

The
REFORMATION
as **RENEWAL**

**RETRIEVING THE
ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC,
AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH**

An Intellectual and Theological History

MATTHEW BARRETT

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*To Michael Haykin, who pursued me to support
my scholarship when I was young and unproven.
I have sought to model your humble generosity with my
students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

“[We must] vindicate an absolute historical necessity to the Reformation, and to expose in its utter emptiness and nakedness the reproach, cast upon it by its enemies, as an uncalled for innovation. We go further, however, and affirm that *the entire Catholic Church as such, so far as it might be considered the legitimate bearer of the Christian faith and life*, pressed with inward necessary impulse toward Protestantism, just as Judaism . . . rolled with steady powerful stream, in its interior legal, symbolical and prophetic principle, directly toward Christianity, as the fulfillment of the law, the prototype of all its symbols, and the accomplishment of all its prophesies.”

—Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*

FOR REVIEW ONLY

CONTENTS

Foreword by Carl Trueman xiii

1. The Catholicity of the Reformation 1

PART 1:

The Reformation's Catholic Context

2. Spiritual Ascent and Mystical Dissent 35

The Reformation and Monasticism

3. Faith Seeking Understanding 77

The Advent of Scholasticism

4. Thomas Aquinas as a "Sounder Scholastic" 114

The Reformation's Critical Retrieval of Scholasticism

5. Provocation for Reformation 205

*The Via Moderna, Nominalism, and the Late Medieval Departure
from the Realism of Thomistic Augustinianism and Its Soteriology*

6. From Rebirth to Aberration 284

The Reformation and Renaissance Humanism

7. The Ecclesiastical Watershed 325

Conciliarism, Curialism, and the Papacy on the Eve of the Reformation

PART 2:

The Genesis of Reformation

8. Martin Luther as a Late Medieval Man 371

Luther's Augustinianism, the Via Moderna, and the Papacy

9. Reforming the Reformation 458

Liturgical Catholicity and Prospects for Renewal

10. From Union to Schism 487

The Eucharist, the Turks, and the League

11. Protagonists and Protestants 522

Defining the Center of Reform

PART 3:
***The Formation of
Reformed Catholicity***

12. The Renewal of a Catholic Heritage	553
<i>The Reformation among the Swiss</i>	
13. Abandoning Catholicity for Primitive Christianity	608
<i>Radicals and Revolutionaries</i>	
14. Constructing a Reformed Church	655
<i>The Reformation in Strasbourg and Geneva</i>	
15. Fortifying a Reformed Church	706
<i>The Reformation in Geneva, Berne, and France</i>	
16. An Apology for the Universal Church	758
<i>The Reformation in England and Scotland</i>	

PART 4:
Counter-Renewal

17. Roman but Catholic?	841	
<i>Counter-Reformation, Catholic Renewal, and the Antidote</i>		
<i>Conclusion: The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church</i>		881
<i>Afterword by Timothy George</i>		885
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		887
<i>Abbreviations</i>		889
<i>Bibliography</i>		897
<i>Subject Index</i>		947
<i>Scripture Index</i>		979
<i>Author Index</i>		981

FOREWORD

The pathway between scholarly breakthroughs and their popular reception is neither a swift nor a simple one. And this is nowhere more true than with the reception of theology within the church. This pathway between the insights of scholarship and the attitude of the church can seem long and arduous, especially since it is embedded within a broader culture of strong individualism with an antispeculative and pragmatic ethic. An understandable fear of novelty has often been akin to error or even heresy, and there has long been a deep suspicion of intellectuals and scholars in American conservative Protestantism, particularly in its evangelical variety.

There have been many exciting scholarly developments in the field of historical theology in the years since the Second World War. Heiko Oberman redrew the map from the late Middle Ages to the Reformation. As with all great scholars, he built upon the insights of an earlier generation, such as those offered by Joseph Lortz, who drew attention to the clear connections between late medieval theological paradigms and Martin Luther's Reformation theology. Unlike Lortz, Oberman set aside time-worn and time-hardened Catholic-Protestant polemics to assess late medieval nominalism and Martin Luther on their own merits. In so doing, he freed Reformation studies from the distorting effects of later ecclesiastical posturing and opened the field in new and fruitful ways for the next generation of scholars. His student, David C. Steinmetz, took up the challenge of theological genealogy as it had been developed by Oberman and applied it to the history of exegesis. Then, Steinmetz's student, Richard A. Muller, applied both approaches to Reformed Orthodoxy and extended the narrative into the early eighteenth century. The older theological approaches began to crumble as they faced the rising challenge of epistemology.

Oberman, Steinmetz, and Muller, along with their doctoral students and many other academics influenced by their work, effected a revolution in how the relationship between the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the early modern period is understood in terms of intellectual and theological developments. It became clear that the accepted Protestant readings of, say, Aquinas were nonsense and unsustainable in light of the primary texts. The old paradigm of Reformation theology as a radical break was finally put to bed as it became clear that Reformation theology was built upon a medieval heritage (particularly

theology proper) even as it broke with that medieval heritage on aspects of soteriology, sacraments, and authority.

But historical scholarship was not only transforming scholarly understanding of the Reformation. In the field of patristics the last twenty years have seen some equally remarkable developments. Scholars such as Lewis Ayres and Khaled Anatolios have reworked the scholarly understanding of Nicene orthodoxy. We now have a much better grasp of what terms such as *hypostasis* and *ousia* meant in the fourth and fifth centuries, and a deeper understanding of what lay at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity. Old clichés that drew sharp divisions between East and West, between the Cappadocians and Augustine, have been put to the scholarly sword. Just as the Catholic-Protestant paradigm was shown to be a distorting lens through which to understand the Reformation, the division between Rome and Constantinople has now been revealed as similarly problematic. Institutional divisions are stark and clear; intellectual relationships are far more subtle and complex.

All of these scholarly developments inevitably have implications for the church, especially Protestant and evangelical churches. Some of the implications are disturbing. As scholars such as James Dolezal, Matthew Barrett, and Stephen Duby have appropriated the fresh insights into the classical doctrine of God that lay behind the theology of such august Protestant documents as the Westminster and Second London Confessions, it has become clear that much of modern evangelical writing on this subject would not have been recognized as orthodox by the Reformers and their heirs. While such deviation was no doubt pursued in good faith, the rejections of simplicity, immutability, and impassibility—as classically understood—place much of contemporary evangelical theology closer to the biblicist and highly problematic Socinianism of the early seventeenth century than to the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the church catholic. A return to orthodoxy on the doctrine of God is belated, but it can only benefit the church. Socinianism was a dead end in the Reformation and can only prove so again today.

Other implications are more positive. Protestantism long labored under the accusation from Catholics that it represents a set of deviant innovations. Now we know—and can prove—that this is not the case. To the extent that Protestantism is confessional, to the extent that it is committed to the teaching embodied in a document such as the Westminster Confession, it is catholic and represents what Calvin and his contemporaries claimed it to be: not a repudiation of the church's tradition but an affirmation of the church's true tradition over against the fallacious additions under which it had been buried.

Yet the path from scholarly breakthrough to church life is never easy or straightforward. The works of the scholars I've mentioned is often highly technical. Their work frequently assumes both a wide knowledge of historical context and a deep familiarity with the history of scholarly debate. What is needed, therefore, is for one of them to outline an accessible road map that makes the

salient points comprehensible to a wider audience and makes clear the implications of these fresh insights for Christians today.

This is why Matthew Barrett's new book is such a gem. It bears all the marks with which readers of his earlier work on the doctrine of God will be familiar. It is not overburdened with technical jargon, nor is it misleadingly simplistic. It builds upon the best scholarship, yet does so in a manner the layperson and student alike will find accessible. And it gently guides the reader into a deeper knowledge of the Reformation and its aftermath in a way that highlights the theological catholicity of the movement. It is a key tool for bridging that gap between scholarly research and the everyday life of the student and the church.

No doubt some of Barrett's claims will prove hard to swallow for those unfamiliar with the vast and compelling scholarship of the last sixty years. There is always a time lag on such things. Those who still peddle old and discredited caricatures of Thomas Aquinas, for example, will no doubt be around a while longer—careers in some quarters depend upon it. But careful reading of texts and thoughtful scholarship will, in the long run, defeat the tendentious polemics of a bygone age. Matthew's book is a gracious contribution to that process, for which we all now owe him a debt of gratitude.

