book provides helpful

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grammatical summaries and presents new information close to an intermediate grammar. The verse selection and analysis will surely motivate students to continue their desire to learn the original language of the Old Testament.

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**DeYoung, Kevin. *The Ten Commandments: What they Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2018, 203 pages, \$17.99, Hardback.**

At the time of printing, and according to the back cover of the book, Kevin DeYoung serves as a pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, and also as an assistant professor of systematic theology at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. DeYoung completed his PhD at the University of Leicester.

His book begins with a quick tour of secular feelings about the Ten Commandments. This tour becomes the impetus for posing and answering two questions in the introduction: “Why should we study the ten commandments?” and “Why should we obey the Ten Commandments?” The answers to those questions lead to the following ten chapters, each presenting one commandment. These chapters focus on Christian understanding and application, starting with the first commandment in a chapter he titles “God and God Alone.”

“God and God Alone” begins with an appeal to true faith in the true God, then focuses on how the commandments underpin modern society and moral law (p. 30). From there, he works through the first commandment, examines the Heidelberg Catechism to understand the Decalogue in total, and then backtracks to a list of reasons from Douglas Stuart on why the Israelites kept slipping into idolatry (p. 34). The chapter concludes by applying the first commandment to Christianity: “If you don’t know God in Christ, then you don’t really know God” (p. 38). The second commandment (and chapter) is on “worshiping God in the wrong way” (p. 42). DeYoung illustrates this idea with the Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32 (p. 43). Then, he applies this lesson by concluding the right way to worship God is through Jesus. Jesus is “the fulfillment of the second commandment” (p. 50).

Chapters 3-10 all follow different patterns as well, although each one begins with the commandment and ends with an application. In Chapter 3, the commandment on taking the Lord’s name in vain finds application in Christians living worthy of the term *Christ*. The following commandment finds its fulfillment in the Christian taking a sabbath to rest in Christ (p. 77). DeYoung expands the fifth commandment to mean showing respect for all, including those in government (p. 92). He uses the commands of Jesus concerning anger and loving all people for application of the sixth commandment (p.130-4). Commandment seven is expanded to protecting marriage and family (p. 115), the eighth commandment against stealing becomes a

focus on laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (p. 137-8), and the ninth commandment is fulfilled by “loving your neighbor as yourself” (p. 152). Finally, the tenth commandment (coveting) is transformed into a focus on the already-not yet kingdom. (p. 165-6).

Overall, DeYoung should be commended for producing a hermeneutic that applies each commandment through Jesus’s ministry. This method negates troublesome applications and legalism. One such example is the first commandment where he places “Have no other Gods before me” in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. DeYoung should also be commended for working through New Testament passages and allowing them their full weight in application. One such instance is Paul’s words on keeping holy days and Sabbaths in Colossians 2:16-17. Here, DeYoung concludes, “Sabbath keeping was spiritualized to mean a life of devotion and humility to God” (p. 71). He then redevelops the idea of the Sabbath as an issue of trust: a person must decide if he or she is willing to trust God for the time and work lost while resting during the Sabbath (p. 77).

Unfortunately, weaknesses in method and argumentation temper these commendations. One such shortcoming is his (several) assertions that lack support or notation. For example, he denies henotheism existed in the Old Testament (p. 31) even though several Old Testament scholars would disagree. They do so for several reasons, including the surrounding culture as the Egyptians and those in the Levant were polytheistic at this time (outside of Akhenaton’s reign if one holds to a later date for the exodus). Furthermore, wars between nations equaled conflicts between gods (YHWH vs. Pharaoh as Horus’s representation on earth, YHWH vs. Dagon in the days of Saul and David, and so on). However, DeYoung makes no mention of scholars who agree or disagree with his position.

A second weakness in argumentation is found in his treatment of the New Testament. In one place, he argues Jesus and Paul stripped the Jewish laws from the sabbath, leaving only the original intent. However, he then explains, “The Gospel writers are at pains to demonstrate that Jesus never violated the fourth commandment” (p. 68). The problem falls in the discontinuity of his arguments: in the first century, the fourth commandment is bound in the Jewish laws they sought to strip. Consequently, Jesus stripping away the first-century understanding breaks the commandment in the context of the first-century Jewish mind. This problem comes to the forefront when some Pharisees confront Jesus in Mark 2:23-27. There, Jesus concludes in “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (v. 27). Although arguments can be made for how both statements are true, DeYoung does not explain how that might be.

These two examples of weaknesses, (1) DeYoung’s assumptions and assertions without footnotes, endnotes, or further argumentation; and (2) his discontinuity of arguments illustrate the limited usefulness of this book depending on the target audience. The tone of the book indicates the focus is on the laity. However, his

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writing scores above a PhD reading level (using Flesch-Kincaid) in a few places, making it difficult to use this material in a Sunday school class, Bible study, or even as a background study for the average Christian. Furthermore, the argumentation is difficult to follow as several chapters seem to meander between Old Testament interpretation, theology, New Testament interpretation, and application.

Consequently, in its current format, this book is difficult to recommend to bible students, scholars, or lay leaders. However, at the core of this book are the seeds of a great hermeneutic and an excellent tool for pastors. If a second edition can address the concerns listed above, it would be a good book for training Bible students and laity in applying Old Testament teachings to the Christian life.

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**Hill, Carol, Gregg Davidson, Tim Helble, and Wayne Ranney, eds. *The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth: Can Noah's Flood Explain the Grand Canyon?* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2016, pp. 240, \$26.99 hardback.**

*The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* is a collaboration by eleven authors to address the “needless controversy” surrounding the creation of the Grand Canyon (11). The eleven authors are scientists—geologists, paleontologists, hydrologists, biologists—and some are admittedly Christian while others are non-Christian (11, 232-35). Many authors hold teaching positions in institutes of higher learning, while others serve(d) in various agencies such as the National Weather Service and the Los Alamos National Laboratory. All authors have contributed greatly to their respective fields (232-35).

In *The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* the authors offer a response to scientists who argue that Noah's flood created the Grand Canyon (flood geology). Flood geologist, in keeping with a literal understanding of Genesis 1-11, argue that the Grand Canyon did not form in billions of years. The authors of *The Grand Canyon*, however, contend that saying the earth is billions of years old should not be seen as an attack on the Bible (10). They note that of those “modern professional geologists” who hold to the inspiration of the Bible, “the vast majority also understand the Earth to be billions of years old” (10). The authors assert that flood geologists denying the old age of earth while accepting other parts of science is “essentially a statement that science works only when we agree with the outcome” (11). Therefore, the authors, in opposition to flood geologists, describe the creation of the Grand Canyon according to conventional geology and critique the positions of flood geology.

The book is divided into five parts, each containing two to eight chapters each. In the first part the authors define flood geology, and contrast the difference in

opinion between flood geologists and conventional geologists regarding the geologic time frame assigned to the rock layers. The second part, the largest part of the book, describes how geology works: how sedimentary rocks are formed and how they help geologists understand the past, various dating methods, plate tectonics, various fossil types and how they help geologists interpret the past. With a basic understanding of how geology works, the authors move on to part four where they lay out their argument on how the Grand Canyon was formed. Lastly, in part five, the authors describe the geologic history of the Grand Canyon as seen on the South Kaibab Trail, closing with a critique of flood geology.

*The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* is clearly written for the novice in geology. With that audience in mind, the authors describe with clarity and effectiveness the processes of geology and how the various features of geology are used to interpret the Grand Canyon's past. Each part begins with a brief introduction that ties the preceding part and chapters with the upcoming chapters; the flow of the argument in each chapter, in each part, and in the entire book is never lost to the reader. Each chapter also contains insets in which the author(s) highlight a specific issue with flood geology; the differences between conventional geology and flood geology are clearly discernible in each inset. The book contains many beautiful pictures of various locales in the Grand Canyon, and the maps and diagrams are well designed and informative. *The Grand Canyon* is certainly an easy book to digest.

In a debate that is hotly contested, it is understandable that the authors take a hard stance on certain issues or conclusions. However, in *The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* the authors often overstate their case for conventional geology. For example, in their history on the advent of the creationist movement, the authors conclude that “the common claim that all biblically minded people believe in a young Earth”—when compared with the beliefs of church theologians of years past and the first Renaissance scientists—“has little historical precedence” (24). History shows, however, that the belief in a young earth has a long history among Jewish and Christian students of the Scriptures. In their discussion on how sedimentary rocks give clues to the past, Stephen Moshier and Gregg Davidson seem to equate the Principle of Uniformitarianism and “Christian doctrines of God's consistency and providence” (74). Flood geologists, according to Moshier and Davidson, assert that natural laws of physical and chemical processes must have been different during creation, before the Fall in Eden, and during Noah's flood. This assertion by flood geologists, claim Moshier and Davidson, is a departure from uniformitarianism “and from Christian doctrines of God's consistency and providence” (74). A denial of the Principle of Uniformitarianism does not necessarily mean the denial of God's providence; furthermore, it could be argued that the belief in God's providence and consistency undergirds much of the work by flood geologists despite their rejection of uniformitarianism.

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Moreover, at times the authors exaggerate flood geologists' position on the Bible in relation to science, or demonstrate a misunderstanding of their position. For example, in one inset Gregg Davidson and Wayne Ranney observe that flood geologists claim that all explanations of the Grand Canyon's creation are based on the Bible. Davidson and Ranney respond to flood geologists with some questions: "So where in Scripture do we find references to Noah's flood linked with earthquakes, shifting continents, rising mountains, tsunamis, and mineral-rich ocean vents? . . . The answer is zero. Exactly how, then, is flood geology a biblical model?" (205) While there are examples of flood geologists reading geological phenomena into verses that really do not support such a reading—such as in various Psalms—it would not be accurate to say that flood geologists expect the Bible to speak on continental drift or every geologic event that occurred during the Flood. This critique seems a bit naive on the part of the authors.

In *The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* the authors follow familiar lines of argumentation in defending conventional geology against flood geology; the authors do not advance the debate. However, the book is best served as an introduction to the topic of geology and the Bible from the viewpoint of conventional geology. To that end *The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth* serves its purpose well.

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**Walton, John H. *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017, pp. 302, \$35, hardback.**

John Walton is one of the most well-known and prolific scholars of the Old Testament today, having published several Old Testament introductions, works on the conceptual and contextual world of the Hebrew Bible, and various individual monographs such as the *Lost World* series. He currently serves as a Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School. An offering concerning the theology of the Old Testament from an author with his pedigree is therefore of significant interest.

Walton's approach in this volume is to try to discern the contextual world of the Old Testament authors and then to try to build a bridge from that thought world towards a Christian understanding of these concepts, or what Walton terms as "enduring theology." This methodology has several advantages, with perhaps one of the strongest contributions being the safeguarding against reading New Testament passages and their theological concepts back into the Old Testament, which may not teach those same principles. This is not to say that Walton holds that the Old Testament and New Testament are contradictory to one another; rather, it is to say that Old Testament concepts should not immediately be seen in light of a New Testament

concept with similar terms. Walton raises “the spirit of the Lord” as one example of this danger (281-282).

For Walton, the spirit of the Lord and the Holy Spirit are different concepts, and therefore Scripture should only be seen as teaching about the Holy Spirit if it specifically references the Holy Spirit. Old Testament teaching on the spirit of the Lord should not be conflated with these New Testament principles. In a particularly poignant passage, Walton explores if the spirit of the Lord should be seen as indwelling in its nature. The Holy Spirit indwells, but the spirit of the Lord is never explicitly stated as indwelling. Walton encourages exegetes to avoid reading that New Testament concept of indwelling into these Old Testament Passages. In this way, Walton anchors Old Testament concepts in their context and seeks to bring them forward modern readers as a separate thought-category from similar New Testament ideas. This book utilizes this approach in exploring six major theological categories: Yahweh and the Gods (29), the Cosmos and Humanity (71), Covenant and Kingdom (105), the Temple and Torah (143), Sin and Evil (183), and Salvation and Afterlife (225). Walton concludes with several helpful lists discerning certain New Testament teachings he feels are not in the Old Testament at all (such as the Trinity, 286-291) as well as some concepts about God that would be unknown if one did not have the Old Testament (such as a theology of Creation or the concept of people as made in the image of God, 291-294).

These concluding lists are an excellent synecdoche for the real strength of this book, which is a sharpened understanding of how the Old and New Testaments relate to one another. One of the strongest portions of the work is the chapter on Sin and Evil, in which Walton argues that the Old Testament concepts of sin, evil, satan, and demons are very different than common New Testament-informed understandings of the same. The Old Testament does not teach Original Sin as such nor does it hold that satan or a demon took an active role in human events (215). Walton offers his readers much wisdom by demanding a clear epistemology: is a concept or definition actually taught in the Old Testament or New Testament, or is that concept or definition something from the conceptual world of either testament, or is it perhaps a product of later interpreters? A too-hasty unification of these ideals will cause the two Testaments to appear to disagree where they may not actually. The concept of “evil” is different in the ancient Near Eastern thought world as compared to the Hellenistic thought world, which informed the New Testament, yet Walton does not feel that the New Testament definitions invalidate Old Testament teachings. At the same time, he shows that the Old Testament concept of evil offers insight to interpreters in areas left unexplored by New Testament passages. “The New Testament offers more specificity theologically by factoring Christ into those purposes, but the Old Testament provides the basis on which this specificity is built.” (217) By sharpening the differences between the Old and New Testament, Walton is able to present his

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readers with a broader, deeper, truer understanding of each and the unified picture of God that they present.

While the primary strength of the work is the sharpened view of the differences and therefore the unity between the Old and New Testaments, the other major strength is in the understanding of the underlying concepts of temple and Torah, explored at length in chapter five. Far too often, attempts at understanding Old Testament Law from a Christian point of view are either too reliant on external, non-textual categorizations (such as the divisions between civil, ceremonial, or moral aspects of the Law) or primarily interested in the Law as it intersected the lives of Jesus and/or Paul (such as the modern discussion regarding the New Perspective on Paul). Walton, in my view, gives the most satisfying, approachable window into the Temple and Torah by finding their unifying role as arbiters of sacred space. For Walton, the idea of sacred space has similarities with order and morality, though each of those are more properly understood as the end results of sacred space rather than producers of it (143-144). Israel was different than the surrounding culture by understanding their purpose as partners with God in bringing His sacred space into the world (155). Where the ancient temple was often conceived of as a sacred space because of the presence of a god there, the Old Testament extends that space from the temple to the entire cosmos (146-147). The Law, then, served as directives to help maintain access to these sacred spaces as well as the way that God's presence would be reflected to the outside world. "However, the Torah was contingent on the temple, not the other way around." (157) This focus the Law has on maintaining Israel's status as a covenant people, marked out as holy, who live in proximity to sacred space is unlike other ancient Near Eastern people (159). Walton finds this coidentification the covenant people have with Yahweh as one of the enduring teachings of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, though, the covenant people are defined by a people group given holy status through Christ and the New Covenant. The purpose remains: to coidentify with Christ and to bring His presence and purposes into the world (174). The bridge that Walton builds from the Old Testament conceptual world to a modern understanding of the community of Christ is a very sturdy one.

