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AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT LETTERS

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About

***AD FONTES* IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE.**

Ad fontes, "to the sources," was a rallying cry of the Reformation. The Reformers bequeathed to us a heritage, rooted in the Scriptures and their wide-ranging humanistic studies, which sought to address the hard questions of theology, philosophy, and culture in a way that was true to the revelation of God's word and God's world. *Ad Fontes* channels this ethos into a modern context, seeking to explore our questions alongside the great cloud of witnesses and the many exemplars who have gone before us.

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From the Editor's Desk

A growing number of thinkers–Christian and otherwise–tell us that the Church must return to some specific strain of its history to survive the coming (or present) storm as the once Christian West collapses. If we could only retrieve *this* strand of Christian history, if we could only recreate *this* part of the tradition, then we might just make it, and revitalize the West while we're at it. We need a weirder, wilder kind of Christianity, so the thinking goes.

There's doubtless much truth here. No church service should give the impression that Christianity was invented five minutes ago. A church that simply tells people what they could hear elsewhere, but in a slightly more religious tone of voice, is doomed to swift irrelevance. We should shake off our anxiety about the peculiarities of the faith, like angels–after all, Generation Z and the Religious Nones, the data says, are more open to some "weird juju."

Yet these calls to return to some past era are, so often, dead on arrival. More often than not they are simply beholden to aesthetic–as much about "vibes" as any Gen Z TikTokker. Even when valid in their criticisms of the moment, the past is, unsurprisingly, past. The conservative reactionary who goes down swinging, we must admit, can be as much of a toxic romantic illusion as the liberal revolutionary: Che Guevara in tweed smoking a pipe and reading Latin.

But there is good news. The fact is: Christianity is bigger than any of those moments. Throughout church history, the reform movements which have failed most spectacularly are those which attempt to return to a particular era–whether the apostolic, or some other. The most fruitful have been those that honor the inheritance of past generations, but adjust appropriately to the shifting circumstances of their day. At *Ad Fontes*, we would contend that the Magisterial Protestant Reformation is one such movement. Over against the equal and opposite extremes of both Rome and the radicals, the Reformers maintained that, whilst the Church can greatly err, she sits through all ages under "one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."

This unity of faith within the diversity of time and space seems to mark all the pieces in this issue in some fashion. We are privileged to feature an essay from the esteemed Gerald Bray, busting the myth of a more "wild" kind of Christianity in the Celtic Britain of yore. In a

more contemporary piece, Glenn Butner gives an introductory survey of global trinitarian theology, exhorting readers to explore the riches of majority world Christians who worship the same triune God as us, but who "speak Trinity" in their own native tongues. Matthew Hoskin provides us with a fine-grained study of how the fifth-century theology of Leo the Great permeated every fiber of Reformed Christology over a thousand years after his death. And Nathan Johnson contributes an essay I have always hoped for but never before found: a Reformed study of "Old Testament" sacraments, affirming that, as the Apostle Paul says, God's people in all times and places have shared the same spiritual food and drink.

In our book reviews, the venerable John Wilson reviews a landmark collection of modern American Christian poetry, remarking upon the surprising unity among such a diversity of poets. Michael Riggins, our Assistant Editor, reviews an acclaimed biography of John Donne, and queries the author's post-Christian inability to find a transcendent unity in the life of a saint who seemed to be ever changing. And our issue concludes (in a now regular feature) with a review from our President, Brad Littlejohn, which in part refutes the idea that everything true, good, and beautiful in the American founding belongs to Rome.

Peppered through this issue, our Poetry Editor, Colin Chan Redemer, has once again assembled a beautiful collection of original poems, which may provide room for pause between all our well-argued prose. We are honored once again to feature the great Malcolm Guite as well as the widely published Dan Ratelle. Colin himself contributes a sonnet in tribute to an early supporter of the Davenant Institute now promoted to glory.

The fate of the West, and the Church within it, are not matters of indifference. In a time of undeniable social decay, the Church is called to both preach the Gospel and contend for the common good. Perhaps much more can be saved and regained in the coming years than we care to imagine, and retrieving past wisdom will doubtless be part of that. But we have no idea what the Western church will look like in fifty, one hundred, or five hundred years time–other than that she will look different to today. And yet she will be ever the same, the pillar and buttress of the truth.

Rhys Laverty
Senior Editor
February 2022

ESSAYS

Celtic Christianity: Myth and Reality

GERALD BRAY

Since around the mid-1800s, there has been a renewed interest among both the clergy and laity in the West in "Celtic Christianity." Broadly speaking, this Celtic Christian revivalism is animated by the idea that, in the course of history, a certain tradition of more ancient, pre-Norman Christianity from the British Isles has been lost to us, and bears recovering. Often, it is imagined to be more in tune with nature and the wild than the more formalized brand of the faith supposedly imposed by William the Conqueror after he triumphed under a papal banner at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In an age in which Westerners are wrestling often with the issue of "disenchantment," the appeal of this supposedly wilder kind of Christianity has an obvious appeal.

We could pick at a number of threads in all this, but one simple question bears asking before all others: was there ever such a thing as a distinctive "Celtic Christianity"?

DISTINCTIVES OF POST-ROMAN BRITISH AND IRISH CHRISTIANITY

When the Roman Empire was Christianized in the course of the fourth century, its British provinces (essentially modern England and Wales) were no exception and its people soon became at least nominally Christian. Culturally, they were much the same as Romans elsewhere, but after the Empire collapsed in the fifth century, it became clear that the British were different in two notable respects. First of all, they retained their native Celtic language, the ancestor of modern Welsh, although they continued to use Latin for most forms of writing. Secondly, they gave rise to an evangelistic movement which spread the Christian faith to Ireland, a country that the Romans had never conquered. This required a considerable degree of ecclesiastical innovation, because Ireland lacked towns. Churches therefore formed around monasteries, which became centers of evangelization. These monasteries usually began simply with the "cells" of a few monks, and it is from these cells (or *kels*) that so many modern Irish place names derive: Kildare, Kilarney, Kilkenny. Unusually, many of these monasteries were governed by hereditary (yes, hereditary) abbots to whom the local bishops were often subordinate. This was a pattern of church government that was unheard of elsewhere and that was to cause considerable difficulty later on, as various reformers did their best to make the Irish church conform to the norms that prevailed in the rest of Western Europe.

The spread of Christianity across Ireland and the other non-Roman parts of Britain was the work of monastic evangelists whose names are often preserved but whose activities are shrouded in legend. By far the most famous of them was St. Patrick (c.385–461), a British Christian who is credited with having founded the Irish church, although it is generally agreed that he was not the first person to have preached the gospel in Ireland. Patrick has left us some writings in Latin, which may have been his mother tongue, and it is hard to see how he can be described as a "Celt" as opposed to a Roman. He may have spoken the ancient British language, but we know that his Irish was learned during the years that he spent as a captive in that country. Irish is also a Celtic language, but it is fairly distant from British and would not have been immediately comprehensible to Patrick, who would probably not have thought of the two tongues as related to each other. As far as Christianity is concerned, there is no reason to suppose that Patrick saw himself as any different from the Christians of Roman Britain, or of anywhere else. He may be credited with having adopted the monastery as the basic unit of church organization, but this was only because it was the best way to evangelize the country, not because it represented any distinct theological position.

DEVELOPMENT IN WALES AND IRELAND

To this day, Wales and Ireland remain the cradles of any historic "Celtic" Christianity, though they have relatively little to do with one another and the umbrella term "Celtic" is not one that comes naturally to either of them. Wales has followed the development of the Church of England over the centuries, though with some peculiar features that have more to do with its extreme poverty than with any spiritual factors, and in the eighteenth century it was largely swept up in the Evangelical Revival. Welsh Christians tend to be Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists, Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, though many are also Anglicans as in England. Ireland, however, followed a completely different path at the time of the Reformation, with the native Irish largely rejecting the Protestant movement. One result was that Irish Catholics were brought increasingly into conformity with Roman norms, abandoning whatever remained of their native "Celtic" heritage, in particular the odd custom of married abbots and hereditary monasteries. Protestants were few, but they were reinforced by immigration from Britain and now form perhaps a quarter of the population, mostly in what is now Northern Ireland.

DESPITE THE APPARENT GULF BETWEEN CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THAT OF THE CONTINENT, WE SEE NO WIDESPREAD TENSION WHEN IT RETURNS TO UNION WITH ROME.

Conflict between Catholics and Protestants of course still afflicts the island of Ireland to this day, but neither side can be said to have a particular devotion to any "Celtic" heritage they might claim. The revival of interest in the Celts in the late nineteenth century was initially the work of Protestants who had been influenced by the prevailing romanticism of the era, but political developments have created a different situation today. Irish nationalists, most of whom were (and are) Catholics, embraced the Celtic myths in a way that alienated most Protestants, who no longer identify with them. But not all Catholics are nationalists and the Roman Catholic Church's attitude towards "Celtic" Christianity is ambivalent. It is fair to say that those who are enthusiastic about it are mainly Roman Catholic, but that Rome takes a much more reserved approach, neither rejecting it out of hand nor embracing it wholeheartedly. The effects of this ambivalence can be seen in a number of studies of the subject, of which the most notable are Oliver Davies's *Celtic Spirituality* and Thomas O'Loughlin's *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings*. Both of these books do what they can to define an identifiably "Celtic" spirituality, but both also recognize just how controversial and difficult the whole subject is.

THE EASY REUNION OF ROME AND CELTIC CHRISTIANS

To the extent that Celtic enthusiasts communicate with one another today they are obliged to do so in English, which is now the mother tongue of most Welsh and

Irish people, and it is only against the backdrop of the English language and culture that modern "Celtic" consciousness can be understood. This is nothing new. It was under the impact of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries that the Celtic nations of the British Isles assumed something like their modern identities. The Welsh remained hostile to their pagan English neighbors, but the more distant Irish undertook to evangelize them and made an important contribution to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. That conversion was also partly the work of missionaries sent from Rome such as Augustine of Canterbury in the late sixth century, who discovered upon arriving in England that the Romano-British Christians had been cut off from continental Europe for two centuries and had not followed the various liturgical reforms and theological developments that had occurred there during that time. This gave rise to a conflict between Roman and native traditions that was eventually resolved in favor of Rome, though it took a century or more for the more recalcitrant Celts to adopt the new practices, of which the change of methods for calculating the date of Easter was the most important. The transition was slow but it was peaceful and there was no long-term resistance to it among the Celts, which indicates that there were no theological differences between the two sides that would have prevented a merger.

It is important to state this last point because one of the arguments for the existence of a distinctive Celtic Christianity that has been made in modern times is that it had a distinctive spirituality that was based on an independent theological tradition. At its crudest, this comes down to the difference between the teachings of Augustine (354–430) and Pelagius (early fifth century). Pelagius was a Romano-British Christian, traditionally thought to be either Irish or Welsh, who taught at Rome until he had to flee to North Africa in 410, to escape the invasion of Alaric the Goth. It was at that time that Augustine became aware of him and concluded that Pelagius was teaching a kind of salvation by works, which Augustine promptly denounced as heretical. Rome was won over to Augustine's view and Pelagianism was suppressed, though there are indications that something that went by that name remained a problem in Britain for some decades. Modern exponents of Celtic Christianity often like to claim that it was shaped by the survival of Pelagius's teaching, which denied the total depravity of mankind arising from original sin, affirmed the goodness of human nature, and (somewhat surprisingly) promoted a social egalitarianism in which both the religious hierarchy of medieval times and the subordination of women to men were unknown. Celtic Christianity is also supposed to have absorbed a good deal of pre-Christian pagan spirituality, though our lack of knowledge about that makes it almost impossible to evaluate how important an ingredient it was.

And yet, despite this apparent gulf between Celtic Christianity and that of the continent, we see no widespread resistance or tension at the point in history where it returns to union with Rome.

THE TROUBLE WITH "CELTIC CHRISTIANITY"

In this brief analysis of "Celtic Christianity," then, two things stand out. First of all: it is a modern reconstruction of a theological environment that effectively disappeared in the early middle ages and was only retrieved with the emergence of a "Celtic" consciousness in the late nineteenth century. Since that time, it has been embraced by a varied assortment of romantics, revolutionaries, and reactionaries who have revolted against the hegemony of modern society, represented above all by the English language and culture which is everywhere dominant. Given that the Celtic prototypes of these revivalists were pre-modern, it is relatively easy to portray "Celtic Christianity" as a way of life without the trappings of modernity, best recaptured on some remote Irish or Scottish island. In reality, few people take their enthusiasm to such extremes. Instead, they prefer to imagine what such a life must be like and bewail the fact that they themselves are forced to live in a world dominated by automobiles, central heating, and the internet, all of which they tend to see as corruptions of some primitive ideal. It is obvious that men like Patrick and Columba did without those things and lived in what to us would be great hardship, but whether they would have rejected our way of life as inherently unspiritual—and done so more than anyone else in Europe—is not so clear. Nor can it be seriously claimed that everything that has gone wrong in Western culture is ultimately due to Augustine, whose own lifestyle was

THERE WERE GREAT CELTIC WRITERS, EVANGELISTS, AND ARTISTS, BUT THEY WERE NOT FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS ELSEWHERE.