Carl R. Trueman
Grove City College
Christmas 2022

FOR REVIEW ONLY

THE CATHOLICITY OF THE REFORMATION

With this [universal/catholic] Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.

—John Calvin, Reply to Sadoleto

Luther was not breaking with catholic tradition but self-consciously retrieving the tradition, bringing to bear the deepest insights of Augustine and the great monastic teachers on a [late medieval] scholasticism out of touch with its own [Scholastic] roots.

—David S. Yeago, “The Catholic Luther”

Return to the Catholic Church.” This summons to return to the mother church was addressed to Geneva in a letter written by Jacopo Sadoleto in the year 1539. Sadoleto was a cardinal who carried no little clout, an experienced theologian, a seasoned polemicist, and a representative of Rome. The timing of his letter to that small locale called Geneva was strategic: John Calvin had been exiled, no longer Geneva’s pastor. And no longer under his direct influence—and the influence of the zealous William Farel—Geneva was ripe for a call back to the mother church. According to Sadoleto, the stakes were high: to depart from the Catholic Church could only end in everlasting death, but to return to the Catholic Church promised the reward of eternal life.¹

Sadoleto could be very persuasive. Reformers like Calvin were schismatics, leading the Genevans away from the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church into endless dissension. To depart from mother church was sacrilegious, Sadoleto warned.² The choice, then, was easy: either follow the Catholic Church and its fifteen hundred years of faithfulness to God or follow the “innovations” of the past two and a half decades, led by innovators like Calvin, whom the Genevans

1. Sadoleto, “Letter to the Genevans,” 40.

2. Sadoleto, 43.

2 *The Reformation as Renewal*

expelled.³ According to the cardinal from Carpentras, the exiled pastor of Geneva had misled the Genevans, failing to teach them the ways of the ancient church, leading them astray into innumerable “novelties.”⁴

Sadoletto’s opinion was not merely his own but was shared by many in the papacy. The Reformers were heretics, introducing new doctrines into the church. For that reason, they were not catholic, but their modernizations betrayed the church universal. To make matters worse, they created discord when the Catholic Church stood for concord. “Truth is always one,” Sadoletto reminded the Genevans, but “falsehood is varied and multiform.”⁵

Although Calvin was no longer pastor of the Genevans, he was asked to respond to Sadoletto. His reply was a life preserver cast on the seas of a vulnerable Reformed Church, sustaining the Genevans under heavy and successive waves of pressure that called out, “*Return to Rome, return to Rome, return to Rome.*” Return home. Yet Calvin’s reply was also revealing; Sadoletto’s summons forced the Reformer to explain the true intentions behind his program of reform. Sadoletto’s bidding galvanized Calvin to answer the charge of novelty, a charge also lobbed at Luther in the early 1520s (see chapters 8–9). Was Sadoletto right that the Reformers—and all those who followed them—were leading Christians out of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church?

WHO IS CATHOLIC?

Calvin must have infuriated Sadoletto and the whole Roman Church by his reply. He told Sadoletto that the Reformation is not only catholic but *more catholic than Rome*. The Reformers were not peddling novelties, leading the people astray into heretical innovations. If anyone had strayed from the catholic heritage, it was Rome. By contrast, Calvin pursued reform because the Reformation he perpetuated and advanced was committed to *renewal*. The Reformers believed that their teachings, in contrast to Rome’s, were not only faithful to the sacred Scriptures but allegiant to the catholic tradition that embodied those same biblical teachings. The doctrine the Reformation retrieved only needed retrieving because Rome failed to articulate such beliefs in a way that adhered to the catholic tradition without wavering. As Calvin said with fervidity, “With this [universal/catholic] Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.” Calvin said to Sadoletto, *We are more catholic than you*. “Our agreement with antiquity is *far closer* than yours,” Calvin insisted. Therefore, Calvin clarified what the Reformation was about, namely, an attempt “to *renew* that ancient form of the Church, which,

3. Sadoletto, 40.

4. Sadoletto, 42, 43. Sadoletto was not as aggressive as other theologians could be. For example, he did express his own criticisms of abuses in the papacy (cf. *Consiliu de Emendanda Ecclesia*), and he did show good faith at times by extending himself toward dialogue with Reformers. Nonetheless, he remained committed to wooing Geneva back to Rome.

5. Sadoletto, 46.

at first sullied and distorted by illiterate men of indifferent character, was afterward flagitiously mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman Pontiff and his faction.”⁶

Calvin’s words—and his underlying claim—represent the essence of this book, the mechanism by which this project presents a fresh intellectual and theological history of the Reformation. In the words of T. H. L. Parker, “It was a belief common to the Reformers that they had on their side not only the Bible but also, on the major dogmas at issue, the Church fathers. It was not they who were the innovators; it was the Romanists.”⁷ That claim is often wielded for theological, even polemical paradigms, but the assertion should be a historical benchmark that captures the Reformation’s *intent*, regardless of Protestant or Roman Catholic allegiances today. One need not be a Protestant to recognize this conspicuous historical truth: *the Reformers did not think the Reformation was primarily a revolution for new, modern ideas, but a retrieval and renewal of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.*⁸ Whether one thinks the Reformers were correct is a theological matter that is not the burden of this book. Whether the Reformers defined themselves by this theological conviction, however, is a historical matter, one that defined the Reformation as a whole. According to David Steinmetz,

The goal of the reformers was not to supplant a dead or dying church with a new Christianity, as though God had written Ichabod over a moribund Christendom and repudiated his covenant. The goal of the reformers was a *reformed catholic church*, built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, purged of the medieval innovations that had distorted the gospel, subordinate to the authority of Scripture and the ancient Christian writers, and continuous with what was best in the old church. As they saw it, *it was this evangelical church, this reformed and chastened church, that was the church catholic. It was the innovators in Rome who could no longer pretend to be genuinely catholic and whose claim to be the custodians of a greater and unbroken tradition was patently false.* What the Protestants thought they offered was a genuine antiquity.⁹

6. Emphasis added. Sadoleto, 62.

7. Parker, “Introduction,” 64.

8. That motive may have resulted in revolutionary consequences, but the motive itself and its accompanying reforming program was fixated on this catholic spirit.

9. Emphasis added. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 129. And again, “The Lutheran program for the reformation of Christendom began with an appeal to Christian antiquity. There was, of course, nothing in the sixteenth century less revolutionary and more traditional than an appeal to the past. Sixteenth-century Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, shared a strong cultural assumption that what is older is better than what is new. That assumption applied not only to religion but to civic and cultural relations, art and architecture, law and custom, economic and agricultural practices—in short, to the whole range of activities and beliefs that gives human society its character. The modern notion that new things are generally better and ought, in a well-ordered society, to supplant what is older was, on the whole, an idea that had not yet found a home in sixteenth-century Europe. The cultural bias was in favor of what was sound, tested, ancient, and rooted in the collective experience of generations” (127).

4 *The Reformation as Renewal*

A *reformed catholic church*—that label (and goal) captures the title and subtitle of this project.

The Reformers believed they had every right to claim allegiance to the church catholic (universal). On account of deviations within the church of Rome, specifically the papacy, the Reformers mustered their disciples to reform, retrieve, and renew the church's catholicity. Again, Calvin and his reply to Sadoletto is a window into their motivation. The church *catholic*—which Calvin defined as the “society of all the saints . . . spread over the whole world”—stands on three pillars: doctrine, discipline, and sacraments. The Reformers had labored to preserve each, said Calvin, linking arms with the church catholic who understood these marks according to their pure, scriptural meaning.