This volume is excellent. Walton's lifetime of study is brought to bear on this monograph, giving it a depth not often found in a work of this length. His particular point of view is also refreshing, as Walton chooses to focus on concepts that other theologies of the Old Testament don't discuss in depth or see as central. The strength of his argumentation is such that readers will find themselves wondering why these categories aren't seen as the central thrust of Old Testament theology! He finds a way to give voice to the unique contribution of the Old Testament while not totally sundering it from the New Testament nor subsuming its message and concepts to later New Testament ones. Time spent with this work will help a reader appreciate the whole voice of Scripture as a unified view into the purpose, nature, and character of God while at the same time better understanding the diversity of the theology

contained in its pages. This is a task that interpreters spend lifetimes on; few have succeeded as well as Walton. This book is recommended for all serious Old Testament students.

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**Barrick, William D. *Understanding Bible Translation: Bringing God's Word into New Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019, 248 pp, \$21.99, paperback.**

All eyes were transfixed on the speaker who ascended the lectern. As he opened the sacred book, the hushed crowd rose together as if on cue. After a blessing the standing throng uniformly put their faces in the dust. The Word of God was about to be read! But the reading sounded strange, most struggled to understand the foreign words. Expectant hearts began to grow disillusioned until another man stepped forward to translate the text into the common tongue (Neh 8:1–8). Thus began the history of Bible translation, from Mosaic Hebrew to the Aramaic of the exiles.

Bill Barrick offers readers a window into this history as well as the intricacies and importance of translating God's Word into the common languages of the world. Barrick's resume makes him an excellent guide for such a journey: 15 years as a Bible translator in Bangladesh, 50 years of teaching Hebrew and Old Testament, and a contributor to multiple English Bible translations (ESV, NET, LEB). Having taught for many years at The Master's Seminary, he currently serves as the OT editor for the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series with Logos/Lexham Press. He is currently writing the *Genesis* volume for that series, having previously written a commentary on *Ecclesiastes* for the Focus on the Bible series (Christian Focus, 2011). He has also contributed to numerous other works, including *The Inerrant Word* (Crossway, 2016), *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Zondervan, 2013), *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Master Books, 2008). He serves as an elder in his local church and regularly co-leads creation oriented rafting trips through the Grand Canyon. His experience in the local church, academic scholarship, and field Bible translation offers him a unique vista from which to present the principles and priority of Bible translation.

Barrick begins by going backwards into the history and priority of "common language" Bible translations. Beginning with the earliest translations, he discusses the significance of the Septuagint [LXX] (a translation of the OT into the Koiné or "common" Greek of the period). This translation not only served as 3/4 of the Bible for most of the early church population, but it also became the basis for many other early translations (p. 26). Also of note, the Syriac Peshitta (meaning "simple" or "common") and the Latin Vulgate (meaning "vulgar" or "common") follow the LXX approach of translating God's Word into the common language of a people, not a highly formalized dialect inaccessible to many readers (p. 27). Barrick then goes on to

draw out the significance of this issue in the Reformation era where Bible translation into the common languages of Europe helped to fuel that movement. He concludes that a good translation should be accurate, understandable, and clear (p. 31).

Throughout the book, Barrick is careful to point out that translation and exposition of the text are not the same tasks. A good translation serves expositors and teachers, it does not replace them. He writes, “Translation does not eliminate the need for exposition and teaching. Nor does translation ignore the responsibility of the reader of God’s Word to obey what they do understand. . . . Difficult as it might be, translators must allow the biblical text to force readers to think, rather than to be lazy in their approach to the text” (p. 38). His comments echo the apostle Paul who wrote to Timothy, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Tim 2:7, ESV).

After the first two chapters, much of the discussion turns to concrete translation principles and examples, mainly from English translations. He discusses how issues of semantics [ch. 3], simplicity [ch. 4], and theology [ch. 5] impact a translation. He summarizes his approach stating, “Sound translation principles require transferring the exact meaning of the original text into the receptor language while maintaining as much of the original wording as possible” (p. 64). He then goes on to analyze in detail how various English translations approach Psalm 23, Proverbs 8:1–11, and Romans 6:8–14. He concludes, “Essentially literal Bible translations provide superb versions for in-depth Bible study, but might not always speak directly to the heart of someone encountering the Bible for the first time—especially in a context characterized by biblical illiteracy” (p. 156). In other words, different translations have different purposes. It is important for readers, especially those with choices among translations, to understand the usefulness of each approach.

Barrick directs this book mainly to church leaders and interested church members, but one of the final chapters provides some helpful clues as to what makes a good translator. His catalog of skills and attributes can assist both an interested reader and an observant pastor looking for potential missionary candidates. And while Bible translation can appear to be a very human task, Barrick recognizes the spiritual dimension of the work in a detailed call to prayer (p. 219). He concludes the book by reflecting on the significance of this dimension of missionary work, “Long after the Bible translator or translation team has completed their work . . . the Bible continues on to produce spiritual fruit. Its words convert, instruct, encourage, strengthen, guide, and comfort generations of believers yet unborn. No other book possesses such power and potential” (p. 220).

I appreciate the measured and precise approach that the author brings to this topic. He bridges important conversations between the communities of scholarship, missions, and the church. His philosophy of translation strikes a winning balance, “Sound translation principles require transferring *the exact meaning* of the original text into the receptor language while maintaining as much of *the original wording*

as possible” (p. 64, emphasis added). In other words, interpretation is a necessary part of the translation process, but a good translator will stay as close to the *words* of the original as possible. This conviction flows from an understanding of how the Bible functions in the life of the church and the individual believer. The NT clearly ordains the role of “pastor-teacher” in the life of the local church (Eph 4:11–12). Thus, a proper translation will seek to equip these leaders for their teaching ministry as they equip the local body (cf. p. 38). While Barrick recognizes that more “dynamic” translations may have a role to play in evangelism and church life, he posits that Christian growth in biblical and spiritual knowledge will lead them to desire a more direct translation for study and teaching (p. 156).

Barrick also does well in illuminating the theological nature of the task of Bible translation. While writing as a moderating voice, I appreciate that Barrick still takes a clear stand on the inerrancy of the original writings of the Old and New Testaments (p. 217). This conviction on inerrancy, echoing the Chicago Statement, impacts other assertions throughout the book. He writes, “Translators must not add meaning, nor must they subtract any of the meaning. The goal should be to accurately and fully translate the text into its receptor language. . . . The accuracy of one’s theology must rest upon the original text [i.e., the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts]” (p. 120–121). This leads him to emphasize the principles of clear and accurate translation (p. 156). As Hill et. al. write, “[Bible] translators are not as free to adjust the text to the audience’s context as they can in other retellings. . . . Bible translation is a genre which raises the expectation that the meaning the audience can understand from the translation will have a high degree of resemblance to the meaning the original author intended to communicate” (Bible Translation Basics [Dallas: SIL, 2011], p. 110–111). So, while a translation team must be concerned that their translation is understandable and natural in style, theological convictions about the very words of the text demand detailed attention to the words of the apostles and prophets.

No native speakers of biblical Hebrew and Koiné Greek remain on the earth. Thus every Christian today is somehow dependent upon the faithfulness of Bible translators through the ages. Bill Barrick proves to be an excellent guide into the history, significance, and principles of this historic task. I would highly recommend this book for pastors and church leaders who want to understand better how the translation they depend upon weekly came into being. It is also incumbent upon those of us with such a wealth of translations and Bible knowledge to share this with the over 1,600 languages who still have nothing translated, and the over 3,300 who only have partial Bibles. Imagine doing church ministry without the “whole counsel of God” in a language you know best! Barrick’s contribution goes a long way in advancing our appreciation for our own Bibles and spurring us to face the task unfinished.

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**Gladd, Benjamin L. *From Adam and Israel to The Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God. Essential Studies in Biblical Theology.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, 182 pp. \$22, paperback.**

Benjamin Gladd is Associate Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS. His published works include similar topics such as this volume under review, particularly his collaborative work with G. K. Beale. Readers interested in these topics should consult G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd. *Hidden But Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Divine Mystery.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2014.

In this new volume, Gladd states that *From Adam and Israel to The Church* examines the figure of Adam, Israel, Christ and the Church through the lens of the image of God (p. 4). He asserts that the image of God should be understood in the offices of king, priest, and prophet, and then he demonstrates how Adam and Eve fill these offices (pgs. 12-19). Like his previous work, on this point his analysis depends largely upon Eden as temple. Chapter two examines how the fall of humanity led to the abuse of the authority that comes from the image of God. In response, he introduces the concept of an anti-image expressed in the anti-king, the anti-priest, and the anti-prophet (pgs. 27; 33). Chapters three and four move from Adam to Israel, and here Gladd identifies Sinai as a three-part temple parallel to Eden (p. 39). This connection provides background for Israel as king, priest, and prophet. Chapter four also shows that being the people of God should not be understood in purely ethnic terms in the Old Testament (pgs. 52-54).

Chapters five, six, and seven look at Jesus as king, priest, and prophet. Chapter five discusses Jesus as king by introducing the concept of inaugurated eschatology, the idea that Christ's resurrection is a "sample" of the work God is going to finish at the end of time (pgs. 76—78). Jesus as priest is typified by the temple cleansing (pgs. 95-97), with the Great Commission functioning as a promise to make the whole world a temple (pgs. 99-101). Gladd uses the wilderness temptation as a framing device for Jesus' prophetic ministry. Specifically, Jesus's usage of the Old Testament displays his trust in the Father in ways that Adam and Israel failed (pgs. 103-109).

Chapters eight, nine, and ten cover the Church as king, priest, and prophet. Gladd uses the appointment of the Twelve, Pentecost, Paul in Romans 16 and Ephesians 6, and Revelation 7 to show the similarities and differences in the royal responsibilities of Israel and the Church (pgs. 117-127). Chapter nine emphasizes the presence of God in the Church and the accompanying call for holiness. This communicated holiness is the role of the Church as priests. Gladd interprets Pentecost and the expansion in Acts as the reversal of the partial obedience of Adam and his descendants. This contrast is most explicit with his comparison of Babel and Pentecost (pgs. 144-148). The chapter ends with an overview of the perspectives on spiritual gifts (153). Chapter eleven looks at the people of God in the final state. Using Revelation, Gladd points out several images used to describe the people of God and the anti-people of God

(pgs. 157-162). He also examines how kingship, priesthood, and prophethood will function in the new creation (pgs. 162-167). Chapter twelve highlights the key themes Gladd wants the reader to take away from the book: membership in Israel is by faith rather than ethnicity, the significance of life come from reflecting the image of God, Christians should support a just society, Christians should encourage proper worship of God alone, and Christians should value the commands of God (pgs. 171-173)

Gladd's book does not intend to break new ground in the discussion of the people of God. The work is intended to be a general survey of a theme across the Bible from a Reformed perspective. Each chapter is clear and readable, and the author provides helpful bibliography for the themes discussed in each chapter. The works references are from a relatively narrow perspective, but the works cited have a generally broad bibliography. There can be a tendency within biblical theology to read the Old Testament exclusively in light of New Testament use. The treatment of the Genesis narratives shows particular concern to avoid this problem. The discussion of the temple motif of Genesis 1-3 summarizes the main points of the argument.

The book hinges on two interlocking components. The image of God is identified with the classical offices of Christ. Chapter one makes a compelling case that Adam and Eve were kings, priests, and prophets. Likewise, it makes the case that they hold the image of God. The connection between the image of God and the kingly office fit well. However, the connection of the image of God to priest and prophet was tenuous. If the reader accepts the connection between the image of God and the remaining offices, the argument of the book will be convincing. If the reader does not accept those claims, the force of the remainder of the book will be weaker.

A second criticism relates to the structure of the book. The structure of a book or argument matters because it may reflect a particular emphasis of the author. It also influences how a reader understands the work in relationship to the parts and other related works on the subject. Given the parallelism of roles is a key part of the argumentation, the structure of this book is essential. The author appeals obliquely to "theologians" explaining the divine image in these three motifs (p. 12). Eusebius uses the order of priest, king, and prophet (*Hist. eccl.* 1.3.8-9). The Westminster Shorter Catechism uses prophet, priest, and king (Questions 23-27). There is no in text explanation of this order. Hans Walter Wolff's *Anthropology of the Old Testament* is the only author cited in the section where such a justification occurs. Wolff only supports the idea of ruling as the image of God in the place cited. Chapter eleven uses the order of priest, king, and prophet with no explanation of why the previous structure does not work in the discussion of the final state. A discussion of the structure and relationship of the offices would strengthen this book as a whole. *From Adam and Israel to the Church* is a good example of biblical theology accessible to the layperson or useful in a college course on Biblical anthropology. This book is a promising initial installment for the series.

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**Schreiner, Patrick. *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*. Short Studies in Biblical Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, pp. 159, \$14.99, paperback.**

Patrick Schreiner is assistant professor of New Testament at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. In addition to *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, Schreiner has published *The Body of Jesus* and other articles and essays. *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* is part of Crossway Publisher's Short Studies in Biblical Theology series. According to the series editors, "The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers" (p. 11). Each volume is written with readers who have no theological training in mind.

Schreiner defines the kingdom of God as "the King's power over the King's people in the King's place," a definition similar to those put forth by other evangelical scholars. While recognizing all three elements are essential, Schreiner expresses concern that evangelicals often focus on the King's power or rule (p. 15). The neglect of people and place has often led to the abstraction of the kingdom out of its narrative framework. While never ignoring the King's rule, Schreiner emphasizes the people and place of the kingdom throughout his book. By defining "the kingdom of God" as the King's power, people, and place, Schreiner is able to argue that the theme of kingdom is present in Scripture "from the beginning to the end" (24).

Schreiner follows a Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament and offers summary statements seeking to encapsulate each division's (Law, Prophets, and Writings) message concerning God's kingdom (p. 24). Schreiner summarizes the Law's teaching on the kingdom as "reviving hope in the kingdom." Contrary to what is often thought, the theme of kingdom did not originate with Jesus in the Gospels or even with the rise of the Israelite monarchy. Instead, as Schreiner argues, the theme of kingdom originates in the initial chapters of Genesis. God created (power), Adam and Eve (people), to be his king and queen over creation (place). This kingdom plan quickly becomes corrupted, however, and thus hope in this kingdom must be revived. This revival of hope in the kingdom comes from God's promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), his creation of a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6), and that kingdom's (often tenuous) journey to the Promised Land. Schreiner summarizes the Prophets as "foreshadowing the kingdom." Although God brings (power) Israel (people) into the Promised Land (place), this is not an inauguration of the kingdom but a foreshadowing of the true kingdom. Furthermore, the prophets place faith in a coming Davidic ruler who will realize the kingdom. Schreiner summarizes the Writings as "life in the kingdom." These books give a poetic picture of life in the kingdom" (67). "Life in the kingdom" is established by acquiring wisdom, fearing the Lord, and suffering righteously. The Writings conclude by anticipating a return from exile led by the messianic king.