(after all) much closer to that of Patrick and Columba than to ours.

The second standout feature brings us to the nub of the problem we face when trying to evaluate "Celtic Christianity." If we read the writings of the ancient Celtic saints through the lens of modern life, we shall be struck by their apparent simplicity—the closeness to nature, the lack of theological sophistication, and so on. But if we compare the Celts of the fifth and sixth centuries to their contemporaries elsewhere in the Christian world, another perspective emerges. Were the Irish ascetics any different from the Desert Fathers of Egypt? Was Pelagius unique in what he taught? The evidence strongly suggests that he was not—some form of works-righteousness was common across the ancient Roman world. In this context it was Augustine who stood out, not Pelagius, who was apparently welcomed in Constantinople as perfectly orthodox after having been chased out of North Africa as a heretic. The Irish and the Welsh no doubt drew on their local traditions and customs to illustrate their faith. The well-known Irish hymn "St Patrick's Breastplate," for example, is couched in language reminiscent of primitive tribalism:

> I arise today, through
> The strength of heaven,
> The light of the sun,
> The radiance of the moon,
> The splendor of fire,
> The speed of lightning,
> The swiftness of wind,
> The depth of the sea,
> The stability of the earth,
> The firmness of rock.

Yet whilst this imagery used to illustrate the faith may be drawn from their natural surroundings, there is nothing particular here about *the faith itself*. The hymn's theme—devotion to the Trinity—is clearly imported from the Christian mainstream and is fully in tune with it. Even the elements of local "color" cannot be restricted to the Celts, since their neighbors, the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, shared them in equal measure, and nobody—least of all the "Celts"—saw anything odd about that.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, we ought to say that the Christianity of early medieval Wales and Ireland (with its extensions in Brittany and Scotland respectively) reflects the time and place in which it emerged, but that it did not differ in any significant respect from what could be found elsewhere at the same period. As the worldwide Church elaborated its orthodoxy, the Celts took it on board and either abandoned or reinterpreted their traditions accordingly. Modern reconstructions of their world are inevitably selective in what they choose to emphasize and therefore distort the reality. This is particularly obvious when it comes to claims that the ancient Celts practiced "gender equality" in a form that neatly dovetails with modern beliefs, but the principle can be extended to cover every aspect of their church and society. The portrait of the Celts as "noble savages" in the tradition of Rousseau and the Enlightenment may appeal to some, but objective historical investigation has shown how inaccurate it is, just as it has done with similar societies in other times and places. The conclusion therefore seems inescapable: there were great Celtic writers, evangelists, and artists who have left us an impressive legacy, but they were not fundamentally different from contemporary Christians elsewhere and their heritage cannot be considered to have been a form of Christianity genuinely distinct from what was then common to the Church as a whole.

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ESSAYS

Old Testament Sacraments? A Reformed Overview

NATHAN JOHNSON

INTRODUCTION

Throughout five hundred years of Protestant theology, there are few questions about the sacraments which have not been litigated at great length. In the Reformation era, debates over the sacraments did not merely divide Protestants from Roman Catholics, but even divided Protestants among themselves. While these intense squabbles have long seemed alien, there is nonetheless a renewed interest in sacramental theology among some Reformed and evangelical Christians.[1] Often, however, there is not much clarity on what constitutes a sacrament, or from where in Scripture we should glean our sacramental theology. On the one hand, many people assert, in one way or another, that "everything is sacramental," in an attempt to emphasize the goodness of creation and the fact that God speaks through *all* the things that he has made.[2] On the other hand, many good Protestants will assert that only the Lord's Supper and baptism constitute a sacrament, and our sacramental theology should be derived only from a small selection of New Testament passages that speak directly of these.[3]

In this article I hope to navigate between these two extremes by posing an unexpected question: were there sacraments in the Old Testament? It may be surprising, but the answer for many Church Fathers, medieval scholastics, and even Reformed Protestant theologians is *yes*. Despite the seeming obscurity of the question, it pushes us to carefully consider the basic questions of our sacramental theology: what is a sacrament? How is

1. One might consider Keith A. Mathison's *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002) as a forerunner in this recent revival. Works such as Andrew Wilson's *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharismatic Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018); Michael A. G. Haykin's *Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022); and Kevin Emmert's forthcoming *The Water and the Blood: How the Sacraments Shape Christian Identity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023) evidence its ongoing development. Although, one might also see Mathison's recent *Ad Fontes* piece for evidence that there is still a long way to go. See Keith A. Mathison, "Still Reclaiming the Lord's Supper," *Ad Fontes*, June 29, 2022, https://adfontesjournal.com/web-exclusives/still-reclaiming-calvins-doctrine-of-the-lords-supper/.

2. For example, Hans Boersma, in works such as *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2011), and *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). Boersma speaks often of a broad "sacramental ontology."

3. This is evidenced by the fact that very few books on the sacraments speak at any length about Old Testament sacraments or even reference the Old Testament when developing sacramental theology.

a sacrament connected with God's covenants? What is offered in the sacraments—and were the Old Covenant saints offered in their ceremonies the same thing that we are offered in the New Covenant sacraments?

> **THE OLD COVENANT DOES CONTAIN SACRAMENTS IN ACCORD WITH A REFORMED DEFINITION, AND THAT THIS HAS BEEN THE CONCLUSION OF MOST OF THE GREAT MINDS WITHIN THAT TRADITION.**

This article seeks to demonstrate that the Old Covenant *does* contain sacraments in accord with a Reformed definition, and that this has been the conclusion of most of the great minds within that tradition. What's more, Old Covenant sacraments—particularly the tree of life, the rainbow, circumcision, and Passover—enrich and deepen our understanding of what the New Covenant sacraments mean and achieve. For one thing, all of these sacraments serve as signs and seals of the respective covenants to which they were attached. More significantly, they both pointed forward to the fuller revelation of the New Covenant, and (most controversially) also provided spiritual union with Christ just as the New Covenant sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper do. By exploring in-depth these Old Testament sacraments, we gain a fuller and deeper understanding of the meaning of the New Testament sacraments which we enjoy today as Christians.

I only here attempt to lay the groundwork for a fuller doctrine of Old Testament sacraments. Fresh forays into sacramental theology will only come by looking back at how theologians of the past understood the meaning of Old Covenant signs and seals.

DEFINITION OF SACRAMENTS

In the early church, most theologians were more concerned with the proper way to practice what we would term sacraments—such as baptism and the Lord's Supper—than with clearly and narrowly defining the term.[4] The term sacrament, from the Latin *sacramentum*, carried several interrelated meanings for the early church. In the Latin Vulgate, the Greek *mustērion* was either translated as *sacramentum* (cf. Eph. 1:9, 3:3; Col. 1:26) or *mysterium* (cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4; 1 Cor. 4:1).[5] Because of *mustērion*'s broad use in reference to the revelation of the Gospel in Christ, many of the early Church Fathers used the word *sacramentum* to broadly refer to "any mystery or sacred and not obvious doctrine."[6] John Chrysostom (c.347–407) calls the sacraments "covenants" that God uses to bind himself to men.[7] Cyprian (c.210–258) used the Latin term *sacramentum* to refer to "something that gives a teaching… particularly of Old Testament types that are referred to Christian practices."[8] Cyprian's definition connected the general sense of *sacramentum* as a spiritual mystery communicated through the Word with the idea of a *sign* or *type* that represents the Word and is carried out in Christian practice. His emphasis on the Old Testament signs is particularly relevant to our discussion.

Augustine (354–430) took Cyprian's broad concept of *sacramentum* and narrowed it with a series of definitions. In a number of places, Augustine defines *sacramentum* as "a visible sign of a sacred thing" and "a visible form of an invisible grace."[9] He also famously refers to a sacrament as "a visible word."[10] In these instances, Augustine uses *sacramentum* to properly refer to visible signs that signify sacred doctrine and the gracious work of God in Christ.[11] Yet his use of *sacramentum* remains broad: he

4. Cf. *Didache*, Book 2, and Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, 61, 65–66.

5. Sometimes these words are used almost interchangeably, as in Ephesians 3:3–4: "that is, the mystery (*sacramentum*) made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery (*mysterio*) of Christ" (NIV).

6. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrace Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Puritan & Reformed Publishing, 1997), 3:338.

7. John Chrysostom, *Opera*, ed. Erasmus (Basel, 1530), II.82.

8. Everett Ferguson, "Sacraments in the Pre-Nicene Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 125.

9. Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, xxvi.50; cf. *Letters* cv.3.12; *Questions on the Heptateuch* III.84.

10. Augustine, "Contra Faustum," trans. Richard Stothert, Book XIX.16, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 4, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/140619.htm.

11. Often Augustine refers to the Lord's Supper and baptism as "sacraments" and he indicates that they both signify and seal God's grace. See:

refers to baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments, but also to the Church and Christ himself as sacraments.[12] This broader use of the term also included any "visible symbol" instituted under the law and prophets to "serve as a bond of union" in the "religious society" of the Old Covenant. Indeed, part of Augustine's argument in *Contra Faustum* is that no religious society, whether the religion be true or false, is possible without sacraments. Under the Old Covenant, these were "types of Christ who was to come" that were fulfilled in Christ, being either abrogated (such as sacrifices) or superseded by something new (such as baptism for circumcision).[13]

AQUINAS DOES NOT ARGUE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRAMENTS AS AUGUSTINE DOES—HE SIMPLY ASSUMES IT, AS AN HEIR TO AUGUSTINE.

The early and broad use of *sacramentum* contained the seeds for the much narrower definition of sacraments in the medieval scholastic period as being, according to Thomas Aquinas, "a sign of a holy thing insofar as it makes men holy."[14] Following Peter Lombard and the official ruling of Lateran IV in 1213, Aquinas enumerated seven New Covenant sacraments.[15] Aquinas clarifies that *sacramentum* can refer to something with a "hidden sanctity," something that is the cause of sanctity, or a sign of sanctity. He argues that the "special sense" of sacrament refers to signs "given to the Church to perfect man in things pertaining to the worship of God according to the religion of Christian life, and to be a remedy against the defects caused by sin."[16] In keeping with this understanding, Aquinas and many other scholastic theologians considered there to be sacraments of the Old Testament.[17] Indeed, it is worth noting that, in *Summa Theologiae* III, where Thomas treats these questions, he does not lay out an argument for the existence of Old Testament sacraments as Augustine does in *Contra Faustum*—he simply assumes, as an heir to Augustine (and while citing *Contra Faustum*), that this is understood to be the case.

From the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Protestant theologians sought to narrow the definition of sacrament further. While the Lutherans came to confess three sacraments—baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution—the Reformed only recognize the former two.[18] But, as we will see, their definitions did not preclude the existence of Old Testament sacraments.

While the Reformers differed with Augustine on what constitutes a sacrament, Augustine's three definitions, coupled with the connection of sacramentum to *mysterion*, created the necessary Reformation connections: Christ is the substance; sacraments are always attached to covenant words; they are related to salvation; and they are given to the Church. In keeping with the traditional notion of a sacrament as a "sign," many early Reformed confessions narrowed the definition by connecting the sacraments to God's promises, defining the sacraments as "holy signs and seals of God's promises."[19] Sacraments "seal unto us [God's] promises,"[20] and are "symbols [that] have God's promises annexed to them."[21] These promises are most certainly *covenant* promises.

"On the Eucharist—Easter Sunday"; "On the Eucharist II—Easter Sunday," in *Selected Easter Sermons of St. Augustine*, ed. Phillip T. Weller (Herder and Herder, 1959); *Contra Faustum,* Book XIX. For an extended discussion of how Augustine connects the sacraments to the work of Christ, see Lewis Ayers and Thomas Humphries, "Augustine and the West to AD 650," in *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, 156–69.

12. C. Pierson Shaw, "Christ as Primary Sacrament: Ways to Ecumenical Convergence in Sacramental Ecclesiology," in *Pathways for Ecclesial Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century: Revisiting Ecumenical Method*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Miriam Haar (UK: Macmillan, 2016), 29–31.

13. Augustine, "Contra Faustum," Book XIX.11.

14. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, III, q. 60, a. 2, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4060.htm.

15. Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 65, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4065.htm.

16. Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 65, a.1.

17. Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 65.

18. For an explanation of the Lutheran view on there being three sacraments, see Article XIII of the Defense of the Augsburg Confession, https://bookofconcord.org/defense/of-the-number-and-use-of-sacraments/.

19. "Confession of Faith of the English Congregation at Geneva (1556)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation,* vol. 2, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), Section IV.

20. "Belgic Confession (1561)," in *Reformed Confessions*, Section XXXIII.

21. "Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," in *Reformed Confessions*, Section XIX.

In this same vein, John Calvin (1509–64) calls the sacraments signs of a covenant, arguing that "since the Lord calls his promises 'covenants' [Gen. 6:28; 9:9; 17:2] and his sacraments 'tokens' of the covenant, a simile can be taken from the covenants of men."[22] He further argues that "a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself."[23] Because every sacrament is a sign of a covenant promise, "the testimony of the Gospel is engraved upon the sacraments."[24] Calvin's narrower definition places him firmly within the tradition of the early church, for he connects the sacraments with covenants (following Chrysostom) and with the testimony of God's covenant promises (following Cyprian), identifying them as visible signs that ultimately signify Christ (following Augustine). This definition thus allowed Calvin to identify only two sacraments of the New Covenant as instituted by Christ: baptism (cf. Mt. 20:19) and the Lord's Supper (cf. Mt. 26:26–29; Mk. 14:22–25; Lk. 22:17–23).