Rome, in contrast, had undermined such fidelity. “The truth of prophetic and evangelical doctrine, on which the Church ought to be founded, has not only in a great measure perished in your Church, but is violently driven away by fire and sword.” Calvin asked, “Will you obtrude upon me, for the Church, a body which furiously persecutes everything sanctioned by our religion, both as delivered by the oracles of God, and embodied in the writings of holy Fathers, and approved by ancient Councils?” Calvin, at this point, reached a fever pitch: “Where, pray, exist among you any vestiges of that true and holy discipline which the ancient bishops exercised in the Church? Have you not scorned all their institutions? Have you not trampled all the canons under foot? Then, your nefarious profanation of the sacraments I cannot think of without the utmost horror.”¹⁰

Calvin was convinced the Reformation was catholic at its core, and according to his own testimony, he was horrified by its distortion with more modern innovations. Calvin and the Reformers, says Bruce Gordon, “would have hated the idea of Rome being called Catholic.”¹¹ Calvin considered his reforming program a renewal rather than a departure from the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. If anyone had strayed from true catholicity, it was Rome, said Calvin.

ROMAN BUT CATHOLIC?

Calvin's argument was not unique, as if catholicity was segregated to the Reformed wing of the Reformation. The German wing of the Reformation thought along the same lines: “Luther, who seems to have read and admired Calvin's letter [to Sadoletto], was in fundamental agreement with its argument.”¹² For example, when Henry of Braunschweig accused Luther of betraying the church universal with innovation and heresy, Luther became furious. “They allege that we have fallen away from the holy church and set up a new church.”

10. Calvin, “Reply to Sadoletto,” 63.

11. Gordon, *Calvin*, xi.

12. “The Catholic church was riddled with innovations introduced over centuries of inattention and theological laxity. By submitting themselves to Scripture and the writings of the ancient fathers, the Protestant communities were purging themselves of such unwanted innovations and returning to a more ancient and therefore purer form of ecclesiastical life and thought.” Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 128.

No, Luther said in response, “We are the true ancient church . . . you have fallen away from us.”¹³ Yet even outside Luther’s reaction to Henry, numerous other assertions of catholicity among German Reformers existed.

For example, consider Philip Melanchthon, the Wittenberg professor of Greek, author of the *Loci Communes*, and architect of the Augsburg Confession, that foundational document of Lutheran concord. When Melanchthon commented on the meaning of the word *catholic* in the creed, he claimed that a Reformation church was a true representation of creedal fidelity. His argument relied on his definition of the catholic, universal church. The church “is an assembly dispersed throughout the whole world and . . . its members, wherever they are, and however separated in place, accept and externally profess one and the same utterance or true doctrine throughout all ages from the beginning until the very end,” said Melanchthon. The church is invisible, dispersed across time and space, but a local, visible assembly knows whether it is part of this universal church by whether or not it confesses the one and the same true doctrine. In Melanchthon’s estimation, the credibility of the Reformation did not depend primarily on the visible—kneeling before the Eucharist, venerating images of saints, going on pilgrimages to the Vatican—but the invisible truth of their doctrine.¹⁴ The Reformers proclaimed “one and the same . . . true doctrine,” and as that doctrine was heard and embraced within by faith alone, the reforming church knew they were part of the of assembly dispersed “throughout all ages.”¹⁵

As for Rome, she claimed to be purely catholic, but her theological beliefs and ecclesiastical configuration proved otherwise, said Melanchthon: “It is one thing to be called catholic, something else to be catholic in reality.” In other words, “Those are truly called catholic who accept doctrine of the truly catholic church, i.e., that which is supported by the witness of all time, of all ages, which believes what the prophets and apostles taught, and which does not tolerate factions, heresies, and heretical assemblies.”¹⁶ The papacy could accuse the Reformers of heresy, but the reforming church was on the side of orthodoxy. The papacy might be Roman, but it was not purely catholic, he concluded.

According to various Reformers, Rome defined catholicity in a far *too narrow sense*, tapering Christianity’s catholicity to its institutional badges. The Vatican aligned its children under an institutional umbrella, but an umbrella confined to external distinctives such as apostolic succession, papal supremacy, transubstantiation, and indulgences. Outside its institutional walls no salvation was possible (which raised major questions about the entire Eastern church, at least in the minds of Reformers). Conformity, therefore, was paramount to soteriological, ecclesiastical fidelity. That conformity presupposed Rome was in continuity with the past, a continuity that included both her beliefs (from indulgences

13. *LW* 41:194.

14. Although I will argue in chapters 14–15 that Calvin did have a place for living icons.

15. *CR* 24.397–99.

16. *CR* 24.397–99. Cf. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 160.

to purgatory) and her organization (from papacy to supremacy). In the eyes of Rome, the Reformers transgressed that fundamental principle of continuity by introducing novel heresies. Therefore, excommunication was entirely appropriate. The church needed to expunge the unorthodox virus.¹⁷

In response the Reformers refused to delimit catholicity to such narrow, external—and *Roman*—confines. They could reject purgatory and penance alike because these were not products of the ancient church but recent accretions, even modern corruptions. A return to both Calvin and Melancthon's words revealed a different standard of catholicity: sound doctrine.¹⁸ Catholicity is a *theological* matter, they said. Their spiritual bond with the church universal was stronger than institutional externals. Although the Reformers desired—even craved—external, international concord, their ecclesiastical threads consisted of gospel continuity. By retaining Christ and his grace, the Reformers linked arms not only with the apostles but with the core of Christianity, both its patristic and medieval representatives.

While Rome had the political and ecclesiastical power to expel the Reformers, the Reformers were not so easily dismissed. They considered themselves members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, however small or challenged or powerless they might have appeared. Their intention from the start, as Luther's life demonstrated, was to reform the church *from within*, to bring about genuine *catholic* renewal by means of its own members. It was Rome's decision, not Luther's, to oust the "heretics." When threatened with expulsion, the Reformers were unwilling to sacrifice the staple of catholicity—professing one and the same true doctrine with the church from its beginning—for the sake of institutional unity. Unity—*catholic* unity—could not be sacrificed on the altar of conformity to Rome. For a unity substantiated by the catholicity of their doctrine was their direct line of continuity with the church universal, however hostile the church of Rome might become. Therefore, with Rome's accusation of innovation in mind, Melancthon responded in his *Loci Communes* (1543) with this clarification: "I am not creating new opinions. Nor do I believe that any greater crime can be committed in the church than to play games by inventing new ideas, departing from the prophetic and apostolic Scripture and the true consensus of the church of God. Further, I am following and embracing the teaching of the church at Wittenberg and those adhering to it. This teaching unquestionably is the consensus of the catholic church of Christ, that is, of all learned men in the church of Christ."¹⁹

17. Alister McGrath says it so well: "Catholic opponents of the Reformation declared that Protestants had broken away from the Catholic church by introducing innovations (such as the doctrine of justification by faith alone) or by abandoning the traditional structures of the church (such as the papacy and the episcopacy). . . . It was clear to the Catholic opponents of the Reformation that this continuity had been destroyed or disregarded by the Reformers, with the result that Protestant congregations could not be regarded as Christian churches, in any meaningful sense of the word." McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 160.

18. Again, McGrath: "Protestant writers argued that the essence of catholicity lay not in church institutions, but in matters of doctrine. . . . Historical or institutional continuity was secondary to doctrinal fidelity." McGrath, 160.

19. *LC 43*, 15.

Calvin, Luther, and Melanchthon were only a few in the immense chorus of Reformers who sang this same tune. As this book will make plain, the Reformation's insistence on catholicity was the blood that kept its heart pumping, from Luther to Melanchthon, from Bullinger to John Jewel, from Calvin to Cranmer, from Bucer to Vermigli. However, some old and new histories of the Reformation portray the sixteenth-century movement in categories that run counter to the Reformation's own testimony to catholicity.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE REFORMATION

Over the last century, the Reformation's self-confessed identity (catholicity) has not always been appreciated or understood with accuracy. Consider several reasons why.

Lamenting the Reformation as Schism and the Seed of Secularism: The Secularization Narrative

Interpreted as a deviation from the church catholic and its view of God and the world, the Reformation has been labeled the birth mother of all that is schismatic and sectarian on one hand and all that is modern and secular on the other hand. Such an approach takes on many different shades.