Turning to the New Testament, Schreiner argues that the four Gospels each focus on a different element of the kingdom. Matthew focuses on the King's place; Mark focuses on the King's power; Luke focuses on the King's people; John focuses on life in the kingdom. Acts is framed by references to the kingdom (Acts 1:3–6; 28:23, 31) and shows the spread of the kingdom community from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Rome). Although the kingdom terminology is not prevalent in the New Testament Epistles, the idea forms the narrative framework underlying them. For instance, Paul recognizes Christ as king (Col 1:15–20; Phil 2:6–11), describes how the covenant community enters the kingdom, encourages readers to share in the rule of the king, and looks forward to the rule of the king. Schreiner summarizes Revelation as achieving the kingdom's goal. The opposition to the king's power is defeated. The people of the kingdom are gathered to the king, and the place of the kingdom is revealed. Schreiner concludes by emphasizing the importance of the cross for the kingdom. He concludes by presenting two stories (Passover and the convicts crucified with Jesus) emphasizing the importance of the cross.

Schreiner makes a compelling argument for the centrality of kingdom within every part of Scripture. Without a doubt, his presentation of God's kingdom as consisting of power, people, and place will aid readers in seeing the pervasiveness of this important topic in Scripture. Additionally, his stress on the narrative foundation of the kingdom theme will help readers who tend to abstract much of the Bible's message into a sovereignty lesson.

There were a couple of things which I felt could have been potentially misleading to the intended audience. First, although I am not an expert in the Gospels, Schreiner's depiction of each Synoptic Gospel as emphasizing a particular aspect of his kingdom definition felt somewhat contrived to me. To his credit, Schreiner does acknowledge that each Gospel contains all three aspects and that his presentation was one of emphasis, but since this is the case, I think it would have been more effective to show how each Gospel contained a full expression of the kingdom as Schreiner defined it.

Second, given that this series is directed towards an audience with no theological training, I wonder how necessary it was for Schreiner to emphasize the importance of people and place over power. Schreiner certainly does not ignore the power/rule aspect of the kingdom, but he does seem to favor people and place on multiple occasions. While I would agree with his general assessment that power is often emphasized at the expense of people and place (especially in some evangelical circles), I am not certain that addressing this imbalance in a book directed to a non-theologically trained audience will prove to be helpful. On a related note, in a few places, Schreiner seems to assume more theological background from his audience than he should. One instance I have in mind is when he refers to Adam and Eve as "priest" (38). Schreiner (rightly) shows that Adam and Eve are depicted as royal figures (30–31) but does not argue for their "priestly" role. He does mention that

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they were to “work” and “keep” the garden, which is an important indicator of their priestly role, but he does not make this connection explicit.

Despite these critiques, there is no reason to deny that Schreiner has written a tremendously helpful guide to the theme of kingdom within the Bible for the theological non-specialist. Average church members and even many theologically trained pastors (especially those who have abstracted this theme) would benefit from this study.

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**Beers, Holly. *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, pp. 172, \$17.00, paperback.**

Dr. Holly Beers is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Westmont College, having previously taught at Bethel Seminary and North Central University. Beers is a Luke-Acts scholar, and earned her PhD in New Testament from the London School of Theology. Adding to her list of publications is the current book under review, *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman*. This book is part of InterVarsity’s “A Week in the Life” historical-fiction series, which aims to illuminate the world of the New Testament. Other works in this series examine the week in the life of Corinth, the fall of Jerusalem, Rome, Ephesus, a slave, and a centurion.

Beers’ volume follows the daily life of a woman, Anthia, throughout one week of her life, with each of the seven chapters being told from the perspective of one day of the week. This creative work of historical-fiction reads like a captivating novel, as characters develop, interact with one another, and are exposed to Paul’s teaching about Jesus—who presents a challenge to the cultural worship of Artemis. Readers gain insights on what life was like for first-century women, as Beers highlights Anthia’s pregnancy, parenting, marriage, work, and social status. Beers also aptly shows what it would have been like for a community to hear the teaching of Jesus for the first time, and also how early followers of the Way would have interacted with one another across social barriers. The setting of the book is inspired by Acts 18-20 and 2 Corinthians 11-14.

One of the strengths of the book is its engaging format. Written as a novel, Beers draws the reader into Anthia’s life and thus exposes the reader to the way in which first-century Greco-Roman women experienced their world. To offer additional clarity, numerous descriptive sidebars provide specific information on a variety of topics. These topics include: abortion, infanticide, Artemis, marriage, poverty and subsistence, urban housing, sanitation, medicine and physicians, textiles, teeth, dyeing, cosmetics, laundry and fullers, perfumery, alcoholic beverages, honor and shame, the terrace houses, and patronage. The sidebars range from a brief paragraph

to several pages, and occasionally include pictures. This format of a novel with brief clarification sidebars is both highly readable and also nicely informative.

Through this inviting format, Beers illuminates the world of the New Testament for her readers, showing how the first century would have been experienced by regular people. The reader learns of the dangers and fears surrounding pregnancy, the reality and regularity of spousal abuse, the daily fact of poverty and hunger, and the barriers of class difference and social structures. Along with learning about the daily life experienced by those in the era of the New Testament writings, the reader also gains insights into the ways in which early Christians operated. The reader is invited into the gatherings of the early church, and witnesses how they prayed, healed, read scripture, cast out demons, and cared for one another. Particularly helpful Beers' description of how social barriers were broken in early Christianity. The wealthy violated societal expectations in their care for all people—rich and poor alike—as Christian brothers and sisters of all classes broke bread together, nurturing each other and the poor. This formation of a new family of followers of the Way challenged existing social structures and worship of local gods. The novel format of the book adds a slight touch of suspense, leading the reader to wonder how Anthia will respond to hearing the new teaching presented by Paul, and also whether or not Anthia's husband will welcome the kindness of the Christian community.

The biblical and theological student should remember that this book is a novel—not an academic textbook. As such, the academic audience should feel the freedom to simply read and *enjoy* this book, while gleaning insights about first-century women and culture along the way. Students should enjoy the story-telling nature of the book, and the way in which it puts flesh to knowledge—remembering that women are *real people*, not merely topics to be studied. Though not an academic or technical book, this book is helpful for students of the New Testament to better understand the realities of how women experienced life in the Greco-Roman world. The academically-inclined reader will also be pleased by Beers' useful bibliography of additional sources. This bibliography can point the reader who desires additional academic resources to further materials on the topics discussed in the book, including resources on Greco-Roman women, early Christian meetings, Artemis, and economic and social systems.

Overall, Holly Beers' book *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman* is highly recommended. The lay reader and academician will enjoy a leisurely Sunday afternoon read of this narrative, as Beers creatively weaves academic insights into this novel. This book will appeal to readers interested in the New Testament, in topics related to women, and the culture of the Greco-Roman world, along with readers who enjoy reading a good story.

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**Keener, Craig S. *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016, pp. 448, \$29.99, paperback.**

Craig S. Keener (PhD, Duke University), F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, is one of the most widely read and respected New Testament scholars today. He has continually published a number of important commentaries, books and essays, particularly concerning the study of the Holy Spirit – these include *Gift and Giver* (Baker Academic, 2001), *Miracles* (Baker Academic, 2011), *Spirit Hermeneutics* (Eerdmans, 2016), *Between History and Spirit* (Wipf and Stock, 2020) and, not least, his *magnum opus* four-volume exegetical commentary on *Acts* (Baker Academic, 2012-2015). Keener's *The Mind of the Spirit* is another academic accomplishment pertaining to the study of the Holy Spirit, with special reference to Paul's understanding of the transformed human mind. The main aim of the book is to use the concept of mind – in particular, the mind transformed by and in Christ – found in the Pauline passages to explicate how believers' righteousness (in terms of one's status or relationship with God) and/or moral transformation actually take place in the life of believers (pp. xv-xvi).

Chapter 1 explores Paul's argument concerning the corrupted pagan mind in Romans 1:18-32. Despite ancient philosophers' repetitive call for rational mastery over passions, according to Keener, the supposedly wise pagan mind became subject to passions, corrupting nature's evidence for God, rejecting the knowledge of God, and misconstruing reality, particularly human purpose and identity (pp. xvi, 1, 28-29); as a result, the Gentiles were given to idolatry and sexual immorality. However, for Paul even the Jewish mind enlightened with the Torah without the Spirit eventually remains the mind of the flesh – Keener dwells on this topic further in chapter 3. Chapter 2 discusses “the mind of faith” (6:11) or “the new way of thinking in Christ,” which comes from one's new identity in Christ. For Keener, Rom. 6 consists of two elements, namely, “indicative” and “imperative.” The indicative element is “Christ's death and resurrection, historically accomplished events” or “the new reality” that needs to be embraced with faith or to be “reckoned” with “(6:11: ὑμεῖς λογίξεσθε ἑαυτοὺς; ‘reckon yourselves’ – a cognitive action)” (pp. 31, 32, 44, 45, 53). The imperative element invites the believers who have been righted with God through faith to more fully share and live out God's perspective on their union with Christ. Chapter 3, the longest chapter of the book, revisits the topic of the fallen mind and explores “life under the law without life in Christ” in Rom. 7:15-25 (p. 56). Keener's basic assumption is that Rom. 7:7-25 is not Paul's current experience as a Christian but rather “Paul's graphic dramatization of life under the law” (p. 112). This passage thus describes “the more knowledgeable Jewish mind” or “the religious mind informed by God's righteous requirements,” in contrast to the pagan mind in Rom. 1:18-32

(p. xvi). This religious mind enlightened by the law is “all the more frustrated by passions, because it knows right from wrong yet is unable to silence passion” (p. xvi).

Chapter 4 deals with “the mind of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5-7), juxtaposed with “the mind of the flesh” in chapter 3. As opposed to “the mind of the flesh” that is subject to passions, the mind of the Spirit – that is, the new way of thinking in Christ – is able to fulfill God’s will because this mind is guided, motivated and empowered by God’s Spirit that now dwells in believers. The frame of mind involving the Spirit is characterized by life and peace. This peace can refer to both the individual tranquil mind and to communal tranquility (pp. 135-141). Chapter 5 continues with a similar theme, “a renewed mind,” in Rom. 12:1-3 in which Paul exhorts his hearers to renew their minds, “according to the standards of the coming age instead of the present one,” so that “[s]uch a mind leads one to devote one’s individual body to the service of the larger body of Christ” (xvi). Chapter 6 explores “the mind of Christ,” (1. Cor. 2:15-16; 2 Cor. 3:18) that sheds light on how “the indwelling of God’s Spirit shares with the spiritually mature... a measure of God’s own wisdom” and “a foretaste of eschatological reality” (xvi). Keener’s basic claim is that “true wisdom is found in the cross,” and “[a]n increasingly fuller understanding of the character of Christ crucified could increasingly transform [one’s] character, conforming [him or her] to Christ’s glorious image” (p. 216). Chapter 7 briefly touches on the cognitive themes in Philippians: 1) divine peace guards the minds casting their worries to God (4:6-8); 2) a Christlike mind leads to serving one another (2:5); and, lastly, 3) those of citizens of heaven look to the matters of the heavenly, not of the earthly. The eighth and final chapter carries on the last theme of Philippians, “the heavenly mind,” with special reference to Col. 3:2. As opposed to the abstract and transcendent nature of heaven for ancient philosophers, the heavenly focus is clearly the exalted Christ for Christians. Contemplating Christ will result in Christlike character and daily living in accordance with his character.

Unquestionably, the book is well-researched and compelling, possibly paving a new path in Pauline studies. *The Mind of Paul* is unique and special in its contribution to Pauline anthropology, for no other scholars have yet given extensive attention to Paul’s view of the mind, as Keener does, especially against the backdrop of a wide selection of ancient sources. Consulting with a plethora of Greek, Roman and Jewish sources, on the one hand, enables readers to delve deeper into the logic of Paul’s argument concerning the notion of mind, in comparison with other ancient philosophical ideas. On the other hand, Keener successfully shows Paul’s distinctive view of the nature of the human mind, in contrast to the ancient philosophers’ perception of the human mind.

His detailed exegetical and theological reflection offers many practical (e.g., pastoral and psychological) insights into the human mind according to Paul. Just as Keener himself predicted in his postscript, the book will “challenge the [socially constructed] common divide in many Christian circles between emotional religion

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(related to US frontier revivals and earlier mystics) and intellectual religion (historically related to academic training)” (p. 257). Keener’s attempt to “surmount such historically and socially formed forced choices” (p. 258), despite some foreseeable disagreements and controversies related to the issue, will awake a responsive chord in the hearts of those who are serious about the call to love another (Rom. 13:8-10) despite the differences on secondary matters (14:1-23).

Furthermore, Keener’s interdisciplinary call to use Pauline thought to contribute to Christian psychology is unique and refreshing (pp. 260-261). Although such an interdisciplinary endeavor can be extremely challenging – for there are a “vast array of theories of counseling and psychotherapy today” (p. 260), an attempt towards an interdisciplinary dialogue between biblical studies and psychology will certainly benefit those interested in Christian psychology.

Overall, Keener has written another helpful and informative book concerning the study of the Holy Spirit, with his special reference to key Pauline passages. With his exegetical, charismatic, multidisciplinary and pastoral concerns seen throughout the book, church and academy alike will certainly benefit from the book. I highly recommend this book for students with a particular interest in the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian mind.

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**Tonstad, Sigve. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, 398 pp, \$65 hardcover, \$29.72, paperback.**

Sigve Tonstad is a well-established scholar whose work in biblical studies explores issues of theodicy, hope, and ecological hermeneutics. In addition to the volume under review, his English works include *The Scandals of the Bible* (Pittsburg: PA, Autumn House Pub. 1996); *Saving God’s Reputation* (New York: NY, T&T Clark, 2006); *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs: MI, Andrews University Press, 2009); *The Letter to the Romans: Paul Among the Ecologists* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 2017); *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense* (Eugene: Oregon, Wipf & Stock, 2016), and numerous articles. Tonstad is a research professor at Loma Linda University. His background as a physician has made his study of Revelation as a book of healing (Rev. 22.3) a personal interest.

*Revelation* is a new addition to the Paideia commentary series by Baker Academic. As with most commentaries on this challenging book, Tonstad includes the requisite introduction to Revelation. He discusses topics which give the reader a foundation on which to build an interpretation of the book. Among these are: questions of authorship, the relationship between Ancient Roman and Revelation’s visions, interpretative stances (preterist, futurist, historicist), genre, date, and the structure of the book.

Tonstad divides the remainder of his book into eleven chapters, following the contours of Revelation. He sees the units of Revelation as comprised of 1.1-20; 2.1-3.22; 4.1-8.1; 8.2-11.19; 12.1-14.20; 15.1-16.21; 17.1-18.24; 19.1-21; 20.1-15; 21.1-27; 22.1-21. Those familiar with commentaries on Revelation will recognize Tonstad unites certain sections which are typically treated individually in other works. Each section begins with a brief overview. In the “introductory matters” Tonstad connects the passage with the larger rhetorical flow within the storyline. Next is “tracing the train of thought” which contains a narrative dialogue with the text, often accomplished by uniting several verses together to capture the main thought. The chapters conclude with a discussion of the theological themes brought out in the passage being examined.