The definition of sacraments was further clarified with the writings of the Reformed Scholastics and Westminster Divines. The Westminster Confession defines sacraments as "holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace."[25] More broadly, Francis Turretin (1623–87) defines sacraments as "signs of the covenant" (cf. Gen. 9:12, 13), "signs and seals of the righteousness of faith" (cf. Rom. 4:11), and simply "signs" (cf. Ex. 12:13).[26] He applies Paul's definition of circumcision (Rom. 4:11) to all sacraments as "sacred visible signs and seals divinely instituted to signify and seal to our consciences the promises of saving grace in Christ and in turn to testify our faith and piety and obedience towards God."[27] The sacraments "signify and seal grace; this is the grace of God in Christ or Christ with all his benefits."[28] He further contends that "the principle [of the sacrament] is the confirmation of the covenant of grace and the sealing on the part of God of our union with Christ (promised in the covenant) and of all his benefits."[29] According to Turretin, in order for something to be a sacrament, the sign must cohere with the thing signified, contain the promise of grace, be instituted by God, and be used in the Church.[30]

In time, then, it became the dominant understanding of Reformed Protestantism that the sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace, specifically connected to the redemptive work of Christ and his incarnation. The Reformers joined the sacraments to God's covenant promises, founded on the bedrock of the work of Christ. The sacraments are a means of union with Christ and apprehension of all of his benefits. The sacrament is always joined to the word of promise and finds its substance in the whole Christ, a Christ of past, present, and future.

All this being the case, with the sacraments so connected with the work of Christ, one might assume that the Reformers only regarded the New Covenant institutions of baptism and the Lord's Supper as true sacraments. Yet many Reformed confessions, as well as major theologians, contended that there were numerous Old Covenant sacraments as well. The support for this came both from the connection of sacraments with God's covenant promises and with the consensus that Christ himself is not merely prefigured in the Old Covenant but actually offered through the covenant and received by faith.

OLD TESTAMENT SACRAMENTS

Before we unpack the logic behind regarding Old Testament signs as sacraments—and which signs may constitute sacraments—we can first simply evidence the fact that Old Testament sacraments were attested by many of the major confessions and theologians of the sixteenth century. The Scottish Confession of Faith

22. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1970), 4.14.6.

23. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.3.

24. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, 2 Cor. 5:19, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom40/calcom40.xi.iv.html.

25. "Westminster Confession of Faith," XXVII.1, https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20XXVII.

26. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:338.

27. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:339.

28. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:339. This can apply to the OT as well, for each of the OT sacraments imparts grace found in Christ.

29. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:341.

30. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:342.

(1560, overseen by John Knox) and the Second Helvetic Confession (1566, penned by Heinrich Bullinger) affirm the existence of Old Testament sacraments, namely circumcision and Passover.[31] In both cases, this identification of circumcision and Passover as sacraments creates a simple correlation between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments: for baptism replaces circumcision and the Lord's Supper replaces Passover. This also combatted the Roman Catholic doctrine of seven sacraments, since most of these have no correlation with the sacraments of the Old Covenant.[32] The Westminster Confession also affirms the presence of Old Testament sacraments, but does not specify what constituted these.[33]

MANY REFORMERS ATTESTED TO THE REALITY OF OLD COVENANT SACRAMENTS, BUT COULD NOT AGREE ON WHAT QUALIFIED AS SUCH.

According to Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), many Reformers attested to the reality of Old Covenant sacraments, but could not agree on what qualified as such.[34] The differences, unsurprisingly, come down to what exactly one means by "sacrament." Here, Calvin proves helpful. Although we have seen how he aided in the narrowing of the definition of "sacrament," his definition still includes "all those signs which God has ever enjoined upon men to render them more certain and confident of the truth of his promises."[35] Within this definition he distinguishes between three types: 1) covenant signs attached to "natural things," such as the tree of life in the covenant of works and the rainbow in the Noahic covenant;[36] 2) signs of faith "set forth in miracles," such as the smoking oven in Genesis 15 and Gideon's fleece;[37] 3) covenant signs willed by the Lord for his Church as "ceremonies" rather than "simple signs," such as circumcision, Passover, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. [38] Through his threefold definition, Calvin covers the three different ways that the Reformers considered Old Testament signs to be sacraments. His first definition focuses specifically on the nature of the sign as attached to a covenant, while his second definition more broadly refers to Old Testament miraculous signs that confirm God's Word, whether that Word is a strict covenant (as in Gen. 15) or simply a divine promise not specifically attached to a covenant (as in the case of Gideon); in both these senses, the sign is occasional and often given to a single individual. His third definition is the narrowest, and only refers to covenant signs given to God's people as ceremonies of their worship and covenant renewal. When considering the nature of Old Testament sacraments, it seems that either Calvin's first or third category coheres with most Reformed confessions and theologians on the nature of Old Testament sacraments. Both kinds of Old Testament sacraments bear two essential marks: they were signs of God's covenants with his people and they were a means of spiritual union with Christ and all his benefits.

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL NATURE OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRAMENTS

Peculiar as it may seem, the Reformed consensus has been that the Old Covenant saints partook of Christ and his benefits in their sacraments just as we do in baptism and the Lord's Supper. In late antiquity, Christians began to understand the Old Testament connections with the New as typological, with New Testament doctrine being prefigured in the Old Testament. This figural and typological reading was centered largely on

31. "Scottish Confession of Faith (1560)," *Reformed Confessions*, Section XXI; "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," in *Reformed Confessions*, Section XIX.

32. When detailing the seven sacraments, Thomas Aquinas admits that many of them (such as confirmation and extreme unction) do not directly correspond to Old Testament sacraments. This may be why many of the Reformed confessions emphasized two sacraments of the Old Testament—circumcision and Passover—that are replaced by baptism and the Lord's Supper. See Aquinas, *Summa*, III, q. 65, a. 1 for his addressing of this question.

33. "Westminster Confession of Faith," Article XXVII.5.

34. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 662.

35. Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.18.

36. "These, Adam and Noah regarded as sacraments…because they had a mark engraved upon them by God's Word, so that they were proofs and seals of his covenants." Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.18.

37. "Since these things were done to support and confirm their feeble faith, they were also sacraments." Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.18.

38. "They are testimonies of grace and salvation from the Lord, so from us in turn they are marks of profession, by which we openly swear allegiance to God, binding ourselves in fealty to him." Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.19.

Old Testament liturgy and its connection with present practice.[39] By the time of the Reformation, the Christological link to the sacraments was firmly established: although the fullness of his person and work had not yet been revealed in the Old Covenant, in both the Old and New Covenant sacraments the substance is Christ—the precise point made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:3–4: "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (NIV). This mysterious yet glorious doctrine is well-attested among the major Reformed theologians and the Reformed confessions.

ALTHOUGH THE FULLNESS OF HIS PERSON AND WORK HAD NOT YET BEEN REVEALED IN THE OLD COVENANT, IN BOTH THE OLD AND NEW COVENANT SACRAMENTS THE SUBSTANCE IS CHRIST.

The explanations for the coherence between the grace offered in the Old and New Covenants center on the conviction that salvation has always and only come through the merits of Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. He has always been our Mediator, the one mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim. 2:5); and this same Christ was offered even in the Old Covenant, although the nature of this grace was more obscure and the benefits were not as fully enjoyed. The Second Helvetic Confession explains at length:

> But the principal thing which God promises in all sacraments and to which *all the godly in all ages* direct their attention… is Christ the Savior.…Now, in respect of that which is the principal thing and the matter itself in the sacraments, the sacraments *of both peoples* [of the old and new covenant] are equal. For Christ, the only Mediator and Savior of the faithful, is the chief thing and very substance of the sacraments in both; for the one God is the author of them both. They were given to both peoples as signs and seals of the grace and promises of God.[40]

Similarly, the Westminster Confession asserts that "the sacraments of the old testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same as those of the new."[41] The difference lies not in the *substance* or even the means of reception (faith), but in the lasting nature of the new sacraments—which will not be abrogated until Christ's return—and the testimony that the promises have been fulfilled in Christ.[42] Thus, our faith is more sure, our sacraments more lasting, and Christ more revealed in the New Covenant; but in both dispensations, the grace of Christ is offered and received by faith.

This assertion directly strikes against the Roman Catholic doctrine that the Old Testament sacraments merely foreshadowed Christ, but did not offer true grace. Calvin states this firmly:

> But we must utterly reject that Scholastic dogma…which notes such great difference between the sacraments of the old and new law, as if the former only foreshadowed God's grace, but the latter gives it as a present reality. Indeed, the apostle speaks just as clearly concerning the former as the latter when he teaches that the fathers ate of the same spiritual food as we, and explains that food as Christ [1 Cor. 10:3]. Who dared treat as an empty sign that which revealed the true communion of Christ to the Jews? …Nor is it lawful for us to attribute more to our baptism than he elsewhere attributes to circumcision when he calls it the seal of the righteousness of faith [Rom. 4:11].[43]

Calvin further clarifies why this is the case, asserting that what is promised in every divine covenant is always Christ himself: "I say that Christ is the matter or (if you prefer) the substance of all the sacraments; for in him they have all their firmness, and they do not

39. R. W. L. Moberly, "Sacramentality in the Old Testament," in *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, 8.

40. "Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," Section XIX (emphasis added). This is also attested in the "Scottish Confession of Faith," Section XXI.

41. Westminster Confession, XXVII.5, https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20XXVII.

42. "Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," Section XIX.

43. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.23.

promise anything apart from him."[44] He continues that "those ancient sacraments looked to the same purpose to which ours now tend: to direct and almost lead men by the hand to Christ….no promise has ever been offered to men except in Christ."[45] The difference between the Old and New Covenant sacraments is not what is offered—it is always Christ—but in the clarity of revelation, for in the New Testament sacraments Christ has been more fully revealed to us, and is thus remembered rather than anticipated.[46]

Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) was also convinced of the unity of the testaments, because Christ, as the Word, was the *res*—that is the substance, or, more literally, the *thing*—of both.[47] Whether in the Old or New Covenant era, the "content of faith is always the same: union with Christ."[48] The Old Testament signs and forms were thus the way in which Christ communicated himself prior to his incarnation: "That the Fathers were justified we doubt not: and they could not be justified without faith in Christ….[W]hat have we in our sacraments, which we receive as the chief and principal thing? Is it not Christ? But the Apostle testifies that the old Fathers received Him in their sacraments."[49] The reason for this is that Christ has always been the one mediator between God and man: "Indeed there, as among ourselves, Christ Jesus is the same Mediator, outside whom there is no salvation. Therefore as to nature—or as I may say, substance and essence—the Church of the Jews is the same as ours."[50] While the Papists argued that Christ could not be communicated in the Old Covenant because he had not yet taken human flesh, Vermigli disagreed, arguing that because God is "the same yesterday, today, and forever," and Christ is "the lamb slain before the foundations of the earth," he communicates his benefits sacramentally outside of historical time. Hence, Paul can argue that the Old Testament fathers partook of Christ (1 Cor. 10:3).[51] Thus, for Vermigli, the distinction between Old and New Covenant sacraments was in their form, not their substance: "one and the same covenant between God and Man, are the old and new testament…[W]hat difference is between the testaments consists not in the substance of the covenant, but in the accidents."[52]

Turretin also maintained the same Christological link between the Old and New Testament sacraments. Because Christ does not change, the benefits of his death and resurrection are always sealed by the sacraments: "This is the reason why with respect to the internal matter Paul ascribes the sacraments of the New Testament to believers under the Old (1 Cor. 10:1–3); and in turn the sacraments of the Old to believers under the New (Col. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:7)."[53] Turretin connects these sacraments not only to Christ's office as Priest, but also to Christ as King, for "Christ promises to the believers of the New Testament no other kingdom of heaven than that in which they sit down with Abraham and the other patriarchs (Mt. 8:11)."[54] While materially the Old Testament sacraments are different from the New, they are the same "formally" because they also sign and seal Christ, being of the same covenant of grace established with Abraham.[55]

WHICH OLD TESTAMENT SACRAMENTS?

Even if we can establish a Reformed consensus on the reality of Old Testament sacraments, the substance of which was Christ, we are still left with no small amount of disagreement among the Reformed. The major debate among the Reformers was not whether there were any or what they signified, but rather which Old Testament signs were properly sacramental. Herman Witsius (1636–1708) takes a narrow view, arguing that only the signs attached to the dispensations of the covenant of grace—such as circumcision in the Abrahamic Cove-

44. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.16.

45. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.20.

46. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.22.

47. Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli A.D. 1500–1562* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 86.

48. McLelland, *Visible Words of God*, 88.

49. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "Rom. 8:15," in *Commentaria de Epistle of St. Pauli ad Romanos*.

50. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "1 Cor. 10:1," in *Commentaria de priorem Epistle ad Corinthios*.

51. Qtd. in McLelland, *Visible Words of God*, 90.

52. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "1 Sam. 2:10," in *Commentaria in Samuelis Prophet libros duos*.

53. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.340.

54. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.373.

55. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.374.

nant and Passover in the Mosaic Covenant—constitute authentic sacraments. Others—such as Calvin and Vermigli—contended that the signs of the Adamic and Noahic Covenants (the tree of life and rainbow, respectively) also constitute sacraments, at least in some sense.[56]

> **THE MAJORITY VIEW SEEMS TO BE THAT THE TREE OF LIFE WAS THE SACRAMENT OF THE COVENANT OF WORKS: A SIGN AND SEAL OF THE LIFE GOD PROMISED TO ADAM IF HE OBEYED.**

Taking Calvin's first definition of an Old Testament sacrament as a sign joined to a divine covenant, the majority view seems to be that the tree of life was the sacrament of the covenant of works: a sign and seal of the life God promised to Adam if he obeyed.[57] This view was present in the early church, and continued into the Reformation.[58] Of the Fathers, Augustine put forth the deepest understanding of the tree of life within the context of redemption and covenant as in fact conveying spiritual benefit to Adam.[59] By the time of the Reformation, Calvin, Wolfgang Musculus, Vermigli, and Turretin argued for the tree of life as a sacrament and type of Christ, for Christ as the second Adam is the fulfillment of the covenant of works and is, through the Lord's Supper, our tree of life.[60] It is unclear, however, in what sense Christ either was offered to Adam and Eve through the tree of life when they still had permission to eat from it, or would have been eventually when they fulfilled the covenant of works.[61] Calvin simply asserts that the tree of life itself did not convey eternal life, but that it was a "pledge" and "seal" of the life they would derive from God himself.[62]

Among many Reformers, the sacramental nature of the rainbow is even more obscure. Although it is clearly a sign and seal of the Noahic covenant, this is not generally regarded as a dispensation of the covenant of grace. Witsius, for example, strongly argued against understanding it as such, although it is predicated upon the covenant of grace and in "supposition" of it—he calls it "an appendage of the Covenant of Grace."[63] Rainbows, however, do not convey Christ and all his benefits. For this reason, Witsius argues that the rainbow should not be called a "sacrament" in the strict and proper sense, although it is a covenant sign. But, as a concession, he declares that "the signs of the covenant of grace, in a way of proportion, bear the very same relation that the rainbow bore in sealing or ratifying this covenant."[64] He maintains that it functions as a *type* of the covenant of grace and a confirmation of it.[65]

Likewise, Calvin and Vermigli do not seem to regard the rainbow as the same kind of sacrament as those of the covenant of grace, or even the tree of life. Calvin calls the rainbow a "sign" and "pledge" and "seal."[66] Vermigli argues that the Noahic Covenant foreshadows the redemption in Christ: "Though in this covenant, God promised to deliver men, as to their bodily life, that they should not perish in the waters; yet in this there was a shadow or type of the deliverance from eternal death; namely, they should not be overwhelmed with eternal damnation."[67] The rainbow, as the sacrament of this covenant, functions as a sign and seal of God's prom-

56. See Calvin's comments on Genesis. 9:12 in his *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King, https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/genesis/9.htm.

57. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 217.

58. Theologians who regarded the tree of life as a sacrament include Bede, Augustine, Musculus, Perkins, Chytraeus, and (possibly) Luther.

59. "God did not want man to live in Paradise without the mysteries of spiritual things made present in material things. Man, then, had food in the other trees, but in the tree of life there was a sacrament." Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ed. and trans. John Hammond Taylor (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1982), vol. 2, VIII.4.8.

60. For Wolfgang Musculus on this topic, see *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1–11*, ed. John L. Thompson (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 1:80. See also Turretin, *Institutes*, 374; Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 150.

61. It is also unclear whether they had, in fact, ever eaten from the tree of life.

62. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, Gen. 3:22, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01/calcom01.ix.i.html.

63. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 2:240.

64. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 240–41.

65. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 240.

66. John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis 1–11*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (East Peoria: Banner of Truth, 2009), 298–99.

67. Qtd. in Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 240.

ise not to flood the earth again, which foreshadows his promise to renew the creation and redeem mankind rather than wipe it out, a renewal and redemption accomplished through Christ. Calvin argues that because the sacramental meaning of the rainbow is fulfilled in Christ, the rainbow relates to the New Covenant sacraments.[68] Nonetheless, it does not seem to be a sacrament in the strict sense, since it is not pertaining to salvation or offering Christ. As has been noted, of more universal consensus is the recognition of circumcision and Passover as bearing the same kind of sacramental nature as the sacraments of the New Covenant.

While recognizing that the precise nature of everything in the Old Testament that might qualify as a sacrament may be fuzzier than in the New Testament, it is clear that these Old Covenant signs are beneficial to study. Because of the direct link between Old and New Testament sacraments, many maintained that the Church could draw understanding of the meaning of the New Covenant and the New Covenant sacraments from a study of the Old Testament sacraments. Calvin especially set a precedent for discerning a deeper meaning of the New Covenant sacraments through study of the old.[69] Vermigli provides a helpful defense of this methodology, stating, "Christ has given to His Church the Old Testament, whose authority…is most stable and sure, inasmuch as by it the ancient Christians also discerned the New Testament."[70] Even Witsius maintains that those covenant signs he doesn't regard as sacraments foreshadow and typify what is offered in the sacraments of the covenant of grace.[71] Thus, the old corresponds to the new, and the new is discerned in light of the old.[72]

CONCLUSION

Alas, space does not permit a proper investigation of each potential sacrament of the Old Testament and the treasures it contains concerning Christ and his benefits. More work is yet to be done from a properly Reformed perspective investigating the significance of Old Testament sacraments and how they illuminate the meaning of New Testament sacraments and the redemptive work of Christ. Yet we should be spurred on by our forebears to continue mining these sacraments, for they reveal to us much about our Savior. If anything, we should meditate on these Old Testament sacraments while we participate in the sacraments of the New Covenant, for the Christ of the Covenants is our circumcision, our tree of life, our rainbow, and our Passover Lamb.

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68. Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis 1–11*, 758–61.

69. Randall C. Zachman, "John Calvin," in *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb and David A. Johnson (New York: New York University, 2017), 201.

70. McLelland, *Visible Words of God*, 87.

71. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 240–41.

72. McLelland, *Visible Words of God*, 97.

A Man Near Magnificence

FOR TOM

BY COLIN CHAN REDEMER

I knew Norman as Tom, others knew Reed,
but all knew him as Heathorn. My son knew
him as the man who had a boat with speed
enough to throw his young body off. True
love is what bought that house. Or true enough.
Wildwood was a magnificent act,
bought for his wife. He made love from mere stuff,
distributing his wealth with wondrous tact.

Tom, like his father Adam, named and knew
matter. He said, "I could look at any
built thing and know what tools were used." Each screw,
nail. Know it in a way God knows many
who die, young, with a box of well-read books
and hopes to give those volumes second looks.

ESSAYS

Trinity and Catholicity: A Survey of Global Trinitarianism for Western Readers

GLENN BUTNER

Christians in the West are becoming more familiar with the rapid growth of Christianity around the globe, whether this is through depictions of the persecuted church in China, through exposure on mission trips or online, or through the impact African Christians have played in recent years in debates within the United Methodist Church or as leaders of the Anglican Church of North America. Such contexts, however, may provide limited opportunity for Western Christians to understand the deeper beliefs, practices, and convictions of their brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. As a result, some Western Christians may feel they lack any theological understanding of Christian groups that may have seemed quite different to them after brief exposure. Others might just assume majority world theology is identical to the typical American or British approach to theology. Either approach might lead one to conclude that there is little need to read theology from around the world.

The fact is, however, that Western theologians can benefit greatly from reading global theology, and particularly so in the doctrine of the Trinity.[1] Yet it must be acknowledged that Western Christians seeking to read majority world theology often face considerable obstacles in their efforts to expand their trinitarian reading lists. Besides obvious language barriers, those trained in a Western theological context often have limited exposure to global theology and so have limited knowledge of how to practically engage such texts. With this in mind, this essay will offer a limited introduction to global trinitarianism, a guide by one Western theologian for other Western theologians, clergy, and laity

1. I define Western theology as theology written from the perspective of the dominant cultures of Europe, the United States, and Canada. Some minority and indigenous groups that are Western in geography will fall outside of the label as I use it in important respects, while other representative members of such groups might still be Western in my definition. I will largely focus on English-language readers within the Western theological tradition, though much of what I say will apply more broadly.

who hope to benefit from the spiritual gifts that majority world Christians have to offer Western readers for the common good. Even a brief introduction such as this will show that if Western readers of global trinitarianism can overcome certain obstacles to our understanding, we can become aware of blind spots in our own theological discussions of the Trinity.

OUR REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLES OF GLOBAL THEOLOGY MAY NOT ALWAYS BE VERY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GLOBAL CHURCH ITSELF.

CHALLENGES FACING WESTERN READERS OF GLOBAL TRINITARIANISM

Western readers of global trinitarianism will find many obstacles to their ability to read majority world texts. It must be granted that many texts are not translated into English, and those that are translated have often been selected not because of their appeal within the culture from which they originate, but rather because they will sell to Western audiences.[2] Western readers are often exposed to global theology through texts written by immigrants from the majority world to the United States or Europe, especially if such immigrants are professional scholars. Scholarly and written theological texts are also always imperfect (and sometimes inaccurate) reflections of the spirituality and theology of average Christians on the ground. The first challenge to Western readers of global trinitarianism is simply that our representative samples of global theology may not always be very representative of the global Church itself.

Within those texts which are accessible, one strand of global trinitarianism which English-language readers should be aware of is the *inculturation strand*, which attempts to articulate a theology of the Trinity within the philosophical and cultural categories of various majority world peoples. Often, the stated goal is to draw on indigenous philosophies in much the same way that Christians from the patristic period adopted and adapted various Greek philosophical paradigms. Thus, the late Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) considers the modern African context a parallel to the time when Christianity was "transposed from its original Jewish matrix" into a Hellenistic context.[3] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907), an important Indian Bengali Roman Catholic theologian, worked to develop a Thomistic account of the Trinity by drawing on Shankara, an eighth-century Indian philosopher, rather than on Aristotle. Upadhyay compared his effort to use Shankara with patristic efforts at using Greek philosophy.[4]

While some may find the idea of a trinitarian theology divorced from Platonic, Stoic, and Aristotelian categories concerning, practitioners of such inculturation efforts around the world have made a compelling case that these efforts are methodologically appropriate. Most famously, Gambian Lamin Sanneh (1942–2019) has argued that the translation of Christian ideas and texts from one language, culture, and worldview into another is a fundamental feature of Christianity that can be traced to its earliest origins, when the writers of the New Testament wrote in Greek and cited the Septuagint rather than writing in Hebrew or Aramaic and relying on a predecessor for the Masoretic Text. Sanneh capably reads much of Christian history as shaped by the tensions between a vernacularizing tendency (represented, for example, in the Byzantine Cyrillic liturgy) and a centralizing tendency (evident, for example, in Rome's historic reliance on three languages—Hebrew, Latin, and Greek).[5] Sanneh argues that the fact that Christianity does not have a single revealed language, as Islam does with Arabic, implies that it is a religion automatically open to translation. He notes, "Bible translation is not just cultural leverage; it

2. Edmond Tang gives the example of Japan, where much Japanese theology has been written in Japanese for the Japanese, while some translated works (for example, Kosuke Koyama's *Water Buffalo Theology*) are not particularly impactful within Japan itself. See Edmond Tang, "East Asia," in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 90–91.

3. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 63.

4. For a helpful summary, see P. V. Joseph, *An Indian Trinitarian Theology of* Missio Dei*: Insights from St. Augustine and Brahmabandhab Uadhyay* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019), 94–97.

5. See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007).

is divine witness."[6] Human languages are all imperfect, and hence incompletely able to represent God—a fact that lies behind a plethora of traditional Western doctrinal categories such as analogy, accommodation, and anthropomorphism. The Western scholastic tradition therefore speaks of theological knowledge as ectypal, which is the image of and gracious participation in God's own archetypal self-knowledge.[7] The fact that God is known in different languages is testimony to the scope of the *missio Dei.*

Insofar as the words chosen in the translation process to convey a particular idea have established uses with particular cultural, religious, and/or philosophical connotations and denotations, translation is also always inculturation. Explaining old truths in a new language will result in different associations and assumptions behind these expressions. This point is made powerfully in Shusaku Endo's (1923–96) renowned Japanese-Christian novel *Silence* when Ferreira, the old missionary priest, argues that the Japanese use of *Dainichi* (Japanese for "the Great Sun") for *Deus* (Latin for "God") resulted in a Christianity that had been like a butterfly caught by a spider, where soon only a skeleton remained.[8] Ferreira represents the ongoing fear that translation leads to a loss of theological meaning. Yet, against this fear, modern scholars of inculturation have shown that the imperfection of human language and the incompleteness of human knowledge does not entail that God is not truly known. We do know God, even as we know in part (1 Cor. 13:9).