First, some historians focus mostly on *schism* and blame the intrinsic divisiveness of the Reformation on various factors. For example, the Reformers taught the priesthood of believers, a doctrine that decreased the gap between clergy and laity. When coupled with the belief in *sola scriptura*, each Christian became his own arbitrator, deciding for himself what the Bible really said. This is Protestantism's dangerous idea, and it was not only revolutionary but also inspired revolution itself. Its effects were ravaging: ecclesiastical and political authorities were questioned, which at times led to rebellion and revolution.²⁰

For others, the Reformation's schismatic nature stemmed from a posture of criticism that precluded catholicity from the start. Even the label *Protestantism* reveals a fixation with protest that is destructive for Christianity, past, present, and future. The Reformation, therefore, was tragic because it did not unite but divided Christendom.²¹ Depending on how sympathetic this interpretation is toward Protestantism, it may even label the Reformers as schismatics.

20. Whether or not they are lamenting the Reformation as schism, some frame the Reformation as schism, or a break to start a new church: e.g., Ryrie, *Protestants*; McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*; and McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 125.

21. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*. Vanhoozer responds to Leithart's interpretation of the Reformation with the following correction: "However, contra Leithart, the fundamental gesture of Protestantism is not negative but affirmative. The Reformers did not view themselves as schismatics, nor were they. To protest is to testify *for* something, namely, the integrity of the gospel, and, as we will see, this includes the church's catholicity. It also includes prophetic protest (the negative gesture) whenever and wherever the truth of the gospel is at risk. Unity alone (*sola unitatis*) is not enough unless the unity in question is a *unitas of veritas* (truth)." Vanhoozer then offers his own interpretation, one far more in line with this book: "the only true Protestant—a biblical, Christ-centered Protestant, whose conscience is indeed captive to the gospel—is a catholic Protestant." Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 15.

8 *The Reformation as Renewal*

Blaming the Reformation for schism may be an ongoing, contemporary maneuver, but it is also as old as the Reformation itself. In the sixteenth century, Rome blamed the Reformers for schism in the church, and once the Council of Trent concluded, this accusation became formal, setting the trajectory for the centuries ahead. This interpretation—the Reformation as a schismatic sect—has been recapitulated by Roman Catholics since.²²

Second, if some interpreters blame schism on the Reformation, others hold the Reformers accountable for an unwitting *secularism*.²³ The two interpretations are not unrelated. To hold the Reformers responsible for secularism, one must first decide that the Reformers were in some sense revolutionaries—religious revolutionaries but perhaps even political revolutionaries. The method of interpretation is not all that different either: the Reformers created this revolution by heralding the primacy of Scripture, which then gave every individual and every society the right to decide for themselves what they believed. The Reformers could not agree with each other, and the history of Protestantism since has followed suit with one denominational split after another. Hermeneutical pluralism has resulted in religious pluralism, as everyone claims to possess the only true interpretation of the text, and anyone can claim an exclusive legitimate application of Scripture to church and society. *Sola scriptura* is dangerous because it rebels against the authority of the church for the sake of the individual's rights. That, in turn, is a recipe for secularism, in which everyone becomes his own authority. Granted, the Reformers did not intend to create a secularist revolution. Yet as soon as they turned to the individual's interpretation of the Bible, they elevated a subjectivism that could only lead to modernity and the triumph of the self over received ecclesiastical beliefs.

Such an interpretation depends on a reading of the late medieval era as well. On one hand, this interpretation observes a true shift that started with Duns Scotus in the thirteenth century but culminated with the *via moderna* (modern way), as represented by William of Ockham in the fourteenth century and Gabriel Biel in the fifteenth century. The *via moderna* was a reaction against the *via antiqua* (old way), especially as it was embodied in Thomas Aquinas. As chapter 4 will explore, Thomas believed that the Creator and the creature can be properly related to one another by an analogy of being.²⁴ The incomprehensible God is infinite and eternal, while the creature is finite and temporal. He is pure actuality itself, while the creature is defined by a passive potency—God is being, but the creature is becoming. Therefore, predication must occur within the parameters of likeness.²⁵ For instance, the creature may possess love in his heart,

22. E.g., Denifle, *Luther et le Luthéranisme*, ch. 4.

23. Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*. For a more recent example of a scholar who sees himself carrying the baton of the Bred Gregory narrative, see Saak, *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages*.

24. "The forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power; for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way." Aquinas, *SCG* 1.32.2.

25. Predication is the "act of affirming something of a subject" or "assigning something to a class" or

but however pure that love may be, it only images the love of God. For unlike the creature's love, God's love is an infinite love, an eternal love, an immutable love, and a most holy love. Analogical predication assumes a Creator-creature paradigm of *participation*. Since God is simple (without parts), all that is in God *is* God. As Thomas said, "There is nothing in God that is not the divine being itself, which is not the case with other things."²⁶ God does not depend on another being for his being, but he is life in and of himself (aseity). Therefore, this self-sufficient God is the source of the creature's being and happiness. In him the creature lives and moves and has his being, as Paul told the Athenians, quoting their own Greek poets in Acts 17:28.²⁷ Participation, in other words, depends on the analogy of being.

For reasons that will be explored in chapter 5, Scotus rejected analogical predication for univocal predication instead (although Thomas was not the direct target). Univocal predication is "attributing the predicate to two or more subjects in a *completely similar sense*."²⁸ For Scotus univocal predication was a claim about the type of knowledge man has of God, not necessarily (or at least not primarily, as we will see) an ontological claim. Univocal predication seemed like an innocent move to Scotus and his disciples. However, to his critics substituting univocal for analogical predication was a serious, even colossal shift, one impossible to sever from ontology. Prior to Scotus, Scholastics like Aquinas spoke of the analogy of being in the same breath as God who is pure being—metaphysics and theology could not be segregated as they were with later Scholastics. For instance, if love is predicated to God in a "completely similar sense" as love in the creature, God becomes another being like all the other beings, only greater. Univocity of being does not necessarily entail a total dependence of the creature on the Creator, but now the creature can be his own, independent being in the world. His will may even be autonomous from God's will, introducing a competitive relationship between God and man, grace and nature, faith and reason in which both parties vie for influence and jurisdiction. As a result, the tapestry of the participation paradigm articulated by classical theism is severed.²⁹

Scotus, followed by Ockham and Biel, also introduced a voluntarism that elevated God's will over his intellect and privileged his absolute power to do

"naming something as possessing some act or perfection or as belonging to some other act or perfection," may be univocal, equivocal, or analogical. Analogical predication is "attributing a perfection to an object in a sense partially the same and partially different from the attribute of the same when applied to some other objects." For both definitions, see Wuellner, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, s.v. "predication."

26. Aquinas, *SCG* 1.32.3.

27. Acts 17:28.

28. Wuellner, *Dictionary*, s.v. "predication," emphasis added.

29. Thomas anticipated as much; see *SCG* 1.32.6. Some might object that univocity does not fall outside the boundaries of classical theism, only Aquinas's version of classical theism. However, Aquinas aside, demonstrating that univocity was acceptable to the Great Tradition from the church fathers to the High Middle Ages is a tall order, especially when evidence exists to the contrary (see White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or Wisdom of God?*). Furthermore, the Reformed Orthodox of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries often considered the analogy of being representative of classical theism on the whole. Muller has shown that the majority of Reformed Orthodox outright rejected Scotus's univocity of being. See Muller, "Not Scotist," 127–50.

anything at all (so long as the law of noncontradiction was not violated). In the hands of Ockham and Biel, the implications for salvation were momentous: God is not bound to reward an act of merit according to a fixed standard of righteousness and justice. Rather, God is free to enact a covenant that declares—simply by divine fiat and will—that *if* the sinner does his best, *if* he does what lies within him, then he will be accepted by God and rewarded with further distributions of grace (see chapter 5). This covenantal, voluntarist paradigm provoked the charge of Pelagianism (or Semi-Pelagianism at best) from the *schola Augustiniana moderna* (e.g., Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini), who said it betrayed not only Scripture but the Augustinian view of grace that earlier Scholastics taught.