The previous paragraphs might leave the impression that Tonstad’s work is simply one in a long line of books attempting to make sense of Revelation’s visions. While true in one sense, the *way* in which Tonstad attempts to bring clarity to the symbols and meaning of Revelation is at once new, thought-provoking, exegetical, surprising, and devotional.

The introduction alerts the reader that this is not just another commentary on Revelation, but one that explores the book from an innovative perspective. Tonstad demonstrates chapter 12 exerts an influence reaching both directions within Revelation. The war in heaven scene is felt throughout the entire book. It permeates chs 4-11 as well as chs 13-22. From this viewpoint, Satan is not simply an ancillary character in the book, nor merely a representation of evil, but a thoroughly biblical character who plays an important role in the on-going conflict. Most commentaries do not develop the war in heaven theme nor mine it for its interpretative potential.

Tonstad engages with the expansive scholarly literature that views Revelation through the lens of the cult of emperor worship. He then demonstrates that this common view is the foundation for many interpretations of the book. Tonstad unfolds the weakness of this perspective, evidenced by the shifting understandings of Revelation’s historical context. Rather than Ancient Rome being an interpretive key, he posits an alternative. Tonstad argues the cosmic conflict is the lens through which the book needs to be read, and that the visions serve as an exposé of the deceptive agency of Satan.

Seen in this light, the throne scene of ch 5 is understood to be a reaction to the war that began in heaven. This war is won by the slain lamb (Rev. 5.5-7). Tonstad emphasizes that the lamb, though powerful, is slain by violence. This raises the paradox as to how the lamb can conqueror, while being slain. However, it is precisely in being slaughtered, that the lamb wins the war. Additionally, the idea of being crushed by violence is part of the character of the lamb, an aspect of his essential identity. In order to read Revelation correctly, Tonstad argues, the rest of the book must be interpreted through the *revelation* that the slain lamb provides.

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In his discussion on the first six trumpets (8.6-9.12), Tonstad pursues an interpretation that is focused on the question of *agency*. The trumpets are almost overwhelmingly understood as God's retributive judgments on an unrepentant world. Tonstad explores whether this perspective does justice to Revelation's narrative. He concludes that the hyperbolic language here is more reflective of demonic activity than divine action. For example, the repeated use of "a third" in this section (8.7, 8, 9, 10, 12; 9.15, 18), is reflective of the "third" of the stars thrown to the ground (12.4, 7). There is a fallen star (8.10; 9.1), which reminds the reader of Isa. 14.12-15. The army described under the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets are clearly demonic in nature, as is the king who presides over them (9.11). If Revelation is to be understood as an exposé, then it is appropriate to ask who is being exposed? God is revealed through the slain lamb, the Ancient Serpent (12.9) is revealed despite his deception and slander.

Tonstad's handling of the sea and land beasts (13.1-18) continues his interpretative stance. Instead of viewing the beasts in this chapter through the "Roman lens" or a "future antichrist" lens, Tonstad draws attention to the idea that Satan is acting through his intermediaries. Rather than focusing on the myth of Nero's return or what might unfold in the future, Tonstad demonstrates that this section is "Satan's story." The passage underscores both the slanderous lies that portray God in a wrong light, as well as the imitative aspect of the sea beast. Satan is the one behind the powerful imitation which results in the whole world being brought into the deception.

In the Rev. 22, Tonstad finds further confirmation for his cosmic conflict hermeneutic. The imagery of the tree of life brings the reader back to Gen. 3, where the serpent first promulgates his lies about the character of God. The serpent used the tree of knowledge as his instrument to misrepresent God. The interweaving of the biblical narrative that finds its culmination in the last book of the NT, makes a true revealing of God's nature its main concern. Revelation portrays the reversal of all that was lost in the first garden. Distrust, alienation, and fear are replaced with open communion with God.

This commentary holds an important place in biblical-theological studies due to its insistence that the cosmic conflict holds a primary place for interpreting the text. Tonstad's reading the text through the imagery of the slaughtered Lamb in battle with the slanderous, deceitful serpent brings new insights to several passages. His ability to carve out a fresh reading of Revelation while interacting with several schools of interpretation, and to do so in an accessible manner is to be highly recommended. The concepts Tonstad brings out demand important consideration in forming a correct interpretation of Revelation. The reader might not agree with all he has written but will be challenged and benefited from engaging with this work.

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**Frey, Jörg. *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter: A Theological Commentary*. Translated by Kathleen Ess. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018, pp. 560, \$69.95, hardback.**

At 560 total pages, approximately 430 of which are devoted to detailed study of the introductory and exegetical questions that confront interpreters of the slim epistles of Jude and 2 Peter, this commentary on two of the smallest texts included in the New Testament is a mammoth, thoughtful, provocative, and thoroughly welcome contribution to the growing body of scholarship on these letters. Jörg Frey is Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Zurich. This book was originally published in German in 2015 (*Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus* [Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 15.2; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015]), and it is likely to be regarded as the most important commentary on Jude and 2 Peter since Richard Bauckham's 1983 volume on the letters (*Jude, 2 Peter* [Word Biblical Commentary 50; Waco: Word, 1983]). Although Frey differs from Bauckham on a number of important points, not least the date of 2 Peter and its relationship to the second-century *Apocalypse of Peter*, the careful historical study of the text and the dedication to a theological reading of Jude and 2 Peter will make this commentary a valuable dialogue partner for all who study the Catholic Epistles. The translation of Kathleen Ess is clear, admirably readable, and conveys not only the meaning but also much of the tone of the German passages that this reviewer spot-checked. In short, this is a volume worth consulting when exploring either Jude or 2 Peter.

Frey follows much of New Testament scholarship in dating the letter of Jude before 2 Peter. Jude thus precedes 2 Peter in the commentary. The letter includes a number of words that do not appear elsewhere in the New Testament (*hapax legomena*), and Frey concludes that it is linguistically one of the more sophisticated rhetorical compositions in the New Testament (pp. 10–12). While Jude may not quote often from canonical Old Testament texts, it employs scriptural examples and is aware of Second Temple interpretive patterns. Most striking, perhaps, is the extent to which Jude draws upon *1 Enoch*, even quoting *1 En.* 1.9 at Jude 14–15. Frey argues that the author of Jude, whom Ess refers to as Judas (Ἰούδας; see further p. xv), has written a pseudepigraphal text that can roughly be dated between 100 and 120 CE. In Frey's view, the text was written in part as a response to the author's opponents, whom the author understands to have transgressed cosmological boundaries with regard to the recognition of the cosmic powers. Frey thinks that it is most likely that these opponents, whose own words we no longer have access to, can be placed within the Pauline reception that occurred in the late-first and early-second centuries. In tension with the treatment of Christ's defeat of the powers in Ephesians and Colossians, the author of Jude maintains a high view of the angels even while depicting Christ as the pre-existent master and Lord.

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A few highlights can be given from the commentary on Jude to offer a taste of the exegetical work in the commentary. Frey understands the participial clause in Jude 3 (which can be woodenly translated as “making all haste to write to you about our common salvation”) to have a “relatively weak” concessive relationship to the main verb (p. 67). The faith about which the author speaks in the same verse should be understood in terms of *fides quae creditur*, that is, the faith that is believed. Thus when Jude speaks of faith in v. 3, he refers to something that approaches Christian doctrine rather than to the act of believing. Jude does not hesitate to quote *1 En.* 1.9 as an Enochic prophecy (Jude 14–15). Frey differs from Bauckham’s position that Jude has directly translated *1 En.* 1.9 from Aramaic into Greek. Instead, Frey considers it more plausible that Jude drew on a Greek version of *1 Enoch* that was available to him. In turning to the doxology of Jude 24–25, Frey helpfully points out that the liturgical ending to this letter indicates that it was composed in order “to be read aloud in the context of worship among the addressee congregation(s) (p. 154). Although individual interpreters may find points of disagreement along the way, Frey’s exegesis is consistently engaging and carefully argued.

Perhaps the most significant point of difference between Frey’s commentary and the work of Bauckham concerns the relationship between 2 Peter and the *Apocalypse of Peter* as well as the implications that these discussions have for the date of 2 Peter. Frey follows Wolfgang Grünstäudl in arguing that 2 Peter postdates the *Apocalypse of Peter* (pp. 201–206; see further Grünstäudl, *Petrus Alexandrinus: Studien zum historischen und theologischen Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes* [Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.353; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013]). If both Jude and the *Apocalypse of Peter* precede 2 Peter, then the dates of these texts become vitally important for determining the date of 2 Peter. If Jude was written in the first two decades of the second century (see pp. 31–32) and the *Apocalypse of Peter* dates to the 130s (see pp. 202–203), Frey regards a time between 140–160 as the most likely date for 2 Peter (pp. 220–221). This date requires a pseudepigraphal interpretation of the letter. Frey goes on to ask important questions about the genre and function of pseudepigraphy (pp. 217–220). He argues that the letter is openly pseudepigraphal. On such an understanding, one may suppose that the author wrote a pseudepigraphon without particularly trying to disguise their effort, although it is not necessarily the case that the audience would have been as willing to go along with the fictional ascription. Indeed, the reception of the letter and its place on the fringes of the canon during the third and fourth centuries suggests that later readers had particular difficulty in accepting a pseudepigraphic letter and also in accepting that 2 Peter was authentically Petrine (on the early reception of 2 Peter, see pp. 168–173).

As with any attempt to date a historical document, this lengthy discussion of the date and authorship of 2 Peter may be challenged. Yet even those who regard 2 Peter as authentically Petrine will benefit from reading Frey’s exegesis of the letter. He interprets the language of “partners in the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4) in ethical terms

and employs a variety of sources from multiple Greco-Roman, Hellenistic Jewish, and early Christian backgrounds (pp. 263–269). He regards Peter’s eyewitness testimony to the Transfiguration as closer to the account of the Transfiguration in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and thus not as dependent upon Matt 17 (pp. 294–296). Finally, Frey helpfully draws attention to the unusual way in which the author of 2 Peter mentions Paul—whom he has not yet mentioned explicitly—in the letter closing (2 Pet 3:15–16), a place in the letter where one would not expect the introduction of a new topic (p. 419).

In an exegetical project that is this large, one will likely find places to disagree with interpretations of particular passages. For example, Frey’s interpretation of the allusions to the Transfiguration and their relationship to the *Apocalypse of Peter* may downplay the importance of Synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration too much. In particular, if one allows for the transmission of the Matthean Transfiguration account through social memory or secondary orality, it may be possible to grant a larger place to the Synoptic Gospels in the composition of 2 Peter. Nor will all be convinced by the dating scheme that Frey proposes for Jude, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and 2 Peter. The dating of these texts remains challenging, and further discussions have followed Frey’s commentary (see, for example, the essays in Jörg Frey, Matthijs den Dulk, and Jan van der Watt, *2 Peter and the Apocalypse of Peter: Towards a New Perspective*, Biblical Interpretation Series 174 [Leiden: Brill, 2019]). Such disagreements among interpreters, however, are part and parcel of New Testament scholarship. They do not take away from the immense value of Frey’s theologically oriented exegesis.

Reading this commentary from beginning to end is not an activity for the faint of heart. The text is filled with small-print excurses that provide additional information detailing the history of scholarship on an issue or supporting Frey’s arguments for an interpretation. Yet it is precisely in the combination of the many detailed arguments and the coherent portrait that the commentary paints while exploring these small epistles that the richness of Frey’s exegesis is to be found. The seriousness with which this commentary takes Jude and 2 Peter as theological texts, wrestles with the implications of their polemic, and situates these letters alongside other early Christian literature are much to be admired. The translation and publication of yet another important German-language commentary by Baylor University Press is a gift to Anglophone students, teachers, and researchers. These, along with the theological libraries who support their study, will want to consider purchasing this important commentary on Jude and 2 Peter.

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**Anizor, Uche. *How to Read Theology: Engaging Doctrine Critically and Charitably*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018, pp. 204, \$22, softcover.**

Reading theological literature critically and charitably is a necessary discipline for scholars, pastors, and students. How one goes about cultivating the appropriate skills to read in this way requires instruction and example. Uche Anizor (Ph.D. Wheaton College), associate professor of biblical and theological studies at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, serves the academic community well in this primer where he addresses critical virtues for theological reading. Throughout its six chapters, Anizor's straightforward argument addresses the need for and the instruction to reading critically and charitably. Part 1, "On Reading Charitably," consists of two chapters, and Part 2, "On Reading Critically," consists of four chapters. At the conclusion of these two parts, Anizor includes an epilogue where he further assists readers in applying his methodology. Here he provides examples of theological texts from which one should choose to implement his proposed strategies for critical and charitable reading, even guiding readers through the questions and steps one should expect throughout the process.

In chapters one and two, Anizor describes the challenges associated with reading theology charitably, noting the critical importance of understanding the primary role of context for theological reading. In chapter one, Anizor identifies four enemies to charitable reading: pride, suspicion, favoritism, and impatience. Each of these enemies stifle effective reading, but further, their presence poisons the readers apprehension and appreciation of theological writing. Against pride, Anizor urges humility for it "prompts me to recognize that I do not have the market concerned on theological truth, but that I am in constant need of the palliative breeze of other, diverse voices blowing through my mind" (p. 10). Reading suspiciously is to read while not considering the best of others (p. 11), ultimately leading one to magnify bad qualities while minimizing the good (p. 12). Against suspicion, Anizor urges readers to approach theological authors with a "sympathetic embrace" (p. 14). This posture is born out of love, which "is not crippled by fear, a close correlate of suspicion" (p. 12), and careful work to avoid suspicion in theological reading allows the reader to avoid imputing bad motives to another. Instead of favoritism, readers must cultivate the requisite skills to give a fair hearing to those espousing alternative views. Finally, impatience emerges most often when readers fail to embrace a patient undertaking of theological meaning, often rushing to find application. These four obstacles affect theological readers from every background, from the lay person to the senior scholar. Anizor's counsel helpfully locates and instructs readers to a better way.

Chapter two's importance could hardly be overstated, for here Anizor explains the importance of context when wrestling with theological literature. "Theology is written from within a context," Anizor claims, "and therefore bears

certain contextual marks that must be attended to if we are to understand and assess it well” (p. 28). Anizor focuses on the issues of historical context (one’s culture), ecclesial context (one’s church tradition), and the polemical context (the presence of conflict). Using examples from Barth, Moltmann, Gutiérrez, and Bonhoeffer, Anizor demonstrates why these contextual realms prove critical in reading a theologian’s work critically and charitably.

Chapters four through six apply these practices through the four sources of theology: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. In these chapters readers are instructed to avoid the errors of proof-texting, and Anizor gives careful instruction on how to apply Scripture to theology. Anizor provides readers with a seven point outline for how one should go about assessing doctrinal constructions through the lens of Scripture. On tradition, theological reading must assess and learn from historical developments of doctrine and the practices those doctrines created. Anizor helps readers think through tradition by overviewing creeds, confessions, doctors (theologians), and other teachers (Anizor’s description of the conversation partners one can experience). In his discussion of reason, Anizor demonstrates Christian theology’s view of faith and reason. He guides readers with principles on how to build sound arguments that remain true to Scripture and tradition.