WESTERN READERS AND THE CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL TRINITARIANISM

Returning, then, to the specifics of trinitarian theology, it is important to avoid both relativizing theological truth and absolutizing any cultural expression of theological truth. Many majority world theologians have been quick to point out where the important figures of Western theology have been shaped by their own cultural location. For example, Karl Barth (1886–1968) is clearly shaped by Western philosophical predecessors such as Hegel and Kierkegaard and by the needs of the Church in his own historical context, in which secularism was growing and Protestant liberalism was allying itself to dangerous nationalist movements, often through the use of natural theology.[9] In this context, Barth's link between trinitarianism and special revelation, the dialectical features of his early theology, and his sharp critiques of natural revelation make sense. Recognizing the cultural situatedness of Barth's theology does not falsify his claims, which must be assessed for their truthfulness against Scripture as read with the help of reason and tradition.[10] However, the cultural location in which Barth wrote does suggest that the driving questions behind his theology and the philosophical idioms in which those questions were answered may not be appropriate for all contexts.

For Western, English-language readers of majority world trinitarianism, the balancing act required to avoid both relativizing theology and absolutizing our own cultural understandings can be quite difficult. To evaluate Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's theology fairly, for instance, would require a firm grasp of the philosophy of Shankara, something few Western readers are likely to possess. For example, suppose that an American reader found one of Upadhyay's teachings a poor fit with Scripture. How might they respond?

From the start, let us note we are only considering a hypothetical problem, since a full evaluation of Upadhyay's thought will take us too far afield of the subject at hand, and so a hypothetical disagreement must suffice. Let us also set aside for now the complex relationship between culture and biblical exegesis, and assume that this hypothetical exegetical critique would find a wide range of consensus not only with other American readers, but across numerous other cultures.[11] Even given

6. Sanneh, *Translzating the Message*, 108.

7. See, for example, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), I.2.6.

8. Shusaku Endo, *Silence*, trans. William Johnston (New York: Taplinger, 1969), 148–49.

9. For example, see the analysis in James Henry Owino Kombo, *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought: The Holy Trinity, Theological Hermeneutics and the African Intellectual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 106–14, 119; and Nozomu Miyahira, *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God: A Japanese Perspective on the Trinity* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), ch. 3.

10. I do have certain objections to Barth's theology on other grounds.

11. For introductory discussions of the impact of culture on exegesis, see Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle: Hippo, 2019); and E. Randolph

AT TIMES SOME METAPHORS WILL SEEM UNORTHODOX, BUT GIVEN THE LIMITED NATURE OF METAPHORS AND THE FACT THAT FEW METAPHORS ARE DESIGNED FOR READERS AT A CULTURAL DISTANCE, IT MAY BE BEST TO RESTRAIN JUDGMENT.

such consensus, one could still not fairly evaluate Upadhyay's deployment of Scripture without a grasp of the philosophy of Shankara, because at least two possible interpretations of Upadhyay's hypothetically mistaken theology are possible.

First, he may have taken important steps in an incomplete transformation and deployment of Shankara toward biblical ends, in which case we might judge Upadhyay along the lines of Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296–373), who made clear contributions toward the development of Hellenistic Christian theology, but whose Word-flesh Christology, for example, would seem to fall short of both Scripture and the later standards of Chalcedon. If this were the case, Upadhyay would represent an important step in a trajectory toward orthodox inculturation, but an incomplete one.

A second option, however, could be that this hypothetical mistake of Upadhyay would be developing and enhancing aspects of Shankara that are fundamentally unbiblical, much like ancient gnostics took an anti-material stance that was fundamentally at odds with the canonical creation narrative and the eschatological hope of a bodily resurrection and new creation. The problem, however, is that fairly extensive knowledge of Shankara is required to understand which situation is the case, putting many Western readers in a difficult position.

In light of the challenges of reading inculturated trinitarian theologies, I would propose two guidelines for the Western reader of English-translated texts. First, the reader would benefit from distinguishing between *metaphorical* and *literal* theological statements. The former are often found in analogies used to explain the Trinity, which are notoriously limited even without the complications of cross-cultural analysis. At times these metaphors will seem unorthodox, but given the limited nature of metaphors in the first place, combined with the fact that few metaphors are designed for readers or hearers at a cultural distance, it may be best to restrain judgment. For example, contemporary Nigerian Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator compares the Trinity to the Yoruba concept of the *Obirin Meta*, a compound derived from "obirin" (woman) and "meta" (three). "When you put the two together, the name designates a woman who combines the strength, character, personality, and beauty of three women," Orobator explains. "*Obirin meta* is a woman with many sides, a many-sided character. She is a multifunctional woman of unmatched density and unbounded substance."[12] Though he acknowledges the limits of the metaphor, he considers this a helpful inculturated analogy of the Trinity.[13] When I read this metaphor, it seems quite modalistic, as if God were a single divine person and hypostasis merely fulfilling different roles in the economy. However, in humility, I have to recognize that I don't fully understand the usual deployment of the *Obirin Meta* concept in Yoruba society—if the term means one woman who seems as if she is always simultaneously three, the metaphor may be more viable. I therefore avoid using this metaphor to explain the Trinity in an American context, yet I recognize it was not written for me, and I cannot fully understand or evaluate it without learning more about the Yoruba.

On the other hand, when Westerners read literal theological statements, it is easier to evaluate them for their orthodoxy. For example, when Indian theologian Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–84) argues that Jesus is pre-existent only "as an Idea, as a plan of life, as a predetermined dispensation yet to be realized…a light not yet manifested," it is clear that this teaching, no matter its philosophical origin and cultural impact, cannot be ac-

Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012).

12. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 31.

13. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 31–33.

cepted.[14] Yet, here is where a second principle for Western readers may be helpful: if a claim from a majority world theologian is heretical, it is prudent to condemn the statement rather than the system or the individual, at least in early stages of analysis. Sen's denial of the real pre-existence of Christ obviously undermines the Trinity, but what is less obvious is whether his theological project of inculturation is, despite its obvious flaws, a step toward a fully inculturated trinitarian orthodoxy, much like Irenaeus of Lyons's theology was despite a tendency to treat the Son and Spirit primarily in terms of the economy, or if Sen's theology results in a complete dead end like the ancient adoptionists. To fully evaluate Sen's system would likely require a grasp of Indian thought beyond my and many of my readers' abilities. Yet, if Sen's ideas were introduced somehow to my church community, a clear defense of real pre-existence would be in order. Similarly, were I to have the opportunity to speak with someone who held to Sen's position (Sen himself died in 1884), it would be appropriate to critique this statement as part of the catholic Church's mutual accountability and discernment processes.

GLOBAL TRINITARIANISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF WESTERN THEOLOGY

So far, I have discussed inculturation and trinitarian theology as if majority world theology stands under the judgment of Western theology, but it is crucial to recognize that Western theology is subject to the critique and judgment of theologians in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In fact, since the Western reader's tendency is to position him or herself as the critic of the text being read, it can be even more important to be open to critique from the majority world. Theological accountability and discernment belong to Christians around the world in order to be used for the common good. One of the benefits global theology presents to Western readers is that it can open our eyes to places where our theology has been captive to our culture and history without our full awareness. In such instances, the theology of the majority world can correct certain problems within Western theological discourse. I will focus on three areas where such correction might be welcomed: personhood, divine naming, and the Trinity in relation to ethics.

Personhood

One perennial struggle in much contemporary Western trinitarian theology is the effort to understand the persons of the Godhead in adequately relational ways. Consider the narrative put forward by the English theologian Colin Gunton (1941–2003), who begins his narrative of the individualization of personhood, fairly, by placing blame on Descartes's individualist conception of the person as a *res cogitans*, a "thinking thing," before moving, somewhat fairly, to critique Boethius for linking persons with individual substances and, unfairly (in my estimation), to critiquing Augustine for how he deploys the concepts of relation and mind in trinitarian theology.[15] Leaving contestable details of the trinitarian fall narrative aside, Gunton is one of many contemporary Western thinkers convinced that our Western tendency, due to our Cartesian view of human personhood, is to develop a theology of divine personhood that is too individualistic and too linked with discrete minds. Our trinitarian theology is thus inadequately relational, and ultimately amounts to merely a partially failed attempt at inculturation, rather than the last word on the dogma for all people, times, and places.

Many global trinitarian theologies unfold in contexts in which personhood is understood in more relational terms, setting the stage for a more adequately relational understanding of the divine hypostases. For example, contemporary Filipino theologian George Capaque works to develop his understanding of the trinitarian processions through an analysis of the Filipino word for family, *mag-anak* from the prefix *mag* (which verbalizes a noun) and *anak* (child). In Filipino, *mag-anak* is "literally, 'to bear children,'" such that family has no meaning apart from generation in much the same way that Trinity has no meaning if not understood to reference the processions of spiration and generation.[16] Nozomu

14. M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969), 60.

15. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 89–90, 94, 96–97.

16. George N. Capaque, "The Trinity in Asian Contexts," in *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue (Carlisle: Langham, 2019), 77.

Miyahira, a contemporary Japanese theologian, makes a similar point from a Japanese perspective. He argues that "in contrast to the Western understanding of humanity, in Japan the relationship precedes the subject, not the other way around."[17] This is evident, for example, in the Japanese cultural tendency to tailor behavior to the needs of others rather than individualistically pursuing truthfulness to oneself.[18] In this context, the Japanese term *aida*, a word to name persons that literally means "betweenness," clearly conveys the relational nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[19] In the Trinity there are three "betweennesses." Western readers may not grasp the linguistic or cultural subtleties of Miyahira's or Capaque's points, but in their texts they do provide a challenge to habitual Western individualism.

> **THE USE OF TERMS LIKE "CREATOR, REDEEMER, SANCTIFIER" DOES NOT RESOLVE ANY CONCERNS OVER SEXISM IN THE TRINITY BECAUSE THE TERMS ARE ALL GENDERED IN MANY LANGUAGES.**

Diving Naming

Another oft-discussed theme in modern Western trinitarianism is the naming of the divine persons with masculine titles like Father and Son. Arguing that such terminology contributes to the oppression and exclusion of women, some Western theologians have drawn on feminine scriptural images of God in labor or giving birth (e.g., Deut. 32:18, Is. 42:14) to depict God as Mother. Consider the example of American theologian Elizabeth Johnson (b. 1941), who combines such themes with the feminine image of wisdom (*sophia* in Greek) in the Old Testament to describe God as Mother-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Spirit-Sophia.[20] Other Western theologians prefer to name God by appeal to genderless appropriations, such that God may be Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. For example, contemporary American theologian David Cunningham prefers to speak of the Trinity in terms of "the Three," or else to speak of the relations in non-gendered terms like initiation, fruition, issuance, and emergence.[21] Of course, the tendency is not uniform, but the discussion is prevalent in many Western trinitarian works.

Some of the most compelling critiques of such Western innovations, in my opinion, have been found in trinitarian works written by majority-world theologians. For example, evangelical Puertorriquena theologian Zaida Maldonado Pérez argues that the use of terms like "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier" does not resolve any concerns over sexism in the Trinity because the terms are all gendered in many languages like Spanish.[22] Also, well-intentioned as they might be, such terms simply remain unfamiliar to the prayer life of many Latinas, and so come across as just another Western cultural imposition. As such, they are not a viable catholic response to any sexism found in the Church.[23] Kwok Pui-lan, a Hong Kong-born postcolonial theologian, argues that "a simple change of gender" may not resolve the issues at hand. For example, if the name "Mother" is taken to refer primarily to nurturing roles, then calling God "Mother" may simply reinscribe the gender roles that require women to be childbearers and caregivers, restrictions that progressive theologians critique. Further, a name change does not deal with underlying issues behind imperialistic versions of Christianity, which are often a deeper concern for post-colonial majority world theologians.[24]

Social Ethics

Though Kwok does not center the Trinity in her postcolonial theology, other majority world theologians do

17. Miyahira, *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God*,, 117.

18. Miyahira, *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God*, 118.

19. Miyahira, *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God*, 118, 143.

20. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

21. David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 50, 67–69.

22. Though Puerto Ricans have U.S. citizenship, I still treat Maldonado Pérez as a representative of majority world theology insofar as (1) Puerto Rico's connection to the United States remains partial and the byproduct of colonialism, and (2) her argument would apply to the many Spanish-speaking theologians outside of American territories.

23. Zaida Maldonado Pérez, "The Trinity *Es* and *Son Familia*," in *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, ed. Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene: Cascade, 2013), 54–55.

24. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 131.

deploy the doctrine as a model for social critique. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff (b. 1938) is perhaps the most well-known advocate of this approach. Boff's *Trinity and Society* critiques capitalism for its individualism and socialism for its collectivizing at the expense of individuals, advocating instead a balanced economy attentive to the needs of the poor.[25] Though Boff is the most familiar trinitarian liberationist to Western readers, similar perspectives are found in theologians like Ghanaian Mercy Oduyoye (b. 1934), who sees the Trinity as a means of balancing the individual and the community in political contexts,[26] or in the thought of Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925–96), who saw the sociality of the Trinity as a means of pushing back against a privatized religiosity separated from the social life of Christians with its ethical concerns.[27]

The broad ethical emphasis of much majority world liberationist trinitarian theology serves as a third challenge to Western trinitarianism. Here, though, significant caution is in order. There are strong reasons to believe that a "social trinitarianism" which uses the immanent Trinity as a pattern for social ethics is a problematic and futile endeavor.[28] After all, the dissimilarity between God and creation is so great that such an approach can be used to defend almost any social program—there never seems to be a time when the cart doesn't end up before the horse. Far better to derive our social ethic from parts of Scripture and *loci* of systematic theology with more direct connections to society and history than to seek a supposedly immovable foundation for it in the Trinity.