Behind Ockham's voluntarism resided nominalism.³⁰ In the Platonist tradition, its advocates were realists, convinced that reality is more than individual, particular things. Reality cannot be limited to that which is sensible, as if the world is merely material and mechanical. Rather, reality is structured by two tiers, a sensible world of becoming and an intelligible world of Being. Such a belief in transcendence entailed the existence of universals. To that end, Platonists developed a theory of Forms or Ideas: for example, there are red squares and blue squares, silver squares and gold squares, but their similarity can be explained by their participation in a perfect Form called square. By that logic, Platonists could posit the existence of transcendentals: goodness, truth, and beauty. Disagreements occurred over whether Forms or Ideas exist in a separate realm (Plato believed in transcendental universals) or subsist and inhere within concrete particulars (Aristotle believed in concrete, immanent universals). Nonetheless, they all considered themselves Platonists in this sense: they all agreed that reality is defined by the existence of universals—they were all *realists* even if they disagreed on a specific theory. Over against other ancient philosophies, Platonism believed in a transcendent reality that could not be reduced to materiality with all its limitations. A divine Being could exist who was not bound by the restrictions of space and time, a Being on which all else depends upon and participates in to live and move and have its being. Platonism's radical idea—realism—was not merely agreeable to the Great Tradition, as if it was merely a compatible philosophy to buttress Christian theology. Realism was far more: the true outlook on the sensible world and transcendent Being. As chapter 5 will explore, the Great Tradition—from the Cappadocians to Augustine, from Boethius to Thomas Aquinas—believed in a realist metaphysic. By a process of refinement, they *critically appropriated* Platonism in variegated ways to explain how reality participates in the likeness of God. For example, in an original synthesis Thomas Aquinas corrected and transformed Platonism, explaining the creature's participation in the likeness of the Creator by locating Ideas in the mind of God, yet he used Aristotelian vocabulary (e.g., act, potency) to explain his Christian transcendentalism. For reasons that will be explained in

30. Some believe it may be more precise to label him a conceptualist; see chapter 5.

chapter 5, however, Ockham considered universals illogical. In fact, universals are mere *nomina*, names we assign. As a result, individual things do not have to be substantiated by universals outside the mind. In the eyes of his critics, if Ockham's voluntarism redirected attention away from God's intellect to God's will, then his nominalism redirected attention away from universals to individual objects, the particulars, provoking his critics to charge him planting the seeds of subjectivism, skepticism, and secularism. Once more the participation paradigm was severed, this time by the blade of nominalism.

Everything said so far is an interpretation with historical precedent, and chapters 4 and 5 will labor to define the differences between the classical realism of fathers like Augustine to scholastics like Thomas Aquinas and the paradigm shift to univocity and voluntarism with Scotus and nominalism with Ockham and Biel. Although debated, Radical Orthodoxy is right that these late medieval scholastics bear a certain degree of blame for the advent of later modernity, even if the modern turn was only present in seed form.³¹ The consequences of univocity, voluntarism, and nominalism are not to be dismissed. However, Radical Orthodoxy makes a controversial pivot when it then points its finger at the Reformers as if they were *the carriers* of this voluntarist, nominalist virus, or, to change metaphors, the farmers who spread the seeds that then sprouted in the modern era. The accusation is twofold: First, by virtue of their voluntarism, the Reformers said justification is now a legal transaction in which God, by the unilateral power of his will, simply *declares* the sinner righteous. Second, as a result, Radical Orthodoxy believes the sinner's intimate participation in God, on which he depends for his internal, holy transformation, is now questioned. In the spirit of nominalism, the Reformers substituted a legal fiction, an *external*, imputed righteous status for the *internal*, infused righteousness of their ancestors. The forensic triumphed over the medicinal, an exterior transaction for an interior renovation. The Reformers have been accused of severing the tapestry of participation—man is no longer made righteous but merely receives an announcement—introducing yet another wedge between God and man. That substitution may occur in soteriology, but it is merely one effect of exchanging a realist for a voluntarist, nominalist metaphysic.³²

31. Although, as chapter 5 will explain, Radical Orthodoxy's representation of Scotus may need some correcting and further nuance to be accurate.

32. Different scholars have adopted this interpretation, but not always with the same emphasis nor always with the same aggressiveness. Still, a version of this narrative has been perpetuated by a host of contemporary thinkers, even if in different ways and to different degrees. Consider, Grummett, *Henri de Lubac and the Shaping of Modern Theology*; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; Milbank, "Alternative Protestantism," 25–41; Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*; Dupre, *Passage to Modernity*; Dupre, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*; Boersma, *Heavenly Participation* (11, 84–94); Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*; Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*; Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, 75; Ward, "The Church as the Erotic Community," 167–204; Pickstock, *After Writing*, 156–57. For a critique, consult Cross, *Duns Scotus*; Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*; Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*; and Horton, *Justification*, 1:311–35, who uses the label "Scotus story" taken from Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 7.

For example, John Milbank accuses the Reformers (especially Calvin) of destroying the catholic fabric of participation and as a result divorcing God from the sinner due to a unilateral gift of grace. Others have joined this chorus by labeling Calvin a voluntarist and nominalist, convinced he opened the door to the Enlightenment's radical dualism between divinity and humanity, faith and reason, Scripture and science.³³ The argument, however, can be applied to numerous other areas as well. For instance, by redefining Rome's sacramentalism, the mechanism for man's participation in God, the Reformers took away the Creator's ability to communicate his grace in and through the material realm, the Eucharist being one major example. Or consider the Reformation and hermeneutics: the Reformers, so it is claimed, set the literal sense of Scripture over against the spiritual sense. Without the participation metaphysic of classical realism, their hermeneutic was not primarily concerned with a divine authorial intent that inheres across the canon, as exemplified in the allegorical and christological hermeneutic of the church fathers. Instead, they preoccupied themselves with the human author and his grammatical-historical rendering of the text. *Sola scriptura*, imputed righteousness, the literal sense, and so on—here lie the symptoms of a voluntarist, nominalist paradigm that cannot retain participation in God and by consequence bakes into Christianity the secularism of a modern world. Perhaps we are justified to label this interpretation the *secularization narrative*.

The secularization narrative, however, overlooks how complicated and variegated both the medieval and Reformation eras could be, and it also overlooks the immediate heirs of the Reformation, namely, the Protestant Scholastics. Certainly a shift occurred in the late medieval era with Scotus, Ockham, and Biel, one that departed in significant ways from both the patristic era and the early and High Middle Ages, including earlier forms of Scholasticism (especially Thomism). As chapter 5 will reveal, that shift should not be underemphasized as if the changes were *merely* philosophical, as if the *via moderna's* metaphysic had no theological, ecclesiastical, and cultural consequences. The secularization narrative is half right: the effects of this metaphysical shift left aftershock tremors well into modernity. However, a straight, unqualified line of transition between the nominalism of the *via moderna* and the Reformation must be challenged, since it is a line that involves both continuity and discontinuity, debt and rebellion. It is simply not true to say that the Reformers and their Protestant heirs absorbed and advanced those radical changes *in toto* and are therefore responsible for advancing the modern way as a precursor to secularism. While the reasons are many, consider three.

First, the secularization narrative's categories are not nuanced enough. One major reason the secularization narrative can be so persuasive is due to the rhetoric of the Reformers, especially the way they appear to set in stone an antithesis.

33. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; Milbank, "Alternative Protestantism," 25–41; Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 325–343; Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy*; Oliver, "The Eucharist before Nature and Culture," 331–51; Ward, "The Church as the Erotic Community," 167–204; Ward, *Cities of God*, 161–67. One of the best critiques of these voices is Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*.