Finally, Anizor (in perhaps the best chapter of the whole book) explains carefully the critical importance one’s experience has in theology, while also stating clearly the inherent dangers in allowing one’s experience to be given too great an importance over the previous three emphases (particularly Scripture). For Anizor, experience includes “religious and the nonreligious as well as the individual and the communal aspects of experience” (p. 154), but he insightfully demonstrates that experience not only contributes to theology’s content, it is also a consequence of theology. “Theology, if it is done well, should lead to an experience of the good, true, and beautiful” (p. 164).

Written as a primer, and written with students in mind, one can hardly quibble with Anizor’s instruction. Quite simply, this book should be required reading for students entering academic institutions (seminary, divinity school, graduate school, etc.) in preparation for academic or church-based ministry. Due in part to the ever-increasing toxicity in contemporary dialogue, students must cultivate convictions early on that theological reading can and must be pursued in the manner Anizor prescribes. Regarding Anizor’s instruction, students should apply his methodology by selecting both a theologian within his/her tradition and one from without. In this way, students might be further helped acknowledging their own biases and default reactions within their theological reading. Additionally, this book is organized in such a way that it could easily be incorporated into a mentoring relationship in academic and ecclesial settings.

Some seasoned scholars might underestimate the applicability for a primer on this subject to have relevance with their own practices, but Anizor demonstrates

convincingly how theological students, both new and old, need frequent reassessments of their theological reading techniques. Theologians, pastors and ministers, and theological students are all prone to pride, and this ancient sin often manifests itself in how one approaches the work of others. For these reasons, books like Anizor's give a needed antidote for the sort of reading that honors the dignity and contribution of all who participate in theological conversation. Although this book could be applied to any tradition, Evangelical students and faculty will find the most usefulness of the approaches Anizor advocates.

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**Abraham, William J. *Divine Action and Divine Agency Volume III Systematic Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp.284, £75.00, hardback.**

The third in a projected tetralogy, this volume sketches an entire systematics that follows a traditional credal structure. Abraham's goal is to rescue Christian theology from the Procrustean constraints of an epistemological preoccupation with the problem of divine action. Recent projects, he claims, have worked with a "closed concept" which narrows the scope of God's work attested in Scripture and tradition. This generates an impoverishment of theology with deleterious consequences for church practice. Prioritising the notion of God as "Agent" as opposed to "Being" or "Process", Abraham seeks to offer an account of the range of divine activity (understood as an "open" concept) from creation to eschatology. His intent is to defend and develop the canonical traditions of the church as these emerged in the patristic period. Hence his account is resolutely Nicene and Chalcedonian in its approach, and largely impatient with modern projects such as that of Schleiermacher who is charged (perhaps mistakenly) with losing the doctrine of the Trinity (p. 10). For Abraham, systematic theology is a self-critical appropriation of the canonical teachings of the church directed towards spiritual formation (p. 32). What emerges is an unashamedly ecclesial exercise intended to serve church leaders as well as an academic audience.

This book is never dull. In a lively and engaging study, Abraham offers his readership a fair few surprises, many of these reflecting an appreciation of the Orthodox tradition allied to evangelical and Methodist leanings. So Symeon the New Theologian is frequently eulogised. Prayers for the dead are commended. Anthropomorphic descriptions of the divine are said to be more right than wrong. Feminine pronouns refer to the Holy Spirit. Miracles are accorded a central place, and not only for the apostolic commencement of the faith. Demonic possession and angelic guardianship are defended, while exorcism is advocated. The virgin birth is judged fitting and therefore true. The veneration of saints and icons is valid and

useful. Messianic Jews make an indispensable contribution. Universalism is firmly rejected (though surely its leading Cappadocian exponent was Gregory of Nyssa and not Gregory of Nazianzus, p. 258). Each of the eighteen chapters offers insights and arguments that repay serious study—the present reviewer has profitably worked through the text with a group of graduate students. Of particular note are the clear and productive treatments of creation, providence, anthropology, and the balanced remarks on divine grace and human freedom. These loci admirably reflect Abraham's capacity to combine his expertise as an analytic philosopher with his commitment to theological education.

Yet, notwithstanding its many merits, the book also raises some critical questions. I shall concentrate on three of these.

First, one might ask how well this work fulfils its intended function of providing a one-volume systematics accessible to the wider church. There is frequent use of extensive quotation, while too many allusions and footnote references seem to assume prior in-depth knowledge of the field. This applies also to many of Abraham's quips which are actually very good, but likely to be lost on the intended audience. How many of them are already aware of open theism or the John Templeton Foundation which I take to be the intended referents of the remarks at pp. 144–145? Swipes at the Jesus Seminar and other targets also add to the piquant flavour of the study but again one wonders if these assume too much on the part of the imagined readership.

Second, the way in which the 'canonical' tradition is used to frame the content of the study raises some material difficulties in my mind. In particular, the concentration on a narrative of human predicament and divine solution often feels too restrictive. A few examples may suffice. The classical doctrine of the Trinity is elegantly defended by showing that it improved upon the deficient alternatives of modalism, subordinationism, and tritheism. But one wonders if the seeming attractions of modalism for a contemporary audience are really recognised or if the uncertainty surrounding the person of the Spirit until the second half of the fourth century is fully registered. Is the patristic tradition as unilinear as seems to be suggested? With respect to Christology, little attention is given to the life of Jesus as narrated in the synoptic gospels. As in the classical creeds, we move too swiftly from birth to death, while in Abraham's 'expressivist-cognitivist' approach to the atonement, which some will regard as a disguised subjective theory, there is almost no reference to the resurrection. The two-natures formula is robustly defended with reference to the ecumenical councils, yet modern anxieties around Chalcedon (many of these borne of pastoral concerns about the loss of Christ's humanity) are not properly ventilated. These have been with us for more than two centuries and cannot easily be ignored, especially given the ways in which the Fourth Gospel must now be read. The discussion of the work of the Spirit focusses on the church and the Christian life, but despite what is said earlier regarding the person of the Spirit as divine energy and force there is insufficient reflection on its broader manifestations

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in nature and history. His account of creation has the potential to move beyond an ecclesial anthropocentrism in a richer and more variegated study of the goodness of the natural world, ecological balance, the diversity of species, the benefits of civil society, and the riches of art, science and religion. Yet, despite occasional gestures, these are mostly neglected themes as we move swiftly from creation to salvation. The overall result is again a narrowing of theological focus within a traditional scheme reflecting a classical credal pattern of sin, redemption, and eschatology. A further consequence is the lack of any attention to the theological significance of other faiths—the exception is Judaism, where one wonders if the phenomenon of Messianic Judaism can provide the bridgehead he intends. Abraham may well face some or all of these issues in the fourth volume to which I look forward, but judged as a stand-alone contemporary systematics there are some obvious lacunae here.

Third, there may be a further factor present in all of this. Much of the volume appears to be informed by a fear that theology (and church) are in danger of being instrumentalised by liberationist projects that subordinate the work of God to cultural criticism. Although largely undeclared, one suspects that this anxiety results in a deliberate refocusing of systematic theology as an ecclesial project. This seems to me a welcome corrective, but it results at times in a lack of developed ethical reflection. Admittedly, socio-political concerns appear sporadically, for example in his defence of democracy (p. 166) and especially in his stirring conclusion (p. 275), but these could have been foregrounded earlier for the sake of comprehension and balance.

Nevertheless, this is an important four-volume venture, and I salute Abraham's intention in this third part to overcome the growing chasm between church and university. His insistence upon a more open concept of divine action seems well made to me, with the resultant emphasis upon God as 'Agent' restoring a more Scripturally inflected account of the divine economy. On a personal note, I regret not having the benefit of learning from Abraham's work while writing a recent monograph on providence. Perhaps it takes someone with his philosophical acumen to challenge distortive if beguiling approaches to divine action, and thus to release systematic theology from philosophical captivity. For this and much else, we can be grateful to him.

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**Krötke, Wolf. *Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologians for a Post-Christian World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, 272 pp., \$48, hardcover.**

Wolf Krötke (b. 1938) is professor emeritus of systematic theology at Humboldt University in Berlin, where he began teaching in 1991 and retired in 2004. A student of Eberhard Jüngel (one of Karl Barth's most distinguished pupils), Krötke

was the recipient of the international Karl Barth Prize in 1990, and he is one of the few theologians today who have done detailed work on both Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. However, as John Burgess notes in his translator's preface, "while Professor Krötke is regarded in Germany as a major theological voice and a superb interpreter of Barth and Bonhoeffer, little of his work has been translated into English" (ix). This book serves to remedy this issue.

Although the title suggests otherwise, this book is not about Karl Barth *and* Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Instead, it is a collection of seventeen translated essays about Barth *or* Bonhoeffer, all previously published in German, from across Krötke's career (the earliest in 1981, the latest in 2013). The first eight essays are about Barth, and the final nine are about Bonhoeffer. In lieu of summarizing all of the essays, it will suffice to note some common moves that Krötke makes throughout the collection.

Throughout the essays, Krötke strikes an excellent balance between defense and criticism. He is able to correct various misconceptions about the theologians without becoming a Barth or Bonhoeffer sycophant. Frequently, Krötke highlights the nuances and continuity of Barth's and Bonhoeffer's views before asserting his own critiques. In chapter 2, for example, Krötke provides a helpful summary of Barth's concept of religion (pp. 28-29). He argues that Barth was not overwhelmingly negative toward religion before critiquing his appraisal of atheism as a fundamentally *religious* critique of religion. Krötke, in contrast, thinks that religion and atheism are meaningfully different (pp. 42-44). Krötke similarly defends and appraises Barth's anthropology (ch. 3), christology (ch. 4), doctrine of election (ch. 5), description of pastoral care (ch. 6), political theology (ch. 7), and ecclesiology (ch. 8). Specific areas of disagreement with Barth include his handling of the resurrection and the virgin birth (pp. 67-70) and his conclusions about the church as the body of Christ (pp. 125-26). In an especially strong discussion of Barth's theological perspective on resistance as it developed over time (ch. 7), Krötke also denounces his appropriation of war (p. 117).

As for Bonhoeffer, Krötke devotes three chapters to Bonhoeffer's discussions of "religions and religionlessness" (ch. 9), "religionless Christianity" (ch. 10), and the "nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts" (ch. 16). The rest of the chapters focus on Bonhoeffer's views on theology proper (ch. 11), exegesis of the Psalms (ch. 12), divine guidance (ch. 13), political resistance (ch. 14), and the state (ch. 15). Krötke maintains that Bonhoeffer's critiques of Barth in prison were largely misguided (p. 58), and that his exegesis of the Psalter was too exclusively christological (p. 186) and not eschatological enough (p. 188). Chapters 13-15 especially illustrate Krötke's tendency to defend Bonhoeffer against accusations of inconsistency, even as he acknowledges the provisional nature of Bonhoeffer's thoughts on these matters. Krötke's analysis of the similarities and differences between Bonhoeffer's and Feuerbach's critiques of religion when it comes to the question of "sharing in God's suffering" (pp. 155-62) would be worth the price of the entire book!

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Overall, the major strength of this book lies in the East/eastern German experience and perspective from which Krötke speaks. Although he never got the opportunity to study with Barth (or Bonhoeffer), Krötke immediately put their theologies to the test in the high-pressure, ideological environment of East Germany before the fall of the Berlin wall and in the post-Communist milieu. In chapters 1 and 16, Krötke reflects upon the legacy and relevance of Barth (ch. 1) and Bonhoeffer (ch. 16) for East (now eastern) Germany. He laments the East German tendency to misinterpret and coopt Barth and Bonhoeffer for nefarious ideological purposes. And he mines both theologians for resources that the church can use in eastern Germany's especially "God-forgetful" (pp. 135–37, 235) context today. Krötke's analysis of how the church should relate to the state and to the world (see chs. 1, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, and 16) has an experiential immediacy to it that younger, American Barth and Bonhoeffer scholars simply cannot manufacture.

Because Krötke is a leading contemporary figure in both Barth and Bonhoeffer studies, this book would be well-suited for a student researching the topic of one or more of the essays. For example, chapter 7 provides an excellent discussion of Barth's thought on theology and resistance, while chapter 12 offers a great starting point for research on Bonhoeffer's exegesis of the Psalms. That said, depending upon the original publication date of a particular essay, Krötke's analysis may or may not reflect recent developments within Barth or Bonhoeffer studies. For example, two of Krötke's three Bonhoeffer essays that address "religionlessness" and/or the "nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts" were written in the 1980s, before Ralf Wüstenberg's influential study of Bonhoeffer's changing views on religion was published (*A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998; German original, 1996]). Some of Krötke's early conclusions about Bonhoeffer seem to overlook how Bonhoeffer's description of "religion" changed quite drastically, especially in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Also conspicuously absent from this book was any mention of Andreas Pangritz's indispensable monograph on the Barth-Bonhoeffer relationship, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, first published in German in 1989 (Westberlin, Germany: Alektor Verlag) and now in its second English edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018). Furthermore, there is only one mention of Bonhoeffer's well-known accusation of Barth's "positivism of revelation" (p.58). Even there, Krötke does not offer his own explanation. It is unclear whether the absence of Wüstenberg and Pangritz from this book was due to Burgess's decision to eliminate certain footnotes from the German original of these essays.

Most disappointingly, the relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer is mentioned only four times (pp. 58, 116, 147–48, 226). Although Krötke offers the reader much to think about when it comes to specific topics and themes in their thought, and although he gestures throughout this book at the relevance of each theologian's work for today, this reviewer desired much more from him on how both

theologians, taken together, might help the church move forward theologically in a “post-Christian world.” Surely Krötke is one of the best-equipped theologians alive to offer such comparative and critical analysis of Barth and Bonhoeffer. Unfortunately, he provides precious little of it in this collection of essays. At the very least, a more accurate, chastened title would help readers know what to expect.

Therefore, a student who would like to learn more about the historical and theological relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer would be much better served by Pangritz’s *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* to start, Wüstenberg’s *A Theology of Life* to understand Bonhoeffer’s thought on “religion,” and Tom Greggs’s *Theology Against Religion: Constructive Dialogues with Bonhoeffer and Barth* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011) to apply their ideas to today’s complex environment of pluralism and secularism. If, after this, Krötke addresses a particular topic in Barth’s and/or Bonhoeffer’s thought that is relevant to the student’s research, then he is worth adding to the discussion as an important voice—especially now that a sampling of his contributions is available in English.

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**Neder, Adam. *Theology as a Way of Life: On Teaching and Learning the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, pp. 176, \$18.99, paperback.**

Adam Neder is Bruner-Welch Professor of Theology at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. Neder offers readers a short, engaging, and wise book on the art of teaching the Christian faith.

Neder begins by urging teachers to move beyond communicating theological knowledge by guiding students to “exist in what one understands” (p. 4). In order to accomplish this task, Neder alerts his readers that he draws deeply upon the work of Barth (of whom this book began as a conference paper on Barth’s *Evangelical Theology*), Kierkegaard, and Bonhoeffer. Neder wants readers to know that he believes this book is useful not only for professors, but that connections for congregational ministry are “always just beneath the surface” (p. 9).