Yet, the impulse toward social application, which has featured prominently in much majority world trinitarianism—some of which has influenced a similar trajectory in recent Western political theology—does reveal a weakness in much Western systematic theology as a whole. Much of our trinitarian thought has been done in an abstract manner often detached from the day-to-day experiences of Christians and from their struggles in social ethics, dimensions of theology which many Latino and Latina figures describe as producing theology *en lo cotidiano* ("in the quotidian") and *en la lucha* ("in the struggle"), respectively.[29] While I am not convinced by Boff and others that the obscurities of the Trinity *ad intra* will resolve modern debates in social ethics, I am deeply troubled at the possibility that my academic work in trinitarianism may prove a distraction that keeps me from engaging in combating injustices in my own community. This third critique I find most personally convicting as I spend so much time alone in my office writing and reading. If Western trinitarian theologians like myself would also attend to social ethics with vigor and conviction, perhaps Christians around the world would find less reason to deploy the Trinity in service of social reform. The social deployment of the Trinity in theologians like Leonardo Boff therefore serves as a challenge to me and to some readers of this essay to improve our own work in social ethics.

Much more could be said, and this article only provides a brief and introductory survey of global trinitarianism. Yet, even this short analysis orienting the reader to basic challenges and potential benefits may result in more fruitful reading. The best way to benefit from global trinitarianism is to read it.

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25. Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

26. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 139–41.

27. Juan Luis Segundo, *Our Idea of God*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974), 66–69.

28. This is, in short, not usually how the Bible appeals to the Trinity (John 17's discussion of church unity being a noted exception), and the doctrine of analogy suggests that there will always be a greater dissimilarity between the Trinity and our social institutions than similarity.

29. In an American context, such concepts are most clearly linked with Cuban-born theologian and ethicist Ada María Isasi-Díaz. See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

ESSAYS

Leo the Great Among the Reformers

MATTHEW HOSKIN

If people know any theologians of Christology from church history, those tend to be Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. The former famously defended the full divinity of Christ between the Council of Nicaea (325) and the First Council of Constantinople (381); the latter is famed for defending the oneness of Christ's person in the hypostatic union prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451). Reformed Christians attuned to church history today view themselves as the heirs of these great figures, whose theology was largely assumed and handed down to us by the Reformers. Yet at least equally important in Reformed Christology is Leo the Great (Bishop of Rome, 440-461), whose great *Tome* was endorsed alongside some of Cyril's writings at Chalcedon.

I doubt any readers caught it, but in March 2022, I had the joy of seeing the publication of my book, *The Manuscripts of Leo the Great's Letters: The Transmission and Reception of Papal Documents in the Middle Ages*. I confess it is not not the catchiest title, but the book was the fruit of four years of Ph.D. work and six further years of research and revision. Its 469 pages describe how over 170 letters associated with Leo the Great came to us today, examining almost 400 manuscripts ranging in date from the sixth to the sixteenth century. After an introduction to the life and work of Leo, focusing on the letters, I delve into a detailed discussion of the reception and transmission of Leo throughout the Middle Ages. A major argument that I advance is that, whether people were reading his canon law or his theology, "every time there was a cultural mixture of reform, renewal, and 'Renaissance,' Leo was amongst the authors copied, quoted, and compiled."[1]

However, my analysis stops short in the fifteenth century. In the Middle Ages, one can trace the transmission of writers through specific manuscripts. The advent of mass printing in the 1400s, however, transformed the nature of transmission with its ability to produce identical copies of any work in bulk.[2] It also, therefore, made it possible for a popular author, such as Leo, to become

1. Matthew J. J. Hoskin, *The Manuscripts of Pope Leo the Great's Letters: The Transmission and Reception of Papal Documents in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 466.

2. Not that printed books were produced in such a way all the time. Ariosto, for example, would actually modify the text of *Orlando Furioso* during printings, which means that a critical edition of the poem must take into account not only each printing but even each copy, treating each copy like a manuscript.

even more popular and expand his impact. If you read my book, you will learn about how and why Leo was important in the later patristic era, among the Carolingians, and in the High Middle Ages, at the Council of Ferrara-Florence. But you will not catch a glimpse of Leo the Great among the Reformers.

> **LEO'S TWO-NATURE CHRISTOLOGY WAS AS IMPORTANT TO THE REFORMERS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AS IT HAD BEEN TO REFORMERS IN THE ELEVENTH.**

Consider this article, then, an extra chapter, introducing the place of Leo the Great among Protestants of the Reformation era. Despite the question once posed to me by the guest-master at a Benedictine monastery—"Isn't it hard for you, as a Protestant, to study a pope?"—it is the case that the Magisterial Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican) was rooted in the Fathers, Leo the Great among them.[3] His two-nature Christology was as important to the reformers of the sixteenth century as it had been to reformers in the eleventh. We will see this first in a brief discussion of how the two-nature Christology of Leo and Chalcedon is a given throughout the formularies of the Reformation era, and then, after a brief mention of sixteenth-century editions of Leo, we will consider the influence of Leo upon John Calvin (1509–64), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), and Richard Hooker (1554–1600). These are not the only sixteenth-century Protestants I could have chosen, of course (Martin Chemnitz will surely be at the forefront of any future investigation), but I take them as being exemplary, at the least.[4]

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF LEO AND THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

Leo the Great's Christology is a clear synthesis and presentation of traditional Latin two-nature Christology, drawing on Hilary of Poitiers (c.314–c.367), Ambrose of Milan (c.339–c.397), and Augustine of Hippo (354–430), as well as being in line with Cyril of Alexandria's (c.376–444) and John of Antioch's (d. 441) formula of reunion of 433 and other statements in the Greek Fathers—particularly Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329–390). The prime *locus* for Leo's Christology was his so-called *Tome*,[5] a letter sent to Flavian of Constantinople in 448 in response to the deposition of the Constantinopolitan archimandrite Eutyches on Christological grounds.[6] Leo's *Tome* was embraced as the official orthodoxy of the imperial church at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and a definition of the faith was articulated by the council that distilled the essential components of Leo's teaching into a short span.[7] Later, after Leo's Christology formally won the day at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (which was part of the fallout of Eutyches's deposition), he wrote a letter to the monks of Palestine (Ballerini *Ep.* 124). This letter was revised later and sent to the Emperor Leo I; the revised version is the so-called *Second Tome*.[8] This second letter reframes the same Christology in different phrasing and terminology due to Leo's realization that he faced a hostile audience after the council.[9]

The heart of Leonine-Chalcedonian Christology is the affirmation that Christ exists in two natures but is, nevertheless, a single person. The two natures are united, as the council members were at pains to repeat, "accord-

3. I leave open the question of how "Reformed" the Church of England was or is. That it has historically been rooted in the Fathers from the Reformation to the nineteenth century, however, should be uncontroversial. For more, see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

4. See Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008).

5. Leo's *Tome* is officially numbered as Epistle 28, in the standard Latin edition by the Ballerini brothers, and thus in *Patrologia Latina* vol. 54; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 (henceforth *NPNF2*), vol. 12; and Edmund Hunt's translation of the letters in the series *The Fathers of the Church*. I use the edition of Carlos Silva-Tarouca, *Textus et Documenta: Series Theologica 9, S. Leonis Magni Tomus ad Flavianum Episc. Constantinopolitanum* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1932), 20–33.

6. Eutyches has become infamous for the heresy that bears his name, Eutychianism—the belief that Christ has one nature in which his humanity is swallowed up by his divinity. Whether Eutyches really held to this view is contested. He seems to have been a well-meaning but confused thinker, a lifelong monk ill-equipped for theological precision.

7. For my own translation of this definition of faith, see "Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith," *Classically Christian*, accessed December 1, 2022, https://thepocketscroll.wordpress.com/classic-christian-texts/the-chalcedonian-definition-of-the-faith/.

8. The revised version is "Ep. 165" in the Ballerini, PL 54, *NPNF2*, and *Fathers of the Church*; Silva-Tarouca, *Series Theologica 9*, 44–58.

9. For a summary of this reframing, see Philip L. Barclift, "The Shifting Tones of Pope Leo the Great's Christological Vocabulary," *Church History* 66, no. 2 (June 1997): 221–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/3170655. In *Ep.* 165, Leo shifts away from *naturae* to *formae*, using Philippians 2:5–11 as his terminological cue.

ing to hypostasis," which is Cyril of Alexandria's way of phrasing the "hypostatic union"—an indivisible union of the human and the divine in a single hypostasis, or person. On the one hand, the hypostatic union means that anything Jesus Christ does can be predicated of the God-Word or the man Jesus Christ. Thus we can say that God was crucified and died and that Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord of glory and Creator of all. This interchangeability of who can be made the subject of a sentence involving Christ is called the *communicatio idiomatum*—the *idiomata*, or properties, of one nature are shared or communicated with the other. Nonetheless, the natures themselves remain indivisible and unmixed. Four adverbs are famously included in the Chalcedonian definition of the faith to preserve the two natures and their full unity: without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.[10] This is the Christology of the Reformation formularies, to which we now turn.

CHRISTOLOGY IN THE REFORMATION FORMULARIES

As we consider the role of Leo in the thought of the Reformers, let us begin with Martin Luther. The *Small Catechism* of 1529 is indicative of the formularies at large, stating, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord."[11] The *Large Catechism* of the same year is essentially the same, asserting the full divinity and humanity of Christ. In both texts, I would maintain that a two-nature Christology is assumed. Both texts, however, are more interested in soteriology than in the technical aspects of Christological doctrine; soteriology and Christology are intimately linked in Luther—as, in fact, is also the case with Leo himself.[12] Throughout his various writings, moreover, Luther continually affirms and, when necessary, explicates a two-nature Christology in line with Chalcedon.[13] Thus, his two catechisms share this affirmation when they state that Jesus is both God and man. The Lutheran tradition, through Melanchthon's *Augsburg Confession* (1530), embraces the two natures of Christ in the confession's third article, and, in Lutheran fashion, spends more time on soteriology than the two natures. Such a concern makes sense, given the theological stakes of the first half of the sixteenth century.

> **BY THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, THE TEACHINGS OF LEO WERE SIMPLY IN THE BLOOD OF LATIN CHRISTENDOM.**

Turning to the Reformed confessions and catechisms, two natures of Christ are affirmed throughout the sixteenth century. The Belgic Confession (1561), Articles 18 and 19, even cites Leo's proof text for the two natures, Philippians 2:5–11. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Q. 35, affirms the fullness of the deity of the Son of God and his assumption of a complete human nature, explaining in Q. 36 that this was undertaken for our salvation. The Second Helvetic Confession (1562) goes into more detail than most on this point in Chapter XI with words that echo very strongly the Chalcedonian definition of the faith, saying that the two natures "are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent."[14] This confession, moreover, goes on to accept the *communicatio idiomatum*, whereas most confessions and catechisms, due to their terse nature, do not go into such details.

The formularies of the English Reformation sound a similar note as on the continent—a general embrace of two-nature Christology without a thorough engagement with the niceties of the doctrine. Again, this is understandable given the nature of the texts. Thus, *The Bishops' Book* (1537), in its interpretation of the second

10. In Greek: ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαιφέτως, ἀχωρίστως.

11. Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, accessed December 1, 2022, https://catechism.cph.org/en/creed.html.

12. This is the thesis of Bernard Green, *The Soteriology of Leo the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

13. See Matthieu Arnold, "Luther on Christ's Person and Work," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.005.

14. *Second Helvetic Confession*, accessed December 1, 2022, https://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm.

and third articles of the Apostles' Creed, affirms both the fullness of Christ's deity, in the discussion of Article 2, and his taking on of a full (yet unfallen) human nature under Article 3.[15] Unsurprisingly, *The King's Book* of 1543 is much the same.[16]

The evolution of the English Reformation compels us to consider the 39 Articles of Religion (1571), the Elizabethan revision of Cranmer's 42 Articles (1552). Article 2 states Chalcedonian Christology quite clearly: "that two whole and perfect Natures, …the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man." The catechism as included in the 1549, 1552, and 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* does not deal with the natures of Christ, but the two natures are embraced, for example, in the Holy Communion of 1552 stating "the redempcyon of the worlde by the death and passyon of our Saviour Chryst, both God and man." In the *Books of Homilies*, no single passage or phrase could be taken to demonstrate their embrace of Chalcedon, but two-nature Christology is part of the fabric of the homilies, especially the "Homily of the Salvation of Mankind." By the sixteenth century, the teachings of Leo and Chalcedon were simply in the blood of Latin Christendom and their soteriological import was never passed over. Nevertheless, the Reformers still turned explicitly to Leo in their own research and articulation of doctrine, especially as more of his letters became more available throughout the sixteenth century.