The Reformers may appear to be sold out nominalists and voluntarists because they operated with a strong polemic against Rome that can seem like a hard dichotomy. As Michael Horton observes, “Critics often focus on ‘dualism’ as the tie that binds the Reformation to nominalism: church versus state, God’s agency versus human agency, sacred versus secular, revelation versus reason, and so forth.” Yet does such a charge assume too much, as if to differentiate is to sever altogether? The “charge assumes that *distinctions* are *separations*, which is certainly not characteristic of the Lutheran or Reformed treatment of these topics. In fact, more than Radical Orthodoxy, the Reformers affirmed the temporal city, common grace, and common callings in the world.”³⁴

Furthermore, even if the Reformers were influenced by voluntarism and nominalism, the following claims are all unfounded: (1) the Reformation as a movement should be defined by an absorption of voluntarism and nominalism; (2) the Reformers were marked by voluntarism and nominalism in equal measure; (3) the Reformers imbibed the voluntarism and nominalism system *as a whole*.³⁵ Granted, some Reformers were no doubt influenced by nominalism in a variety of ways. And yet, the historian possesses no little evidence that Reformers like Luther took issue with the soteriological outcome of a voluntarist and nominalist philosophy. As chapters 5 and 8 will explain at length, the German Reformation started because Martin Luther revolted against *Ockham and Biel’s* voluntaristic, nominalistic justification theology, which he was taught and even tried to practice at first. When Luther named Ockham and Biel in his 1517 *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, one thing was clear: Luther was not the same as before. Even if signs of voluntarism and nominalism persisted in other ways, which they did, Luther was adamant in his hostile stance against the voluntarist, nominalist soteriology of the *via moderna*. Now he was on a mission to warn his colleagues, which put him at odds with those who educated the young Luther. However, Luther became more convinced with each passing year that his protest put him in continuity with the church catholic, especially Augustine. One could even describe Luther’s journey toward Augustine’s theology of grace as a journey away from the Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian voluntarist, nominalist soteriology of the *via moderna*.³⁶ In the end, Luther believed his discontinuity with the *via moderna* in soteriology manifested a line of continuity with an older, more catholic heritage.

Second, the secularization narrative fails to consider the Reformation’s relationship to classical theism and its orthodoxy, including the doctrine of God and its metaphysical underpinnings (i.e., classical realism). Claiming the Reformers abandoned the realist metaphysic of the *via antiqua* for the

34. Horton, 1:313.

35. See chapter 5 for a fuller treatment on the issue. Others have made this point, including Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 31; Rupp, *The Righteous God*, 87–101.

36. To what degree that change also meant a shift away from nominalism to realism in Luther’s epistemology and metaphysic remains fruitful for further inquiry.

nominalist metaphysic of the *via moderna* is so startling because the first generation of Reformers did not even address such matters. Their focus was occupied by soteriological and ecclesiastical polemics. While accents may have been present, a mature treatment of metaphysics was not.³⁷

Furthermore, even when someone like Luther made a sweeping condemnation of scholastic metaphysics, for example, the reader should remember that (1) Luther's context often specifies something or someone specific he was reacting against, and (2) the story of the Reformation does not rise and fall with Luther, as if influences of nominalism in the German Reformer mean other Reformers across Europe followed the same fate, let alone the Reformation as a whole.

As for second generation Reformers and their Reformed Scholastic heirs, it is simply not true that they jettisoned a classical theology proper, along with its realist metaphysic of participation. Nor is it true that they left behind Thomism entirely with its reliance on the analogy of being and instead sold out to the univocal predication that buttressed Scotus' voluntarism or the nominalism that fueled Ockham's soteriology, thereby rupturing the creature's participation in the Creator. As chapter 4 on Thomism will reveal, many second-generation Reformers as well as their Reformed Scholastic successors did not withhold their criticisms of Thomas Aquinas on infused righteousness and transubstantiation, disagreeing with the way he applied realism to these doctrines. However, in innumerable other areas they were influenced by Thomas, even indebted to Thomas. One such area was metaphysics and its consequences for theology, as they aligned themselves with Thomas's realist paradigm of participation and considered it essential to their agreement with Thomas's Trinitarian and christological orthodoxy.³⁸ That line of continuity was not limited to theology proper either but extended to other areas as well—hermeneutics, natural theology, providence, hylomorphist anthropology, Christian virtue and ethics, and so on. For this reason, chapter 4 will emphasize the innumerable ways Protestants of diverse stripes retrieved Thomism, a point historians like Richard Muller and David Steinmetz have proved at great length.³⁹

That is no small point since Protestant Scholastics lived on the eve of modernity itself, if not within its early lifespan. If anyone should have been the carrier

37. "Although, Scotist as well as Thomist, nominalist, and Augustinian accents are evident among the Reformers of the first two generations, what we do not find is a fully developed metaphysics and certainly not any indication of how they might have dealt with the question of univocity of being." Muller, "Not Scotist," 130.

38. I am not claiming Thomism was the only metaphysic that claimed to adhere to orthodoxy and explain its rationale. Others, such as Bonaventure, disagreed with Thomas and offered an alternative metaphysic without turning to nominalism like Ockham (see Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 2:250–92). Furthermore, as later chapters will assume, a variety of groups (e.g., monasticism, Renaissance humanism) influenced the Reformed Orthodox, for example. Nevertheless, as historians like Richard Muller and Carl Trueman have demonstrated, the Thomist metaphysic profoundly influenced the Reformed Orthodox in a way that proved strategic to their polemical and confessional writings. See chapter 4.

39. To be clear, this book's purpose is not to provide a critique of that misconception which blames the Reformers for bringing nominalism into modernity. The scholarship of Muller, Steinmetz, and others speaks for itself, and I need not reproduce it here. This book, rather, builds on their scholarship to cast the history of the Reformation in a better light—one of renewing the church catholic.

of a Scotus-Ockham metaphysic, blameworthy for cutting the cord of participation and giving birth to modernity, it should be them. And yet, in Muller's sweeping survey of Reformed Scholastics—Zanchi, Daneau, Beza, Keckermann, Crakanthorpe, Timpler, Maccovius, and so on—he concludes, “Scotist language of the univocity of being is not at all characteristic of Reformed orthodox thought.” Contrary to caricatures, the “documentary evidence points specially toward a diverse reception of arguments concerning predication . . . and a positive interest in Thomist as opposed to Scotist formulations.”⁴⁰ The language of “interest” is not strong enough. They “echoed Aquinas by grounding the analogy in a doctrine of participation,” says Muller. “Against the negative approach of Radical Orthodoxy and [Brad] Gregory, we offer a significantly firmer verdict. Whatever one concludes concerning the implications of the univocity of being, the claim that the concept invested itself in Protestant theology cannot be sustained, nor indeed that early modern Protestant thought evidenced a ‘shift’ away from a ‘metaphysics of participation.’ In short, their claim that the absorption of the concept of the univocity of being into early modern Protestantism accounts for the perceived problems of twentieth and twenty-first century secular culture is seen to be a sorry imposture.”⁴¹

Perhaps the misconception perpetuated by the secularization narrative, then, is due to an overreaction. For instance, could critics be overplaying signs of voluntarism and nominalism even in the first- and second-generation Reformers? If Calvin or Peter Martyr Vermigli, for example, emphasized the sovereign will of God in predestination or providence, that does not necessarily entail that they were carriers of a voluntarism or nominalism in the same vein as Scotus, Ockham, and Biel. While influence is possible (though direct influence is difficult to prove), it is also likely that the Reformers were just as influenced, if not more so, by the Pauline and Augustinian emphasis on the power of God in salvation, the latter having implicit overtones of realism. Likewise, if Luther and Martin Bucer emphasized justification as a legal declaration, that is not to be equated with Ockham and Biel's covenantal voluntarism by which God accepts the sinner's best merit by divine fiat. The former rooted God's justification of the ungodly in the actual righteousness of his Son, while the latter determined God's acceptance of the sinner on the basis of a divine will that conditions approval on man doing what lies within him (Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism).⁴² One still contains the threads of a participation fabric, however rearranged and refined; the other has cut that fabric altogether. In short, nominalist voluntarists believed in the sovereign will of God and the declaratory nature of his Word, but not all who believed in the sovereign will of God and the declaratory nature of his Word were nominalist voluntarists—such a fallacy should be avoided.

40. “There is also, contra [Brad] Gregory, no ground for claiming a nearly universal Suarezian metaphysics.” Muller, “Not Scotist,” 145.

41. Muller, “Not Scotist,” 145, 146.

42. Consider Horton, *Justification*, 1:316, 322–33.

The contrast in these examples becomes all the more apparent when one considers how hostile Luther was to the soteriology that stemmed from Ockham and Biel's nominalist and voluntaristic metaphysic. The same can be said of Calvin's antagonism to the nominalists at Sorbonne. Meanwhile, others like Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Girolamo Zanchi could be explicit in their critical appropriation of a Thomistic metaphysic, however much it had to be modified to meet the outcome of their Reformed soteriology.