Following his introduction, Neder begins the second chapter by claiming: “Anthropology is the soul of pedagogy” (p. 15). He unpacks loaded claims such as this, but also peppers his book with enough unexplained nuggets to cause the reader to pause and think. This chapter provides the foundation for Neder’s philosophy of teaching: the art of teaching the Christian faith is bound to the doctrine of reconciliation. He believes, following Barth, that reconciliation is a reality that includes everyone, while “one’s subjective response to this objective reality is very important” (p. 23). Those unacquainted with Barthian reconciliatory nuance may struggle with Neder’s primary framing of theological pedagogy, but this obstacle can

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be overcome. Put more simply, and, perhaps, diluted from his intent, Neder argues that students are designed and prepared for a restored relationship with Jesus Christ. As such, theological education is germane for *all* students in a way that the study of chemistry is not.

Neder encourages teachers in his third chapter, “Knowledge,” to envision the practical implications of knowledge in life. He used to think that connecting lecture material to “real life” unserious and homiletical, but he now views this task as essential. Neder argues in his fourth chapter, titled “Ethos,” that the vice of theological educators is vanity. Neder explains that Barth understood a vain theologian as “an embodied contradiction of the gospel and the very antithesis of Jesus Christ himself” (p. 65). Neder reminds readers that Jesus told his followers to give up their possessions – for theologians this includes reputations. Neder aims for the ivory tower and pulpit jugulars, writing: “how easily we forget that every Christian leader profits off of Jesus Christ’s suffering and death. He gets crucified and we get paid. That’s the arrangement” (p. 76).

In the final two chapters, Neder explores the danger and type of conversations needed for theological education. He claims the subject matter of Christian theology demands a decision, and it demands a decision now. When we present and exist in the theology we profess, there should be unease, tension, and danger across the spectrum of taught classes. Neder explains that his current students prefer to listen and observe more than those of years ago. As such, teachers must work intentionally (and harder than before) to stimulate conversations. Conversations require improvisational unscripted dialogue, and are, therefore, risky. Neder advises teachers to not answer their own questions, but to let the wheels of their student’s minds turn in silence. In this sense, teachers step out of the way, even if just for five or ten seconds. He implores: “few pedagogical practices are more important than the skillful use of awkward silence” (p. 138).

Those who have stepped behind a lectern with any level of self-awareness are likely to identify with Neder’s overarching main idea: the responsibility to convey what must be said about God. It may be true that educators have some level of training in order to be teaching others, but when teaching about an infinite God, does it help all that much if the professor is one small step further down the academic road than his or her students? Yes, and no. In some strange way – yes, educators do have something to offer, they are placed in the classroom to bring to light what is already present in the hearts of students. Neder rightly challenges educators to move beyond effective information delivery. Educators must accept that their total effectiveness will usually be unknown beyond the length of the course.

Readers will not struggle to see why Neder has won multiple teaching awards at Whitworth. In *Theology as a Way of Life*, he demonstrates that if one delivers the content of the material for what it actually is (God), then it is a different kind of material, a different kind of “topic.” In this sense, educators are guaranteed to be

humiliated because they will delve into discussions about the unknowable. They will invite risk into their classrooms. This is why Neder urges theological educators to believe that prayer is “the essential pedagogical practice” (p. 34).

Neder’s insights will resonate most with those who have taught theology in the classroom for at least a few years. He articulates what it *feels* like to teach theology. Newer teachers might be disappointed if they are looking for a list of practical teaching tips (though some are presented). Neder’s admonition in theological humility is reminiscent not only of Barth’s *Evangelical Theology* but also of Helmut Thielicke’s *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*.

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Young Life Staff

**Greggs, Tom. *Dogmatic Ecclesiology Volume 1: The Priestly Catholicity of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, pp. lxxviii+492, \$50.00, hardback.**

Professor Tom Greggs holds the Marischal Chair of Divinity at the University of Aberdeen. He has authored numerous articles and books, including *Theology Against Religion: Constructive Dialogues with Bonhoeffer and Barth* (T&T Clark, 2011), *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity* (OUP, 2009), and the forthcoming *The Breadth of Salvation: Rediscovering the Fullness of God’s Saving Work* (Baker Academic, 2020).

In *Dogmatic Ecclesiology Volume 1: The Priestly Catholicity of the Church*, Greggs presents us with the first entry in a three volume project. The themes of the three volumes reflect a coordination of the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed’s description of the church as catholic, apostolic, and holy. Volume 2, then, will address the church’s “prophetic apostolicity,” while volume 3 will attend to its “kingly holiness” (p. xxi). As if such a project was not ambitious enough already, each volume will follow the same outline. For example, chapter 1 in each book will address the Spirit’s role through the lens of the volume’s unique theme, chapter 2 in each book will address the role of Christ, and so on.

What the reader will encounter in this, the first volume, can be most aptly described as a non-exhaustive, conscientiously protestant, pneumocentric, dogmatic account of the church according to its priestly vocation and its catholic scope. Insofar as its approach is dogmatic, its goal is not to advocate for a specific form of polity or liturgical life, but rather “to speak of the church and its life in a way that seeks to reflect on its place theologically within the broader account of God and God’s ways with the world” (p. xx). What this means, then, is that Gregg’s focus is the “what” of the church, rather than the “how”. As such, the subject matter is not ecclesiology

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in vacuum, but rather ecclesiology as a derivative doctrine that is intersected and shaped by other central doctrinal loci. Moreover, in his dogmatic approach Greggs is forthright about his own ecclesial commitments (Methodist), even as he draws extensively on thinkers from other traditions (most centrally, Karl Barth).

Greggs lays all of this out at length in the preface, before turning in the first four chapters to explain how the church's ontology must be understood in light of the fact that it is established in space-time by the Spirit as a particularization God's universal reconciling work in Christ (p. 21). It is in these chapters that he introduces the key themes and frameworks that recur throughout the rest of the book. Greggs paints a complex and dogmatically thick picture, so it is impossible to do justice to all the contours of his account in a brief review. However, of particular note are his emphases on Christ's sole priesthood, the provisional and instrumental nature of the church as it participates in Christ's priestly work, and the manner in which the church's priestly vocation orders it both internally and in its outward orientation toward the world.

The following chapters unfold Greggs' account of the key aspects of the church's life as they are graciously caught up in Christ's priesthood by the Spirit for the sake of the world. In addition to the expected chapters on baptism, holy communion, prayer, and the congregation, there are also chapters on thanksgiving and praise, sanctification, and the communion of saints. While Greggs does at times touch on the "how" of these features of the church's life, he generally disciplines himself to outlining what their import and dogmatic substance in light of the emphases noted above.

To conclude the book, and as a sort of bookend to the first four chapters on the church's divine origin and ontology, the final two chapters focus on love and priestly catholicity. For Greggs, love is the feature of the church "which corresponds most closely to the priestly life" (p. 403), and as such, many of the aspects of the church he has already addressed are summarized and encapsulated here. The final chapter, then, makes the case that priestly catholicity locates the intensity of the church's identity at its boundaries insofar as catholicity is rooted in Christ's universal work of reconciliation and priestliness is, at its root, participation in Christ's being for the other. A concluding coda serves to remind the reader that, although ecclesiology is basic in the order of knowing, it is, in the order of being, a derivative doctrine that must always be understood as having its roots in the immanent life of the Trinity.

One of the central strengths of *Dogmatic Ecclesiology Volume I* is its ability to accomplish two tasks simultaneously that are often played against each: namely, he offers a rich dogmatic account of the church *as* a missional church. In other words, while most work on ecclesiology tends to focus on *how* to be the church (or, to Greggs' mind, worse: how to *do* church), Greggs takes the "how" to be simultaneously derivative of what the church is and in service to the church's mission. Thus, the "how" of polity, liturgical life, and even the sacraments (in the chapter on baptism,

Greggs argues against the usefulness of “sacrament” as a genus) must be qualified by and subordinate to the church’s origin and goal. Insofar as the church’s priestly identity subsists in Christ’s sole priesthood and, in Christ, is ordered in service to the other, the “how” of church must be indexed to these realities.

This is not to say that Greggs remains agnostic on the “how” in all places. For instance, he advocates for a thoroughly—although ecumenically qualified—memorialist understanding of the eucharist. However, he almost completely avers from addressing questions of polity, and advocates for the semiotic import of retaining both the practices of infant and believer baptism. Even in these instances, though, he argues cogently from the framework he has established. For example, on the matter of polity he is clearly concerned to, on the one hand, not detract from Christ’s sole priesthood by advocating for a separate essential hierarchy in the church. On the other hand, he is keen to avoid allowing a focus on the clergy-laity distinction to subvert the church-world distinction (to be clear, for Greggs, the church is separate *for* the world rather than *from* the world).

Given that this is the first of three volumes, it would be unwise to take issue with what might at present be seen as an omission, oversight, or one-sided account. Indeed, even with all three volumes in view, Greggs is explicit that his goal is not to offer a comprehensive account of the church. My primary critical comment, then, pertains to form more than content and is, as such, quite minor. In the opening section, “How to Read This Book”, Greggs eschews “reductive modes of deductive reasoning” in favor of what he describes as “theological wavelike movements” (pp. xxiv–xxv). This approach is often very effective. However, inherent to these wavelike movements is a repetition that can at times become tedious, especially when it is paired with Greggs’ propensity for long, highly qualified sentences and complex formulations. As such, there are points when the waves threaten to overwhelm the reader rather than carry her along toward the argument’s conclusion.

Ultimately, though, this should and undoubtedly will be essential reading for all those with a vested interest in ecclesiology, and especially those who are keen to understand its doctrinal location and interrelations. The dogmatic approach is both refreshing and compelling, capturing one’s theological imagination in a way that texts on the church often fail to do. Moreover, it is a dogmatic account that is also thoroughly and deeply conversant with Scripture throughout. As disenchantment with the institutional church continues to grow in the global West, Greggs offers a clarion call for Christians to ground afresh their hope for the church in the God who establishes it in Christ by the Spirit. In his concluding coda, he expresses his hope that the book will be taken as a “*partial* attempt at a faithful, hopeful, and (most of all) loving dogmatic account of the life of the church” (p. 455, emphasis original). To the mind of this reviewer, this is both a fair description of the book and central to what makes it so compelling.

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**Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *The Spirit of Methodism: From the Wesleys to Global Communion*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, pp. 224, \$20, paperback.**

Jeffrey W. Barbeau, professor of theology at Wheaton College, has written a history of Methodism at a moment of crisis within the United Methodist Church. As this review is being written, the specter of conflict threatens to divide that denomination. The debates over sexuality that drive this conflict have been going on for several decades, but seem to be coming to a head. Many United Methodists feel anything but united.

Barbeau writes with the hope that a coherent history of Methodism will help readers gain some perspective: “If the future of the movement seems uncertain to many American Methodists today,” he writes, “at least part of the problem is a persistent myopia” (p. 101). To address that myopia, Barbeau has produced a short, easily-read survey of the history of Methodism, or more accurately, “Methodisms.” *The Spirit of Methodism* rightfully covers not just Methodism in Great Britain and the United States, but in south Asia, east Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Barbeau also reminds readers that Methodism is not just the United Methodist Church, but also other Methodist, holiness, and Wesleyan denominations—such as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Salvation Army. These different Methodisms point to the sheer breadth and diversity of the movements that sprang from John Wesley’s ministry.

Rather than original scholarship for academics, *The Spirit of Methodism* is a survey for interested laypeople and seminarians. Still, Barbeau has set for himself a tall order, bringing coherence to a movement containing millions of people over two and a half centuries, from numerous denominations, living in the major cultural regions around the globe. Barbeau is quite aware that generalizations have to be made, some eras and movements will be left out, and the day-to-day experiences of ordinary Methodists cannot be unpacked with any depth. To describe the core of historical Methodism in such a short account, Barbeau addresses both large-scale, structural developments as well as the personal, spiritual promptings in individual lives. *The Spirit of Methodism* highlights representative leaders from different eras and regions, as a way to illustrate particular spiritual and social dynamics of Methodism. Of course, the famous “founding” personalities are here, like John Wesley and Francis Asbury. But Barbeau also touches on personalities that appear less often in popular histories of Methodism, such as Phoebe Palmer and John Mott. More importantly, Barbeau brings to the forefront important Methodists from around the world that would only be known to specialists of particular branches of Methodist history, such as D. T. Niles in Sri Lanka, Thomas Birch Freeman in West Africa, and Willis Hoover in Chile. Many of these individuals get a concise summary in an inset box, as do key events, practices, and organizations, such as the stillness controversy, love feasts, and the World Council of Churches. Throughout the narrative, Barbeau

regularly links new developments back to theological principles, sermons, or practices of John Wesley.

What holds these disparate bodies and individuals together? Barbeau argues that it is grace, “the active presence of the Spirit of Christ” (p. xiv). With this framework, *The Spirit of Methodism* moves perceptions of the historical core of Methodism away from opposing oversimplifications -- either as a set of evangelical doctrines or progressive theological innovations. By arguing instead for a “Broad Church Methodism,” Barbeau seems to be speaking primarily to the opposing sides of the conflict within the United Methodist Church today, as well as insular oversimplifications that may operate within other Methodist and Wesleyan denominations.

If Methodism is framed within the American context, the cultural and theological power of these oversimplifications make it uncertain that many will embrace Barbeau’s approach of a Broad Church Methodism. There is more hope, however, if the scope is global. That is why the substantive inclusion of Methodists from Latin America, Africa, and Asia form such an important part of the story. The burning of fetishes in Korea or E. Stanley Jones’s Christian ashrams in India hint at complicated theological and cultural issues that most North American or British Methodists have yet to come to terms with. As a survey, *The Spirit of Methodism* cannot explore these issues with any depth and so it is possible many readers will miss the theological implications at work here. At the very least, though, the inclusion of Asian, African, and Latin American Methodism ought to keep readers conscious that the movement is bigger than its American forms. Readers who undertake further investigation of Methodism from the framework of missiology and the history of world Christianity will quickly discover new conceptual and theological questions to ponder.

Finally, *The Spirit of Methodism* reminds readers that conflict, controversy, and division have been present within Methodism from its very beginning. John Wesley’s debates with George Whitefield, the American break with the Church of England, denominational divisions over racial problems, arguments over the holiness movement, indigenous complaints about missionary authority—these disputes, among many others, indicate that one would be hard pressed to find an era or region without conflict. Barbeau keeps the work of the Spirit present within and around these historic controversies, providing assurance that the Methodism will continue to transform lives and societies after our current conflicts have subsided.