LEO AND THE PRINTING PRESS

The "sacred philology" of the sixteenth century made an increasing number of Leo's letters available in print as the century drew on, beginning with reprintings of Giovanni Bussi's 1470 edition of five letters in 1505 and 1511, but really moving forward in 1524 when Merlinus produced an edition of Pseudo-Isidore with ninety-four of Leo's letters. An edition devoted to Leo alone would come with Pierre Crabbé in 1551. Seven more editions of Leo's letters would follow up to the year 1591.[17] These sixteenth-century editions of Leo's letters were printed throughout Europe, at Paris, Cologne, Leuven, Antwerp, Venice, Rome, and elsewhere. Given the references to Leo in sixteenth-century Protestant writers, we know that copies of his letters were available to them. The number of such writers is vast; some prominent names, besides the three discussed below, are Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Chemnitz, Thomas Cranmer, John Jewell, and Philip Melanchthon. Of these, Chemnitz is the one with the greatest likelihood of fruitful future research.

LEO AND JOHN CALVIN

John Calvin, throughout his discussion of Christology in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.12–17, maintains, defends, and upholds through Scripture and reason the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ. Straight out of the gate in 2.14, where this topic is discussed most intensively, Calvin sounds a Chalcedonian note, citing the post-Chalcedonian Athanasian Creed: "the Son of God became the Son of man, *not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.*"[18] Calvin, like Leo and the Council of Chalcedon, seeks to articulate the fullness of the unity of Christ's person on the one hand, and the lack of mingling of the two natures on the other. After making the soul-body analogy from Augustine, Calvin discusses how the divine and human natures in Christ operate, saying that each retains its own properties, which lies at the heart of Leo's famous passage that begins, "For each form does what is proper to it."[19] Just as Leo includes in that passage the statement that the natures operate "in communion with one another," so does Calvin go on to say, "This combination of a twofold nature in Christ they express so carefully, that they sometimes communicate them with each other, a figure of speech which the ancients termed *idiom-*

15. See "The Bishops' Book: The Institution of a Christian Man," in *Confessional Documents Issued by Henry VIII and Thomas Cranmer*, ed. Charles Lloyd and Andrew Raines (Galesburg: Seminary Street Press, 2022), 47, 49–50. *The Bishops' Book* (the popular name for *The Institution of a Christian Man*) was the official interpretation of the Ten Articles, the Church of England's first confession after the break from Rome.

16. See "The King's Book," in *Confessional Documents*, 212. *The King's Book* was a revised version of *The Bishops' Book*, published after Henry VIII expressed concerns to Thomas Cranmer about the latter's more explicitly Protestant theology (in contrast to the more circumspect Ten Articles).

17. Hoskin, *Manuscripts*, 72–74.

18. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 2.14.1, 309. Italics mine.

19. In Latin: *Agit enim utraque forma*. Leo the Great, "Ep. 28.4," in *NPNF2* 12.40.

aton koinonia (a communication of properties)."[20] Leo drives at this point in the *Tome*, saying, "For although in the Lord Jesus Christ there is one person of God and man, nevertheless the injury common to both is from one, and the glory common to both is from the other. For from ours he has a humanity less than the Father, and from the Father he has a divinity equal with the Father."[21] Although Calvin does not here explicitly cite Leo, the Christological doctrine is the same.

Calvin does cite Leo elsewhere in the *Institutes*. In 3.5.3, he cites *Ep*. 124.4 to the monks of Palestine where Leo argues that the deaths of martyrs are not efficacious for the salvation of anyone as evidence of the Fathers being against indulgences and merits of the martyrs. While this final passage from Leo was being used in a context beyond Christology, it is clear that Leo's main legacy in Calvin, as in the Church at large, lies in Christology, for Leo's letter to the monks of Palestine is one of his major Christological texts. Calvin's *Institutes* do not engage with Christology at length, given its nature as a broad overview of Christian theology. For a more thorough treatment of Christology and richer engagement with Leo, we turn to Peter Martyr Vermigli.

LEO AND PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI

In the Reformation era, Christological questions arose as part of the Reformers' attempts to articulate a philosophically coherent, biblically faithful eucharistic theology as an alternative to the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation. This, however, led to the intramural Protestant dispute between the Lutherans and Reformed over "the doctrine of ubiquity." This doctrine, taken up by certain Lutheran theologians, held that, along with his divine nature, the human body of Christ was present everywhere, allowing his body and blood to therefore be present in the elements of the Lord's Supper. An inability to find agreement upon the sacraments lay behind Luther and Zwingli's infamous parting of the ways at the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529, and lay at the root of Lutheran-Reformed division throughout the Reformation era and to this day.

Peter Martyr Vermigli's final work, *Dialogue on the Two Natures in Christ* (1561), was part of this debate, being a response to Lutheran Johannes Brenz's *De personali unione duarum naturarum in Christo*. Throughout the *Dialogue*, the protagonist representing Vermigli, called Orothetes, debates one Pantachus. Many of Pantachus's arguments are taken directly from Brenz's work, and many of the patristic passages discussed by Orothetes are likewise drawn from Brenz. At a simple, surface level, the aim of the *Dialogue* is to refute Brenz's *De personali unione*. However, if all Vermigli did was demonstrate that ubiquity was false, taking 203 pages to do so would perhaps be beating a dead horse. Whilst refuting Brenz, Vermigli simultaneously lays out an orthodox, Protestant exposition of the doctrine of two natures in Christ, discussing the fullness of the humanity and of the divinity, the maintenance of their properties as per Chalcedon, and a thoroughgoing discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the primary disputed point between the Reformed and the Lutherans.

Because of the breadth of space available to him, Vermigli goes beyond the more basic engagement with Chalcedonian Christology found in the formularies and Calvin's *Institutes*. Taking such theology as (mostly) agreed between Orothetes and Pantachus, his discussion is largely taken up with the interpretation of the Church Fathers' Christology. Scripture itself plays an important role, but since the interpretation of Scripture is part of the matter under dispute, the Fathers are also important, as both Lutherans and Reformed muster them in support.

Vermigli explicitly cites Leo on the *communicatio idiomatum*, using the same passage that we earlier saw only paralleled in Calvin: "Each nature in communion with the other carries out what is proper to it."[22] Immediately after marshalling this passage of Leo's, Vermigli draws on another Leo passage, from Leo's "Second Sermon on the Resurrection," to show that the *communicatio idiomatum* does not destroy either nature but leaves them intact, and then uses later passages in the same

20. Calvin, *Institutes*, 310.

21. Leo the Great, *Tome*, *Ep*. 28.4–5 (trans. author). For the Latin edition, see Silva-Tarouca, *Series Theologica 9*, 122ff.; see also *NPNF2* 12.41.

22. *Agit enim utraque forma*. Leo, *Ep*. 28.4, quoted in Vermigli, *Dialogue on the Two Natures in Christ*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly (Kirksville: Northeast Missouri State University, 1994; repr. Landrum, SC: Davenant Press, 2018), 53.

sermon to show that, although the properties of the natures are intact, nevertheless, they are fully united in a single, undivided person. Vermigli's discussion then proceeds with the Second *Tome*, in which it is shown that the *communicatio idiomatum* enables us to say that the Son of God suffered, even though God himself is by nature impassible.

The final Leo passage in this stage of Vermigli's argument is from Leo's letter to Theodoret after Chalcedon, which Vermigli uses to vindicate Theodoret of Cyrrhus as an orthodox Father for appeal in this matter. Vindicating Theodoret is necessary because Vermigli frequently turns to Theodoret even though he opposed Cyril of Alexandria—and Cyril was a favourite of Brenz's. A critique of Leo's *Tome* that gains its most pointed form in Severus of Antioch in the 500s but persists to this day is that he is insufficiently grounded in the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum*.[23] Severus even uses the aforementioned passage from the *Tome* ("Each nature in communion…") to prove that Leo does not truly believe in either of these doctrines. In other words, Vermigli is disarming a 1000-year-old criticism of traditional, Latin Christology as he makes his way through the controversies of his own day.

Vermigli cites Leo a second time, referencing one of his many letters to Julian of Cos, showing that Leo rejects the implication of *assumptus homo* language that the human person of Jesus took up God—"rather it was created by the assumption itself."[24] That is to say, the hypostatic union of human and divine is thoroughgoing and, temporally speaking, coexistent with the entire incarnation of the God-Word. Vermigli even goes on to show how this statement of Leo's works in tandem with the work of Cyril of Alexandria, the great exponent of Christ's complete and utter unity. Vermigli's final citation from Leo is not only part of the clinching patristic argument against ubiquity but also part of the implications of the historic Christology of the Fathers: Christ's ascension enables all Christian disciples to receive the blessings of the incarnation.[25]

Vermigli's use of Leo goes beyond prooftexting and is itself a deft display of the historic, Latin view of Christology, unpacking the implications of Leo's teaching not simply for the two natures but also for the hypostatic union, the *communicatio idiomatum*, and the benefits we receive from Christ, besides finding contemporary application in Vermigli's opposition to the doctrine of ubiquity. Furthermore, Vermigli is not simply "Leonine," but draws richly from across the Greek and Latin Fathers in his argumentation and interpretation of Scripture, using Fathers from before and after Chalcedon, as well as those who highlight the unity of Christ such as Cyril and those who emphasize the reality of the two natures such Theodoret. In other words, Vermigli not only stands within the tradition but consolidates and synthesizes it for his own generation.

LEO AND RICHARD HOOKER

Hooker's discussion of Christology comes in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, Chapters 50–55, beginning in Chapter 50 with sacraments in general, then moving into the good and necessary consequences for the Christian and the Church in 56–57. Only after discussing Christology and its wider implications does Hooker consider the two dominical sacraments in particular. Christology is part of his discussion of sacraments because "the Sacraments do serve to make us partakers of Christ" (5.50.3).[26] Answering the question of *how* they do so necessitates an analysis of traditional, Chalcedonian Christology. Like Vermigli, Hooker draws from a broad range of Fathers in his discussion of Christology, pre- and post-Chalcedon. Among the fifth-century Fathers we find Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Vincent of Lérins, and Leo the Great. Again, like Vermigli, Hooker seeks to balance the concerns of unity found in the arguments of Cyril and of duality found in the works of Theodoret and Leo. However, unlike in Vermigli, most patristic quotations are in the notes, and the argument itself primarily uses Hooker's own words with the Fathers to back him up. Of course, Hooker's intentions were different from Vermigli's, although both discuss Christology in a sacramental context.

23. Severus, "Ad Nephalium, Oratio 2," in *Severus of Antioch*, trans. Pauline Allen and C. T. R. Hayward (New York: Routledge, 2004), 62. For this critique's persistence to this day, see the conclusion of this essay.

24. Vermigli, *Dialogue on the Two Natures*, 59–60.

25. Vermigli, *Dialogue on the Two Natures*, 164.

26. Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Ronald Bayne (London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1907), vol. 2.

Hooker writes, "These natures from the moment of their first combination have been and are forever inseparable" (5.52.4). Besides arguing for the Chalcedonian indivisibility of the natures, Hooker also argues, in 5.53.1, that there is no commingling or confusion of the natures, then affirms the reality of the hypostatic union, which he discusses for the rest of Chapter 53. He also addresses the *communicatio idiomatum*. Hooker closes Chapter 54 with a discussion of the Council of Chalcedon's four adverbs relating to the union, which he translates as truly, perfectly, indivisibly, distinctly: "Within the compass of which four heads, I may truly affirm, that all the heresies which touch but the person of Jesus Christ, whether they have risen in these later days, or in any age heretofore, may be with great facility brought to confine themselves" (5.54.10). It is perhaps noteworthy that Hooker brings forth Chalcedon from his arsenal when he has already made his argument—it is a conclusion, not a premise. That said, Chalcedonian Christology is not the end goal in the *Laws*—the corollary of union with Christ is a corollary found throughout the post-Chalcedonian Fathers, such as Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus. Hooker is right on track with the tradition.

In 5.56.10, Hooker gives us the great payoff for the spiritual life that is ours as a result of the hypostatic union, the *communicatio idiomatum*, the fullness of the two natures in the one person of Christ:

> Christ is whole with the whole Church, and whole with every part of the Church, as touching his Person, which can no way divide itself, or be possessed by degrees and portions. But the participation of Christ importeth, besides the presence of Christ's Person, and besides the mystical copulation thereof with the parts and members of his whole Church, a true actual influence of grace whereby the life which we live according to godliness is his, and from him we receive those perfections wherein our eternal happiness consisteth.

Richard Hooker is not simply parroting patristic Christology. Like Vermigli, he synthesizes it and finds for us corollaries and consequences. As a consequence of the hypostatic union, we ourselves are able to be united to Christ in baptism and in holy communion. We are partakers in the divine life. This is the practical reality that is at stake in orthodox Christology. It is the same reality pressed for by Leo.

CONCLUSION

In the essay that introduced me to Christology, Robert W. Jenson argues that Western Christology is ultimately deficient because it relies too heavily on Leo and never moves beyond him to address the concerns of the Miaphysite movement.[27] However, what I hope I have shown in the above is that, while Leo's two-nature Christology is prominent in the theology of the Reformation, early Protestant theologians engage with Leo and his teaching in the context of a wide array of other Fathers, from East and West, and address the concerns of the Miaphysite movement by showing the unity of the single hypostasis of Christ as articulated by Leo and interpreted by Cyril, the Scholastics, and the Reformers' own logical analysis of both the Fathers and the Scriptures. In this way, the foundational authors of Protestantism show themselves to be heirs of the tradition who are actively and consciously engaging it as they produce coherent articulations and syntheses of the tradition for their own time. Their Christology is neither incoherent nor deficient, and we would do well to internalize their teachings and their approach as we seek to bring the riches of classic, orthodox Christology to light in our own day.