Furthermore, ascribing to a monolithic influence is simplistic; the Reformers were far more complicated. Luther, for example, was not influenced by one but many different streams of medieval thought. As chapter 2 will reveal, German mysticism moved Luther's piety. Since German mysticism cannot be separated from Neoplatonism, advocates of the secularization narrative must explain why Luther is a carrier of nominalist voluntarism when his spirituality is reliant on the realist metaphysic of Christian Platonism in a way not all that different from Augustine.⁴³

Third, to claim, as the secularization narrative does, that Reformers like Calvin dismantled the participation paradigm by means of a unilateral declaration of forensic imputation fails to consider their justification theology in the context of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). For instance, the claim forgets that Calvin positioned his doctrine of justification within his broader, more encompassing doctrine of union with Christ. Calvin's corpus as a whole, but his *Institutes* in particular, reveals a weighty emphasis on participation through union with Christ. Yet rather than sanctioning participation to one corner of soteriology (justification), Calvin allowed union to define a *duplex gratia*, a double grace—justification *and* sanctification.⁴⁴ However primary the former is to the latter as its logical cause in the *ordo salutis*, Calvin considered both essential to a full understanding of the Christian's union with Christ, a union that is the avenue to participation with God. J. Todd Billings, among others, has led the way in correcting the misconception.

One cannot simply label Calvin's doctrine of the double grace (*duplex gratia*) wholly forensic or simply reducible to a non-forensic account of "union with Christ." Calvin's view is irreducibly forensic, but a courtroom analogy of an external, forensic decree is not the exclusive image for his theology of union with Christ and the double grace. Rather, Calvin's theology of union with Christ is articulated with reference to participation, adoption, imputation, and the wondrous exchange. It is a multifaceted doctrine, utilizing both legal and transformative images.⁴⁵

43. Horton, 1:318, also makes this point, pushing against Lortz's two volumes: *The Reformation in Germany*.

44. E.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 3.6.1, 3, 4; 3.7.3; 3.8; 3.9.4; see my forthcoming companion book on Calvin's *Institutes* (Zondervan Academic).

45. Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 23. On justification's logical and causal priority to

Calvin did not abandon participation in his soteriology due to some overpowering influence of nominalism and voluntarism. In his own mind, he merely described participation in full color. He did not ignore its transformative and internal force, but merely located the transformative in sanctification instead. In other words, Calvin did have a participation paradigm, but it was multi-dimensional, elastic enough to incorporate *both* a forensic shade (justification) and a transformative effect (sanctification), yet without ignoring its eschatological outcome (ascent to the beatific vision).⁴⁶ Furthermore, even when Calvin did describe the forensic nature of imputation, he refused to portray the doctrine as impersonal and detached, merely exterior, without participatory measure (the very accusation lobbed at the Reformers). Calvin sounded nothing like the voluntarist-nominalist tradition when he wielded the concept of participation and said, “Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but

sanctification in Calvin, see Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*; Horton, “Calvin’s Theology of Union with Christ and Double Grace,” in *Justification*, 1:72–96.

46. See *Institutes* 3.6–8, 11–14. In his impressive comparison of Aquinas and Calvin, Raith argues that the reader does not see “robust signs of participation” in Calvin’s commentary on Romans until chapter 6. “This is due in large part to Aquinas’s doctrine of justification as transformation rather than Calvin’s extrinsic-imputational understanding of justification. We discover that Calvin’s understanding of justification, combined with the *way* Calvin distinguishes justification from sanctification, mutes his participatory understanding of our salvation” (*Aquinas and Calvin on Romans*, 5). I do not take issue with the differences Raith highlights between Aquinas and Calvin. However, the claim about Calvin assumes from the start that participation is exhausted by transformation, as if the two are synonymous, precluding anything “extrinsic-imputational.” Under that assumption the Reformation doctrine of justification will always appear antithetical to participation. But why define participation by such narrow parameters? In other words, why should participation be limited to the transformative alone? Criticisms of Calvin reveal that one’s definition of participation at the start determines whether the Reformation is a threat to or advancement on the past. Yet reasons exist for considering the legitimacy of the latter. For example, consider Calvin’s doctrine of adoption. Even in human experience, participation of an orphan in his/her new family is not limited to life in the family’s new house, but that transformative relationality is entirely caused by and dependent on the judge’s declaration in court that the child is no longer an orphan. To claim that this external, legal determination is irrelevant to or even antithetical to “participation” is illogical. Without it, participation loses its footing. How much more so with spiritual adoption into the family of God? In short, the strength of recent scholarship like J. Todd Billings (*Calvin, Participation, and Gift*) should not be dismissed: Reformers like Calvin recognized that in a book like Romans, participation incorporates *both* the forensic and the transformative, and for that reason the concept is advanced. In his astute study, Raith does recognize this point (also made by Billings), but considers it mute in the end for this reason: “What is the nature of our participation in God’s activity of saving us if Calvin declares all our works condemnable *in se* even if pardoned and rewarded *in Christo*?” (5). The question is fair enough, but far from original; the Reformers and their Reformed heirs gave an answer. First, while the Reformers distinguished between justification and sanctification, they never severed them; the former grounds and causes the latter and the latter has no legal foundation without the former. Second, if justification and sanctification are not severed, then neither the forensic nor the transformative alone must bear the full weight of participation. Both contribute in unique ways. Third, why must one set a participation *in se* over against an external-imputational pardon *in Christo*, as if the latter cannot be participatory? Again, the illustration of adoption begs to differ: by the declaration of the judge the orphan is truly part of the family even before he has eaten a meal in his new house. Fourth, the Reformed did situate the forensic (justification) *in between* the transformative in the *ordo salutis*: first is regeneration, then conversion and justification, which leads necessarily to sanctification. Reformed participation, then, is not less but more transformative than critics think. Despite these criticisms, I do appreciate Raith’s conclusion that “there exists a substantial amount of harmony between Calvin and Aquinas on a number of points pertaining to the topic of participation” (12).

because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short because he deigns to make us one with him.”⁴⁷

The secularization narrative’s accusation that Reformers like Calvin have betrayed the realism of the Great Tradition (the *via antiqua*) with its classical conception of God and the world is ironic. Reformers like Calvin relied on the church fathers in a variety of ways to propose a participation paradigm that had manifold consequences for his Reformed soteriology and ecclesiology, the sacraments included.

Calvin’s theology of participation emerges from a soteriology which affirms a differentiated *union* of God and humanity in creation and redemption. Through his engagement with biblical and catholic sources (especially Irenaeus, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria), Calvin develops a wide-ranging and emphatic doctrine of participation. In prayer, the sacraments, and obedience to the law, believers are incorporated into the Triune life: as believers are made “completely one” with Christ by faith, the Father is revealed as generous by his free pardon, and the Spirit empowers believers for lives of gratitude. In this way, Calvin’s strong account of divine agency enables, rather than undercuts, human agency in sanctification. Grace fulfills rather than destroys nature, so that believers may “participate in God,” the *telos* of creation. Moreover, “participation in Christ” is inseparable from participation in loving relationship of social mutuality and benevolence, both in the church and beyond its walls. At every stage, Calvin’s account of participation in Christ is grounded in a participatory vision of human activity and flourishing.⁴⁸

Far from abandoning the concept of participation, a number of Calvin scholars now recognize that *union with Christ* is an essential motif for a Reformation vision of the entire Christian faith.⁴⁹ Even when the Reformers took issue with certain patristic or medieval streams, they aligned themselves with other patristic and medieval emphases to exhibit the catholicity of their sacramental soteriology and ecclesiology. In the estimation of the Reformers, a mixture of continuity and discontinuity with patristic and medieval predecessors did not mean a departure from the realist metaphysics of participation *in toto* but rather its refinement, bringing the concept to further maturity in light of Reformation soteriology and ecclesiology.

Or consider Calvin’s Christology and its corresponding spirituality, both of which were framed in the category of participation. In his commentary on Colossians, Calvin asked what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that it is expedient for him to go up to the Father. Calvin denied that the Son was

47. *Institutes* 3.1.10.

48. Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 17.