Oddly, this raises interesting and unintended questions about the nature of conflict with Methodism. Barbeau closes with the understandable observation that schism and division harm ministerial effectiveness. Undoubtedly, there is pain and loss amidst Christian controversy. But one could read *The Spirit of Methodism*

from a different stance. For instance, Methodist divisions over racism produced an institutional reservoir of spiritual sustenance, activism, and hope for the African-American community—the AME church—which Barbeau rightfully describes as “one of the most significant events in the history of American Christianity” (p. 74). Similarly, when Christians in Africa pushed back against missionary paternalism, claiming more responsibilities for themselves, “churches began to grow and thrive” (p. 127). In China, John Sung butted heads with liberal Methodists, resisted interference from denominational leaders, and energized an indigenous church, forming a movement that produced an estimated ten percent of all the Christians in China. Are we to see these movements thriving despite conflict? Or is it possible that conflict—and perhaps even some sort of structural division—were necessary to produce these vibrant movements? Perhaps we all need a more robust theology of Christian conflict.

In the end, *The Spirit of Methodism* succeeds splendidly as an introduction to the complexities of historic Methodism. It is hoped that readers will use it as a springboard to more fully explore a wide range of questions.

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**Berhow, Michael. *Dysteleology: A Philosophical Assessment of Suboptimal Design in Biology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019. 148 pages, \$21, paperback.**

“Dysteleology” is a term invented by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) to describe the apparent suboptimal design and lack of function of biological order. Colloquially known as the “problem of bad design”, dysteleology has long been a central counterargument to the argument that biology was intentionally created by an omnipotent and perfectly good Creator. In the book, *Dysteleology*, philosopher Michael Berhow approaches the problem by contrasting theistic evolutionist Francisco J. Ayala’s dysteleological argument with Intelligent Design (ID) proponent William A. Dembski’s thought. The primary goal of the book is to show that dysteleology, as formulated by Ayala, fails as a counterargument against Intelligent Design. A secondary goal is to show that the project of theodicy requires a teleological worldview, and that Intelligent Design provides better support for such a worldview than Ayala’s brand of theistic evolutionism. Thus, Berhow concludes ambitiously that “If philosophers and theologians hope to develop a coherent evolutionary theodicy . . . they must appreciate the insights offered by ID advocates like Dembski” (p. 139).

Berhow’s critique of Ayala’s theodicy follows familiar lines of argument from the literature. Ayala argues that a non-directed process of evolution absolves the Creator of blame for the suboptimality of biology, but ID, in arguing that evolutionary mechanisms cannot explain biological adaptations, lays the blame on God. This,

according to Ayala, makes Darwinian evolution the preferable option for theological reasons. Many, including Dembski and many theistic evolutionists, have remarked that this does not actually solve the problem, as God would still be responsible for the evolutionary process, and thus indirectly responsible for bad design. Berhow follows this view, and acknowledges that there are more sophisticated evolutionary theodicies (p. 127), but he does not engage with these or the literature in depth, as these are outside the narrow aim of the book. This is a shame: While Ayala is an eminent scientist and an esteemed participant of the science and theology conversation, his brief and popular-level books do not contain all the relevant arguments.

In addition, Berhow also argues that Dembski's design argument can accommodate all the good features of Ayala's evolutionary theodicy, since Dembski and other ID proponents also allow for chance and necessity to have a real explanatory role in biology, as well as design. Here Berhow's discussion sidesteps some of the more theologically difficult parts of the ID hypothesis, such as Michael J. Behe's claim that the malarial parasite is exquisitely designed, and cannot be explained by such undirected processes. So, it seems that at least in some cases, proponents of ID do indeed need to appeal to direct divine or demonic design as the explanation, in contrast to theistic evolutionists following Ayala. However, it is indeed unclear whether Ayala's theodicy could succeed in removing the Creator's responsibility even as the indirect cause of such features. The notions of moral and causal responsibility that this particular evolutionary theodicy depends on are murky and in need of much more work before they could be credible. This is not to say, however, that other evolutionary theodicies could not be successful.

On the theological side, Berhow follows Dembski and other ID proponents in arguing that the detection of design does not require the evaluation of the optimality of that design. After all, we are routinely able to detect imperfect design. Instead, Berhow argues that dysteleology can be analysed as a separate theological question, and in this context it can be shown that theism does not require optimal design. Here engagement with the critical literature on Dembski's argument would have been needed to make the argument more convincing. Both philosophical analysis and empirical studies seem to show that the detection of design both in the human context and in nature is influenced by our background beliefs, and this holds true for both critics and defenders of design arguments. This means that it may not be possible to separate theological and philosophical questions from the design argument as neatly as Dembski claims. There is a vast literature of design arguments, as well as critical responses to Dembski, which Berhow does not engage with in depth in the book.

One of Dembski's core theological arguments against theistic evolutionism has been the alleged fideism of theistic evolution. Berhow similarly argues that "the fundamental difference between Ayala and Dembski, then, is over the detectability of design" (p. 93), and Berhow presents no critique against Dembski's quoted statement that "within theistic evolution, God is a master of stealth who constantly

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eludes our best efforts to detect him empirically” (p. 93). As Berhow notes, for Ayala, the scientific undetectability of design is no problem, because Ayala rejects scientism. But Berhow quickly dismisses this as irrelevant, since proponents of ID also wish to reject scientism (p. 108). Berhow then goes on to argue that because Dembski provides evidence supporting a teleological understanding of nature, in which mind is fundamental, Dembski’s framework therefore also provides a better foundation for theodicy than Ayala’s theistic evolutionism. Nevertheless, it seems that the influence of scientism does distort this debate. Discussion of the further literature beyond Ayala’s works would have helped probe the relationship of faith and reason deeper. The scientific undetectability of design because of methodological naturalism would not imply that purpose is undetectable in nature overall, or that the theistic evolutionist cannot have other reasons for belief in a teleological worldview. Indeed, many of the best defences of the contemporary theistic arguments, such as the fine-tuning design argument and the cosmological argument, have been written by theistic evolutionists. Moreover, the relationship of faith and reason is a complex matter, not reducible to a binary alternative between either evidentialist support for intelligent design, or a blind leap of faith for theistic evolutionism.

The book’s narrow focus on Ayala’s dysteleological argument against ID limits the book’s helpfulness for the scholarly debate. There is a vast literature on evolutionary theodicy, dysteleology, Intelligent Design, Dembski’s design argument, theistic evolution, faith and reason, and so on, which is not taken into account here in much depth in order to make conclusions relevant for the broader discussion. The coherence of a teleological worldview does not rest on ID, nor could ID alone provide sufficient support for it even in principle, since proponents of ID acknowledge that their design argument does not demonstrate the identity of the designer. Nevertheless, Dysteleology will be interesting for followers of the debate over Intelligent Design. Whereas the debate is often acrimonious, Berhow writes refreshingly cordially and clearly intends to be fair to all sides. The book is lucidly written, and Berhow capably corrects many misunderstandings of both Ayala’s and Dembski’s arguments.

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**Burgess, John P., Jerry Andrews, and Joseph D. Small. *A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice*. Pp. x, 190. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019. \$20.00.**

John P. Burgess is Professor of Systematic Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and author of *Holy Rus’: The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in the New Russia* (2017), and *Encounters with Orthodoxy: How Protestant Churches Can Reform Themselves Again* (2013). Jerry Andrews is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in San Diego California. Joseph D. Small is retired director of the Presbyterian Church

(USA) Office of Theology and Worship, and author of *To Be Reformed: Living the Tradition* (2010), and *Proclaiming the Great Ends of the Church* (2010).

*A Pastoral Rule for Today* “emerged out of an initiative of the Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA) called Re-Forming Ministry” (p. ix). The book is the culmination of denominational dissatisfaction with the current state of pastoral ministry and a successful attempt by three significant figures to “analyze the current situation of the church and to propose ways to strengthen the theological foundations of pastoral ministry” (p. ix). “While other members of the initiative pursued different areas of concern,” Burgess, Andrews, and Small committed themselves to “formulating a contemporary pastoral rule that could guide and sustain the ministers of their denomination” (p. 163). The authors express concern with the state of pastoral ministry today and upsetting trends like the “deep declines in membership and significance” (p. 3) within mainline Protestant denominations, as well as the rise of technology and the time constraints placed upon pastors. By establishing a pastoral rule for today of healthy patterns and practices, pastors can stop suffering from “constant distraction, interruption, and fragmentation” (p. 4). By looking into the pastoral rules of the great saints of history, the authors seek to “stimulate creative thinking and spiritual discipline among our pastors and churches” (p. 163). “This book,” they claim, “is not an exercise in history for history’s sake but rather a grateful acknowledgment of how Christ binds us together with the saints and wise elders of every time and place” (p. 2).

The rule consists of three components which they argue have been practiced regularly by the great Christian theologians and pastors of history: “personal discipline, conduct in ministry, and structures of mutual accountability” (p. 165). Though their aim is practical, their method is historical-theological. Andrews writes chapters on Augustine and Gregory the Great, while Small contributes entries on Benedict and Calvin. John Burgess writes three chapters covering the “rules” of Wesley, Newman, and Bonhoeffer. One significant strength of their method is that it clothes each historical chapter with practical ecclesiastical application and spiritual earnestness. One would expect the practical aims of their work to influence the content in negative ways, thus failing to plumb the theological depths of each figure and time period. Conversely, others may expect the theological depth of each chapter to deter contemporary readers. However, the authors have crafted a book that suffers not from these challenges. Their argument for establishing a pastoral rule for today is confidently interwoven into each historical sketch because of their belief that “the Christian past does not constrain our imagination but rather opens it into insights and possibilities for ministry” (pg. 1).

The authors admit that their list of historical figures “is in no way exhaustive, but it does represent a wide swath of the Christian faith: Catholic, Protestant (Reformed, Methodist, and Lutheran), ancient and modern, monastic and lay” (p. 9). “Each figure played a key role in inspiring and organizing communal life in his

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time” (p.9). Community life for Augustine was marked by theological friendship, while Benedict stressed obedience: a concept “not valued by contemporary pastors” (p. 48). Gregory the Great argued that “pastors, like monks, need a life of disciplined prayer,” (p. 10) and a constant daily movement from the “vertical to the horizontal; God and neighbor” (p. 72). Mutual supervision and corporate accountability were hallmarks of Calvin’s Genevan school. Wesley’s rule, however, was not established by Wesley himself but only regarded as a rule by the authors. This makes the chapter on Wesley rather weak. Wesley simply urged that graciousness be on the lips of those speaking “in conference” (p. 117). The Wesley chapter should either not be included in the book or moved to the place of an appendix. The Newman chapter, written by Burgess, examines the discipline of reading and study for the purpose of spiritual growth and discipleship. However, Burgess places too much emphasis on the need for pastors to have an “attachment to a place” (p. 141). While having such a place is no doubt helpful to pastors, some pastors who do not have the luxury of a permanent study room, must learn the art of being nimble. Such a requirement by Burgess lies outside of a biblical and historical rule, and fails to meet the criteria of the rules established in other chapters. The simplicity of Bonhoeffer’s rule of life in the Finkenwalde community is refreshing. The discussion questions following the Bonhoeffer chapter are practical for using in a small group. The last chapter of the book gives a helpful plan for establishing one’s own rule. The authors encourage the establishment of a written rule within a community of other pastors/elders/leaders.

In conclusion, the authors successfully convince the reader that a pastoral rule is needed for today. They unearth the lost arts which many early theologians and pastors practiced throughout history. They present a convincing case for recovering and reestablishing a more robust sense of community through discipline in the church. Readers must decide if establishing a rule in their community is worth the costs. Because the book is written from a particular denominational perspective, it lacks certain qualities that could be more winsome to independent autonomous churches and leaders. Pastors who serve singularly in independent autonomous churches will find the book to be admirable and valuable, but they will struggle to make it apply to their own situation. The rule may simply become a type of personal growth plan with no corporate accountability. However, the book could also serve to stir such pastors to becoming more accountable to others instead of “free agents” (p. 92) who struggle to be disciplined.

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**Witmer, Stephen. *A Big Gospel in Small Places: Why Ministry in Forgotten Communities Matters*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2019, pp. 204, \$18, paperback.**

Stephen Witmer is the lead pastor of Pepperell Christian Fellowship in Massachusetts and is an adjunct professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Witmer is cofounder of Small Town Summits, an organization partnering with the Gospel Coalition, which serves rural pastors serving in rural churches in the New England area. Witmer has written *Eternity Changes Everything* and numerous articles for websites such as *Gospel Coalition* and *Desiring God*.

Many Christian ministries and books have focused on the importance on reaching large, strategic cities in urban areas because they are the center for culture and, as a result, are seemingly more important than rural areas. However, Witmer makes the case that since over three billion people live in rural areas—nearly half of the world’s population—rural areas are important and need fruitful ministry. Witmer uses the term “small places” to refer to areas that are relatively small in population, influence, and economic power, but are worth the investment from potential pastors and ministry leaders (p. 22).

Witmer seeks to answer how to have fruitful ministry in rural contexts by addressing three specific issues. First, he describes the attributes of small places. Second, he considers the elements needed for fruitful ministry in small places. Third, answers the question of whether someone should minister in a small place. In seeking to look at these three specific issues, Witmer provides a gospel-shaped vision for ministry that sees both “our ourselves and our places as God does” (pp. 12-13). By seeing one’s ministry context as God does, one should have a more theological vision for ministry, which should not be defined by the context in which one serves.

In seeking to establish attributes of small places, he argues that small places are *both* better and worse than people think. According to Witmer, small places are better than people think because God has a plan for them to “lavish his grace on them through his body, the church” (p. 41). In this way, Witmer stresses that fruitful ministry in a small place is centered around seeing the community as God sees them, as more valuable than Christians often do. Conversely, Witmer rightly points out that small places are often stereotyped as being inherently good, and this sentiment is both naïve and dangerous. Small places are not simply idyllic places but places that are stained with sin and hopelessness. Witmer stresses that because small places are better than one thinks, they are worth the investment; because they are worse than one thinks, they deserve a lifetime of dedicated ministry.

In seeking to discuss how to have fruitful ministry in a small place, Witmer posits that what is needed is not more ministry tips or advice; what is needed is a theological vision that motivates and molds ministry (p. 62). While tips and practical steps can help inform ministry practice, they cannot change a minister’s heart. Only

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a proper theological vision that sees people the way that God sees them can change hearts. Witmer stresses that small place ministry can be fruitful when pastors and ministers see their context as important because God wants to lavish his grace upon the area through the church. As one sees this as the basis for theological ministry, one begins to see the value in investing in smaller places.

In seeking how to deal with whether someone should invest in small place ministry, Witmer discusses reasons (good and bad) why some are unwilling to invest in small place ministry. Some think they are too educated or talented to serve in small place, while others simply desire the comforts of the city. Perhaps others see small place ministry as too difficult. Regardless of reasons why, Witmer makes the case that people who see the value of small places will see people as worth the investment. While small place ministry can be difficult, it is worth it for those who truly want to make a difference in these areas.

Small place ministry is important because people in all places need the gospel. In this, Witmer is correct. Small place ministry is important because God wants these areas to have proper access to the Gospel and needs theologically grounded pastors serving churches in these areas. Witmer makes a strong case that pastors need to see these areas as valuable places that need long-term investment and care despite the size of the community or the size of the church. While this book makes the case that small place ministry is important, it also honestly deals with some of the challenges that comes with it.

In chapter nine, Witmer deals with a few challenges to small place ministry that are especially helpful to pastors. He deals with discontentment, envy, and fear. These challenges do not only affect small place ministry, they are often byproducts of it. However, seeing people as God sees them stresses the importance of small place ministry and, as Witmer rightly notes, “nothing is little in God’s service” (p. 129). If pastors and ministers see people in small places as God sees them, they will see that their ministry matters and, when convinced of this, ministry will be seen as a joy and not a burden despite difficulties. If pastors view people in their context as those needing and deserving a gospel-centered ministry, they will develop a tender heart towards their ministry, regardless of size. In this, Witmer makes his strongest case that ministry, no matter the context, is worth the investment from pastors and ministers who seek to see people as God sees them: people who need Christ.

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**Perry, Tim (ed). *The Theology of Benedict XVI: A Protestant Appreciation*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019, pp. 314, \$25.99 hardback.**

Tim Perry, adjunct professor of theology at St Paul University (Ottawa) and Trinity School for Ministry (Ambridge), is editor of this wide-ranging volume on the

theology of Benedict XVI. Leading Catholic theologian, Matt Levering, describes the publication as being in 'the top handful' (p.282) of studies on Ratzinger's thought and this judgment rings true given the calibre of the various essays. The fifteen contributors span a range of denominations (e.g. Southern Baptist, Anglican, OPC, and Lutheran) and in their trawl of Joseph Ratzinger's voluminous writings manage to cover virtually every aspect of contemporary theology. Trinitarian thought, Christology, revelation, tradition, theological method, hermeneutics, the relationship between faith and reason, theological anthropology, prayer, catechesis, Mariology, ecclesiology, priesthood, the theological virtues and liturgy all come into play in this evangelical *homage* to one of Catholicism's finest living theologians.

Benedict XVI emerges from this study as an outstanding theologian of culture whose trenchant critique of current societal and theological trends will both enrich and challenge those standing on the other side of the Tiber. This image of Benedict is exemplified in Ben Myers' opening essay. Here he makes a convincing case that evangelicalism has much to gain from Ratzinger's synthesis of faith and reason, particularly as it engages with postmodernity's rejection of any overarching or shared rationality. Katherine Sonderegger's chapter on 'Writing Theology in a Secular Age' is one of the gems of this publication, not least for her incisive portrayal of Ratzinger as a theologian who tells the unvarnished truth about a world estranged from God. This unflinching portrayal of reality on Ratzinger's part she characterises as 'a gift above all' (p. 30). Her robust synopsis of Ratzinger's critique of modern trends opens a window on his unequivocal opposition to secularism: 'Secularism cannot be a form of realism – his claim is that strong. What is necessary for the human subject, for the life and flourishing of the human person, is that this shell of atomized rights and liberties must be shattered, *killed*, so that a larger, 'new subject' can be born who has God as its ground, Christ as its *inner* subjectivity.' (p.38)

Kevin Vanhoozer's chapter on Revelation, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation presents Ratzinger as seeking to follow the same *via media* as evangelicals between fundamentalism and modernist Christianity, or in Benedict's context, neoscholasticism and modernist biblical criticism. His major emphasis is on the way Benedict has challenged biblical scholarship to take seriously what has been termed the 'theological interpretation of Scripture', and not merely to focus on the historical critical dimension of the text. In terms of the championing of this cause, Vanhoozer believes evangelicals may have something to learn from the former Pope (p. 67). R. Lucas Stamps' excellent chapter on anthropology highlights how Benedict's Augustinian theology (sober and realistic in its account of humanity) can help the church navigate the difficult waters of late modernity. A proper vision of humanity's vocation as creature of God, and an understanding of sin as that 'which distorts our freedom and pulls us away from God and our own good' (p. 97) emerge as ways out of the various blind alleys now opening up within the culture.

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Christopher J. Holmes' intriguing chapter on Christology serves to highlight a defining component of Ratzinger's ministry as a theologian. For the Pope Emeritus, the great truths of the faith (not least Christology) are comprehended in the context of prayer, or not at all. As Holmes puts it, drawing at points on a famous Ratzinger text, 'Without prayer we cannot progress in theological understanding. Prayer evokes an "eye of love" and "encourages the faculty of beholding." Without love, we can neither behold Jesus Christ nor receive him.' (p. 110). This 'hermeneutic of faith' was to inform profoundly Ratzinger's great Christological trilogy, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Perhaps what will be the most surprising chapter for evangelicals is Tim Perry's exploration of Ratzinger's Mariology. Here he acquaints his readers with Ratzinger's defence of Mariology, which is derived from prophetic and typological readings of the Old Testament. Once we factor these in to our engagement with the few NT Marian texts that we have, the Catholic view that Mary is typologically present in the Bible is thought to make *some* sense. (p. 134). While remaining a convinced Protestant, Perry's goal is to challenge his fellow evangelicals to engage with the typological basis of Mariology and take the Catholic approach seriously. Another key chapter is Fred Sanders' work on Ratzinger's Trinitarian theology. While acknowledging that the latter has not written extensively on the theme, he draws out key emphases in Ratzinger's work which speak to current deficiencies within systematic theology. Most strikingly, Ratzinger is opposed to a reductionist Trinitarianism (à la Küng) which focuses on the economic Trinity but effectively dismisses the immanent one. Sanders demonstrates how for Ratzinger the Trinity is essential for our knowledge of God and our certainty of being loved. Without a Triune God who is love in himself, we can have no certainty that God is love (p. 145).

Carl Trueman's chapter on ecumenism is the least effusive in its praise of Ratzinger and the most wary of Protestant adulation of the retired Pope. His suspicion is that some have lost sight of the fundamental differences between the two traditions and in the process neglected Protestant distinctives. Ratzinger, on the other hand, has remained committed to the ecclesiology of his own church, note the tone of *Dominus Iesus* and the decision to create an Ordinariate. Trueman claims that perhaps Benedict's most valuable lesson to Protestants is on how to be faithful to one's own convictions (p.167). However, the absence of engagement with Ratzinger's most significant publication on ecumenism ('Luther and the Unity of the Churches') or awareness of his crucial behind-the-scenes support of the Joint Declaration on Justification, raises questions about whether we have been given the whole picture as regards Benedict's attitude to ecumenism. Peter Leithart's complex chapter on the Bible and Liturgy explores two fascinating themes in Benedict – church music and the essential nature of the eucharist. This essay marks one of the few points of disagreement between Ratzinger and his Protestant interlocutors. Leithart argues that Benedict is willing to acknowledge that patristic thought veered away from the apostolic trajectory by downplaying the theological significance of music in worship.

However, with another vital movement away from the apostolic pattern (the eucharist ceasing to be a communal meal and taking on the function of a sacrifice), Ratzinger seems to have conceded very little. Leithart suggests that he should perhaps be more open to acknowledging other points (e.g. food) where the post apostolic church has not kept in step with the scriptural trajectory. The final chapter considered is Bishop Joey Royal's reflection on Ratzinger's Eucharistic theology. In a brave move, especially given American evangelicalism's strong Zwinglian orientation, Royal suggests that Ratzinger's careful explanation of Eucharistic sacrifice and transubstantiation could allay many Protestant misunderstandings about these contentious ideas and potentially overcome barriers still existing between Catholics and Protestants who already believe in the real presence (p. 217).

As I hope the content of this review indicates, the theology of Benedict XVI has much to offer Protestantism. This publication makes it accessible to a new audience who will benefit from Benedict's incisive engagement with contemporary culture, his intelligent articulation of orthodoxy and most-tellingly, his Christocentric spirituality.

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**Cotherman, Charles E. *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020, pp. 320, \$31.50, hardback.**

I owe a great personal debt to Christian study centers. I became a believer at Swiss l'Abri, from an agnostic background at age 19. My wife and I were on staff at the FOCUS Study Center (Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools) on Martha's Vineyard for a number of years. And I was a Senior Faculty Member (a part-time job) at the Trinity Forum Academy (which became the Trinity Fellows Academy) at Royal Oaks, Maryland, for some fifteen years before its closure. Even though my career has been largely in established graduate schools, I am a strong believer in lay education.

At a time when many histories of the evangelical movement are critical (sometimes deservedly, but often agenda-driven) it is refreshing to read Charles Cotherman's perspective. Cotherman, a Vineyard pastor, based *To Think Christianly* on his University of Virginia doctoral dissertation. This is a marvelous book—informative, engaging, and deeply fascinating. Both the main thesis and the outline are simple. The argument is that l'Abri and Regent College, in two rather different ways, spawned a number of influential study centers which changed thousands of lives. After the Foreword by UVA Professor of Economics Ken Elzinga (active in Christian ministries) and an introduction, there are seven chapters, each dedicated to one of the following centers: L'Abri (Huémoz, Switzerland and elsewhere), Regent

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College (Vancouver, British Columbia), the C. S. Lewis Institute (Springfield, Virginia), the Ligonier Valley Study Center (Stahlstown, Pennsylvania), New College Berkeley (University of California-Berkeley), the Center for Christian Study (UVA), and the Consortium of Christian Study Centers (Charlottesville, Virginia, a few miles from UVA).

In lieu of rendering a pedantic account of each of these chapters, a few substantial comments will suffice. The work most familiar to the reviewer and perhaps to most evangelicals is l'Abri (as an aside, the French spelling with a small "l" is better). Cotherman managed to avoid opinions about Schaeffer's move into alliances with the evangelical right, the rather poor quality of the late-1970s film series, *How Shall We Then Live?*, and son Frank's tirades. In one way, good for him. Perhaps in a book about community, though, some mention could have been made about the difficulty of raising a family in the midst of stardom, the problem of succession after Schaeffer's death, and the pressure many felt to imitate the Schaeffers without having their boundless energy or charisma. Succession was a challenge in most of the other study centers.

His account of Regent College, and particularly the role of co-founder Jim Houston is riveting. Readers may be surprised to learn how many of these study center leaders came from a Plymouth Brethren background. Humanly, this might explain two things. One is the hunger for a broader and deeper connection between the Christian faith and the world around. Brethren theology is not typically concerned for social issues. Reactions are understandable. The other is the burden for lay training. The Brethren, at least under John Nelson Darby, did not recognize an ordained clergy. Houston, David Gill, and others were less doctrinaire about this, yet they clearly developed a sensitivity to training those not necessarily called to the pastoral ministry. Regent would eventually develop a biblical and theological track, but it always kept its focus on educating lay persons. How does the gospel apply to business, science, the arts, and other fields? Unlike l'Abri, Regent was founded by an Oxford don (Houston). Although it bore some similarities to l'Abri, it was more closely modeled after Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, an evangelical research institute for biblical scholarship. In addition, Regent sought to attract first-rate scholars to its staff. It was helpful that Houston had a friendship with C. S. Lewis. The close connection of Regent to the University of British Columbia was intentional.

As is well-known, other players at Regent such as Professor of New Testament Ward Gasque and his wife, Laurel, and Professor of Old Testament Carl Armerding helped foster an atmosphere that combined academics with hospitality. In one way or another, this combination is reflected in each of the places Cotherman looks at. As well, one observes that each was created or sustained by a strong personality. It could not be otherwise, though. Such bold initiatives usually do not spring up from an amorphous background. Jim and Lorraine Hiskey, retired from the golf world, helped create and sustain the C. S. Lewis Institute. The location in suburban

Washington, D.C. meant it was natural to contact politicians and chaplains along the way. Ligonier Valley was centered on R. C. Sproul, one of the greatest communicators of theology on the planet. New College was from the mind of David Gill, a Jacques Ellul specialist. The Center for Christian Study was led by David Turner and Drew Trotter (who held a PhD in New Testament studies from Cambridge University).

One concern Cotherman regularly brings up is the role of women. Regent had more of a place for women than many ministries. Linda Mercadante and Thena Ayers, both from a l'Abri background, contributed significantly to life at Regent, Mercadante as a 1978 Masters of Christian Studies graduate and Ayers as Regent's first permanent female professor. The Ligonier Valley Study Center, while heavily oriented to R. C. Sproul's vision, gave a prominent teaching and leadership role to Jackie Shelton (later Jackie Griffith) in 1975. Sharon Gallagher shared in the leadership of New College Berkeley with David Gill. Still, women do not seem to have true equality with men in these places. Cotherman notes this issue without any kind of vendetta.

Historiographically, demonstrating the role of l'Abri and Regent in spurring the other centers is a tall order. But Cotherman's case is persuasive. Both informally and through the formal interactions of these places with Schaeffer and Houston, a clear connection exists. After reading this thoroughly documented story, so well written, three issues needing further exploration. First, why did every one of them, at least from their original form, decline or even fold? Some did morph into new expressions: l'Abri is alive and well in various branches; the Center for Christian Study continues to provide a haven for students. But not everything went well in these places after the initial thrust. As one could anticipate, there were leadership issues, leading to problems with burnout and succession. Financial strains were omni-present. But Cotherman also suggests another reason. There was a shift in the priorities for many young people these centers were trying to reach. According to various studies, whereas in the 1960s American freshmen endorsed "developing a meaningful life philosophy" as an essential value, by the late 1980s financial security and personal peace were the norms (p. 182). Certain issues caught the study centers unaware, particularly in the area of gender and sexuality. Unless new wineskins could be found some of these centers would lose their purpose. The 2018 closure of Trinity Fellows Academy in Maryland is a recent example.

The second question is how these study centers relate to the church. To be sure, none of these works could be strictly ecclesiastic, nor perhaps should they be. A few, such as the Center for Christian Studies, were strongly supported by a local church (Trinity Presbyterian, led by Joseph "Skip" Ryan). The creative minds who led them were necessarily mavericks but none of them denied the centrality of the church (Matthew 16:18). Schaeffer, for example, founded a small Presbyterian denomination (the International Presbyterian Church), and l'Abri residents attended church on Sundays. Yet Schaeffer also called evangelicals "bourgeois," and it was easy for some participants to resent the institutional church's inability to think through issues

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and to reach people effectively. Consequently, some viewed study centers as an ecclesiastical alternative rather than accompaniment. But could there not be a way to have integrated these centers more symbiotically with the church? Perhaps the model of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City is a potent example of combining traditional worship and preaching with endeavors such as Faith and Work. But how to challenge the local church to respond to the issues in the surrounding culture remains.

The third issue is rather petty. Or is it? The title of this wonderful book is *Thinking Christianly*. Yet the bulk of it is not about Christian philosophy but about community living. To be sure, the purpose of these communities is to foster a place for education; however, readers are left without much comment on the task of thinking Christianly. Perhaps, it was wise to leave this stone unturned. A second book may be needed to examine the philosophy, theology, and worldviews taught in these places.

Where do we go from here? In the end, Cotherman pleads for “faithful presence,” the phrase elucidated by eminent sociologist of religion and evangelical commentator James Davison Hunter in *To Change the World* (OUP, 2010). In the first part of his book, Hunter chides Christians for worldview thinking and idealism. I say, let’s be idealistic! With realism, yes, but with hope. Charles Cotherman deserves thanks for opening the door.

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