49. Also, union with Christ is not limited to Calvin’s theological treatises but appears throughout his sermons and commentaries. See Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*; Gatiss, *Cornerstones of Salvation*, 43–68.

subordinate to the Father since he was “endowed with heavenly glory,” which means he ascended to the Father as one who “gathers believers into participation in the Father.” Calvin then zoomed out to describe the entire purpose of the incarnation through the lens of participation: “For this reason Christ descended to us, to bear us up to the Father, and at the same time to bear us up to himself, inasmuch as he is one with the Father.”⁵⁰ The pattern of descent for the sake of ascent has participation in the holy Trinity as its goal. In his *Institutes* Calvin called this descent-to-ascent the “wonderful exchange” (Luther, reflecting on Christ as Jacob’s ladder, called it a happy exchange). By “becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us.”⁵¹ In light of these passages and many other proofs of participation in Calvin, Julie Canlis writes, Calvin “makes both the *goal* and *means* of the Christian life to be participatory communion.”⁵² She further demonstrates that a variety of similarities exist between Calvin and Irenaeus, both “mediating the Platonic tradition of participation in a self-consciously Trinitarian context,” and at points “re-fashioned Platonic participation” to articulate the Christian’s communion with the triune God.⁵³ From Irenaeus to Calvin, “This is not a lineage that is necessarily in competition with the Plato-Augustine-Aquinas axis celebrated by Radical Orthodoxy, although its accents and corrections need to be recognized if contemporary Christianity is to benefit truly from a retrieval of participation.”⁵⁴ Therefore, mere correction does not capture this axis but *renewal*.⁵⁵

Examples could be multiplied, but the critical point is this: the secularization interpretation may be appealing, laying the blame at the feet of the Reformers as if they were perpetrators of the late medieval shift to voluntarism and

50. *Comm. Col.* 3:1.

51. *Institutes* 4.17.2.

52. Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*, 4.

53. Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*, 17; cf. *Adversus haereses*, III.19.1. Canlis believes Calvin does not merely add Christ to the ladder of Platonic ascent, but Christ “breaks open the circle and grafts it onto himself” (44). True enough, but Canlis also claims this is a new feature original to Calvin that improves on medieval mysticism and scholasticism. That claim is too ambitious since many medievals did “graft” the circle of participation onto Christ. Canlis contrasts Calvin with the medievals—communion versus naturalization, Christ versus anthropology—as if Calvin “relocated ‘participation’ from between impersonals (the soul in the divine nature) to personals (the human being in Christ, by the Spirit).” However, that contrast does not take into account the trinitarian nature of medieval notions of participation. Canlis has a point that Calvin makes Christ the controlling principle of participation, but that emphasis was not entirely missing from medieval theologians, some of whom even used allegory to describe participation through a Christological lens. The medieval participation paradigm was Christological as far as it was Trinitarian (e.g., Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*; Torrell, *Spiritual Master*, volume 2 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas*). To refine Canlis’s analysis, if Calvin contributed something “new” it was not the addition of Christ but the way Calvin coupled participation to his reformed definition of union with Christ (which then eliminated the medieval notion of merit on the ladder of ascent). Nonetheless, Canlis is correct that Calvin was an “heir of a rich medieval mystical and theological tradition that had inestimable impact on him” (46). In that sense, Calvin modified and transformed Platonism with the best of them. For a fuller engagement with Canlis, see Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 204, 238–43, 281.

54. Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*, 18.

55. Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*, 20.

nominalism, cutting the cord of participation between the Creator and the creature. However, the truth of history is far more complicated and nuanced. Not only do lines of continuity exist, but so do lines of serious discontinuity exist between the Reformers and the *via moderna*. To complicate matters further, significant lines of continuity exist between the Reformers and earlier eras of Scholasticism (from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries), not to forget the church fathers in preceding centuries. Those lines of continuity are so strong that the Reformers, facing Rome's charge of novelty and heresy, could claim to swim in the stream of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. If true, these lines of continuity defy a straight, tidy line from the faults of Scotus, Ockham, and Biel to the Reformers, as if the Reformation was the carrier of the new, even secular seeds of modernism.

Celebrating the Reformation as Modernism's Liberation or Radicalism's Opposition

The secularization interpretation continues to gain traction for those who lament the Reformation. This is ironic because the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries voiced a similar secularizing interpretation but with cause for great celebration. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Roman Catholics interpreted the Reformation out of a spirit of grief and anger. However, modern liberalism praised the Reformers for this innovative, radical secularization. Friedrich Schleiermacher reoriented theology around the individual's subjective feeling of absolute dependence, creating a new norming norm in the Christian experience.⁵⁶

That reorientation was the ideal framework for Adolf von Harnack and his program of deconstruction, which resulted in the modification or abandonment of traditional dogmas. Liberalism appealed to the Reformation as if the Reformers were the first to set the Christian free from dogma, those unquestioned beliefs adopted on the basis of church authority. Liberated from the shackles of tradition and its ecclesiastical guards, the Reformers could read Scripture afresh, this time by means of critical methodologies. The Reformers, in other words, planted the seeds that eventually blossomed into an enlightened future where the individual no longer depends on or must submit to ecclesiastic authority but can explore and even trust his own, internal religious instincts.⁵⁷ The Reformation gave birth to modernism.

Yet whether lamentation or celebration, each of these interpretations (in various ways) returns to a common root problem: *sola scriptura*, the priesthood of all believers, personal and subjective interpretation, and the rejection of a sacramental worldview all combine to create a Reformation that represents the antithesis of catholicity. Its subjectivism has become the mother of schism and secularism alike.

56. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 738–49.

57. See, e.g., Paul Tillich, *Protestant Era*; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*; Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World*.

WHAT IS BIBLICISM?

To be Protestant is to believe in biblical authority. However, biblical authority and biblicism are not synonymous. Biblicism moves beyond believing in the final authority of the Bible to imposing a restrictive hermeneutical method onto the Bible. Biblicism can be identified by the following symptoms:

(1) Ahistorical mindset: Biblicism is a haughty disregard (chronological snobbery in the words of C. S. Lewis) for the history of interpretation and the authority of creeds and confessions, chanting an individualistic mantra, “No creed but the Bible,” which in practice translates into “No authority but me.” *Sola scriptura* is radicalized into *solo scriptura*. As a result, biblicism fails to let theology inform exegesis, which is designed to guard against heresy.

(2) Irresponsible proof texting: Biblicism treats Scripture as if it is a dictionary or encyclopedia, as if the theologian merely excavates the right proof texts, chapter and verse, tallying them up to support a doctrine. Biblicism limits itself to those beliefs explicitly laid down in Scripture and fails to deduce doctrines from Scripture by good and necessary consequence.

(3) Anti-metaphysics: Biblicism undervalues the use of philosophy in the service of exegesis and theology. Biblicism is especially allergic to metaphysics, failing to understand how the study of being should safeguard who God is (e.g., pure act) in contrast to the creature. As a result, biblicism conflates theology and economy, as if who God is in himself can be read straight off the pages of Scripture when these pages are often focused on historical events.

(4) Univocal predication: Biblicism assumes language used of God in the text should be applied to God in a direct fashion, as if the meaning of an attribute predicated of man has the same meaning when predicated of God. By consequence, biblicism risks historicizing God by means of a literalistic interpretation of the text.

(5) Restrictive revelation: Biblicism is a suspicion or even dismissiveness toward the diverse ways God’s has revealed himself, limiting itself to the book of Scripture while shunning the book of creation. Biblicism is often suspicious towards natural theology.

(6) Overemphasis on the human author: Biblicism neglects the divine author’s intent and ability to transcend any one human author. As a result, biblicism struggles to explain the unity of the canon and Christological fulfillment, nor does it provide the metaphysic necessary to explain attributes of Scripture like inspiration and inerrancy.

These points are taken from my forthcoming *Systematic Theology* (Baker Academic). For a critique of biblicism today and a call to return to the Reformation understanding of authority, see R. Scott Clark’s *Recovering the Reformed Confession*. As for the origins of the word, “The earliest use of the word ‘biblicism’ in English occurred in 1827 in a work by Sophei Finngan in criticism of ‘biblicism.’ In 1874 J. J. van Osterzee defined it as ‘idolatry of the letter’” (19).

Unfortunately, another stream of interpretation has prevailed, but this time from within the ranks of those who claimed to be the Reformation’s own heirs. Evangelical Protestants may claim rights to the heritage of the Reformation more than any other Christian tradition. How ironic, then, that evangelical