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27. R. W. Jenson, "With No Qualifications: The Christological Maximalism of the Christian East," in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century*, ed. K. Tanner and C. A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 13–22.

Besom

BY DAN RATTELLE

Bound-up straw and whittled birch –
they only ever hung their brooms
to rest on Sunday after church
and sat in sun-swept living rooms.

An heirloom? No. Too commonsense.
Too thrifty, though, to cast away
such work. It's been here ever since
as if for one long Sabbath-day.

BOOKS AND ARTS

Christian Poetry in American Since 1940

EDITED BY MICAH MATTIX AND SALLY THOMAS
REVIEWED BY JOHN WILSON

Certain books possess medicinal properties. They can't cure a case of cancer or turn back the relentless advance of dementia; they won't even make you feel ten years younger. But they remind us that, as Jesus promised Julian of Norwich in a vision she recounted, "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Keep in mind that when she received this "showing," Julian was thought to be on the verge of death and had already received the Last Rites; no untested cheerleading here.

Case in point: *Christian Poetry in America Since 1940: An Anthology*, edited by Micah Mattix and Sally Thomas.[1] When Paraclete Press sent page proofs of this anthology a few months ago, I was knee-deep in books forecasting a dire future for the Church in the United States (books I was reading for an essay-review, still in progress). Whether or not one agrees in detail with such assessments (not to mention the responses suggested by some Christians), their cumulative effect was pretty dreary.

But what does a modest gathering of poems have to do with the State of the Church or the State of the World? Wouldn't it be peripheral at best? How many people will even look at an anthology such as this, compared to the audience for the latest sensation on TikTok?

Well, it's a free country, or freeish, at any rate, and you are free to read what you want—the really important stuff, you know, like reports on the latest antics of Donald Trump—while I huddle over poetry with a few like-minded dilettantes. But here's the funny thing. If you think that way (and I know many people who do), you probably haven't read much contemporary poetry, Christian or otherwise. Now if you *did* read it, you still might not *like* it, but at least your contempt would be better-informed.

This anthology, superbly prepared by Mattix and Thomas, was so restorative to me precisely because it stands aslant to all manner of current preoccupations and arguments and big-picture explanations of Our Time, the sort of stuff that routinely makes me want to vomit. The poems gathered here are much closer to everyday life, in all its tangled particularity, than the vast majority of public discourse across the entire ideological spectrum.

1. *Christian Poetry in American Since 1940: An Anthology*, eds. Micah Mattix and Sally Thomas. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2022. 208 pp. $18.54.

"Oh, brother," you may be saying, shaking your head. "He's working the 'old everyday life' shtick." Well, if we had enough time, and you had enough patience, we could feature a long digression here on Andrew Epstein's illuminating 2016 book *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture*. In some respects, Epstein's take on contemporary poetry—and much else—differs from mine, but I think his book is indispensable. And if you simply keep the notion of everyday life, the quotidian, in mind (however you parse it), I think it will illuminate your reading of this anthology.

WHEN I FINISHED READING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WAS PRACTICALLY LEVITATING—AND I HAD TEARS IN MY EYES.

Consider the start of the entry for Robert B. Shaw: "The poetry of Robert B. Shaw, like the poetry of John Donne, of which Shaw is a scholar, often begins with an observation about everyday objects or events: the chirp of cicadas, the function of bookmarks, climbing a ladder, dawn, an ant in amber." This motif runs throughout.

A bit of background on the book. Micah Mattix, poetry editor at *First Things*, is a superb and wide-ranging critic; he also presides over *Prufrock News*, the online newsletter that many of us follow religiously (and he is the author of a very good book on Frank O'Hara, poet of the quotidian *nonpareil*). Sally Thomas, a poet who published her first novel, *Works of Mercy*, in 2022, is Associate Poetry Editor at the *New York Sun*. Together they have assembled an exemplary anthology, capacious enough to include an exceptionally wide range of writers born in or after 1940.

Of course, no anthology can manage to include everyone for whom a good case could be made. I was disappointed, for instance, that Joseph Bottum (who contributes a lovely blurb on the back cover) wasn't represented here, and there are others I missed. But while the editors' selection is generous, Mattix forthrightly acknowledges that this anthology "in no way provides a comprehensive picture of contemporary Christian poetry in America."

I can't pretend to detachment when so many of the writers who *are* included in this volume are not only poets whose work I admire but also friends. Over a period of twenty years, my wife Wendy and I spent time with many of them at Laity Lodge in Texas as members of the Chrysostom Society, a Christian writers' group. We've had meals and splendid conversations with many of these poets in Grand Rapids during the blessed Calvin Festival for Faith & Writing; some of them have stayed with us while in the Wheaton area. Brett Foster (1973–2015), a professor at Wheaton College at the time of his untimely death from cancer, was one of my closest friends; the two poems of his included here are excellent choices.

But you don't need to have known any of these poets in person to appreciate their work. I haven't met the aforementioned Robert B. Shaw, alas, whose "Things We Will Never Know" is one of my favorite poems in this anthology. It puts a twist on the traditional *ubi sunt* ("where are…") in a way that combines genuine pathos and deliciously wry absurdity, suffused with the everydayness rightly emphasized in the editors' capsule account of Shaw. Here are the first three of the poem's nine stanzas:

> What became of Krishna
> the blue point Siamese
> strayed *circa* Nineteen
> Fifty-five in Louisville
>
> Or the box turtle Churchy
> lost a few years later
> What seduced them away Where
> Is Jimmy Hoffa Judge Crater
>
> What was the name of the dwarf
> newsboy we used to buy
> Sunday papers from for seven years
> until we moved

I'd like to go on and quote the entire poem. When I finished reading it for the first time, I was practically levitating—and I had tears in my eyes.

In his substantial introduction to the volume, Mattix valiantly takes up questions about what constitutes

Christian literature in general and Christian poetry in particular, adducing such worthies as C. S. Lewis, Jacques Maritain, and Erich Auerbach. I must admit that I almost never think about such matters, and that when I am forced to, I usually get irritated very quickly. Consider Lewis, whom I revere, pontificating that—in Mattix's summary—"a Christian theory of poetry is 'above all…opposed to the idea that literature is self-expression,'" a reactionary absurdity that Mattix tries to render more palatable.

One passage near the end of Mattix's introduction struck me with particular force:

> While writing from various denominational backgrounds—Catholic, Presbyterian, Charismatic, Orthodox, Baptist—these Christian poets both praise the beauty of the universal Church and critique its failings and excesses. Far from uniform, the work of the poets in this volume is as varied as contemporary poetry itself while, at the same time, profoundly committed to a common faith.

When I read this, I thought about the drives my wife Wendy and I had taken (Wendy always at the wheel) for many years after we moved from Pasadena, California to Wheaton, Illinois in 1994. We often went into Chicago (about 25 miles east of us). Most of the time we stuck to the tollways, but once in a while, on the way back, we would take surface streets: the trip was much longer, but there were compensations. Above all, we marveled at the abundant variety of churches we saw along the way, ranging from massive structures (many of them venerable, some reflecting the heyday of modernism, and so on) to a wild variety of storefront places of worship.

The poets included in this anthology are as unpredictably varied as those churches. I defy any reader to find a common denominator among the first four poets here—Paul Mariani, Diane Glancy, Jeanne Murray Walker, and Marilyn Nelson (followed by Robert B. Shaw)—beyond the essential fact that they are indeed *Christian* poets and, yes, they tend to be anchored in "everyday life" (though there are exceptions to the latter as the volume proceeds). Their angles of attack, their prosody, their voices: all quite different and distinct. It will be a rare reader who tunes into all four of them with equal ease, but very few will regret having made their acquaintance.

Here is the start of one of the two Glancy poems, "Why I Like God." The title is a provocation, of course. Glancy, as I have observed elsewhere, is a shapeshifter, a trickster (though one who will also offer piercing testimony):

> stay out late He says,
> do whatever you want
> wear My shield and helmet anytime
> nothing will get you
> not even those *squeaky* nights
> fly between the surfboards of My wings
> say *I come from a pit I stand on a rock*

Christian poetry, yes, finding a place in the same volume as the suave stanzas of James Matthew Wilson. Wilson is a poet, critic, and Founding Director of the recently established Master of Fine Arts Program at the University of Saint Thomas in Houston. From this post—along with his partner in thought-crime, Joshua Hren, founder of Wiseblood Books—he is leading a guerrilla campaign against Contemporary Poetry, Inc. He also had a poem published in the previous print edition of *Ad Fontes*.

Earlier I mentioned Joseph Bottum's blurb for this anthology, but I didn't quote it. Here it is: "One of the best, and least expected, anthologies in decades." Amen—and many thanks to Micah Mattix, Sally Thomas, and Paraclete Press for giving it to us.

John Wilson *was editor of* Books & Culture *and editor at large for* Christianity Today *magazine. He received a B.A. from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA, in 1970 and an M.A. from California State University, Los Angeles, in 1975. His reviews and essays have appeared in the* New York Times, The Boston Globe, First Things, National Review, *and other publications. He and his wife, Wendy, are members of Faith Evangelical Covenant Church in Wheaton; they have four children.*

BOOKS AND ARTS

Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne

BY KATHERINE RUNDELL

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL RIGGINS

"Oh to vex me, contraryes meet in one." So begins one of John Donne's final Holy Sonnets, usually numbered nineteen.[1] Donne (1572–1631) is a notoriously difficult author when it comes to dating his compositions, but this sonnet is thought to come from the period after Donne's ordination to the priesthood in 1615. Most of Donne's Holy Sonnets are dated five or six years earlier; this sonnet, then, represents some of Donne's mature reflections on the Christian life in verse. It captures the familiar spiritual experience of most Christians: there are days where God seems much nearer than others, and we oscillate dramatically between over-familiarity and irreverence on the one hand, and despair, fear, and shame on the other.

In his later years, Donne became one of the preeminent poets of Christian experience. But Donne's poetic corpus also contains some of the finest love poetry in the English language, written primarily in his youth. He became famous for his unusual and sometimes troubling metaphors to describe love, sex, and marriage, including, infamously, "The Flea"—a poem in which the speaker presents a flea to his lover as an image of marriage. The bug has sucked both of their bloods, and they are forever intertwined as a result.

To read Donne is to marvel at the workings of his mind. What kind of man can look at a flea and see a marriage, or a girdle and see a star-studded sky? Such connections are the defining characteristic of the metaphysical poets—Donne, Abraham Cowley, Andrew Marvell, among others—and have not always been to everyone's taste. Samuel Johnson famously derided their "combinations of confused magnificence that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined."[2] Yet, more puzzling than the question of how Donne could begin ascending the ladder of Being from the most quotidian object is this: what could have effected his monumental

1. See https://www.poeticous.com/john-donne/holy-sonnets-19-oh-to-vex-me-contraries-meet-in-one.

2. Samuel Johnson, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *The Lives of the Poets,* accessed January 16, 2023, https://www.bartleby.com/209/775.html.

transformation from the young, roguish poet for whom poetry was a tool of seduction to the mature Christian clergyman for whom poetry was a tool of devotion?

> **TO READ DONNE IS TO MARVEL AT THE WORKINGS OF HIS MIND. WHAT KIND OF MAN CAN LOOK AT A FLEA AND SEE A MARRIAGE, OR A GIRDLE AND SEE A STAR-STUDDED SKY?**

Katherine Rundell's new biography of Donne, *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne*, makes an excellent beginning in answering this question.[3] The book has been roundly praised, appearing on a surprising array of "Best of 2022" lists, selected by writers and critics whom one would not usually imagine to have much interest in Elizabethan religious poets. As a genre, literary biographies, when done well, repay the work a reader invests in them with interest. Rundell's is no exception. Best known outside of scholarly circles for her children's literature, Rundell is eminently readable, and has a talent for making little details significant and driving home more significant matters with poignant understatement. Take, for example, her discussion of Donne's mustache when he was a young man. In a long section about Donne's meticulous care for his own appearance, she writes, with humor characteristic of the whole volume: "But Donne's moustache, particularly in the Lothian portrait, is exemplary. It is careful: the moustache of a man who understands that even facial hair has to it an element of performance. To see his moustache is to know: *almost nothing is easy*" (57, emphasis original).

The book's title and subtitle arise from Rundell's decision to name most chapters in the book after the many hats that Donne wore throughout his life, such as "The Exquisitely Clothed Theoriser on Fashion" or "The Anticlimactically Married Man." Such multiplicity in Donne will be familiar to any who knows his life already. People often speak of the "two Donnes": the young love poet, "Jack Donne," with grand political ambitions; and the mature Dr. Donne presiding over his pulpit as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. Rundell seeks to weave both (or all) together, as much as may ever be possible. If there is a persistent core to Rundell's portrayal, it is a man who took profound joy in God's gift of the body and the experience of earthly life, even as he wrestled with its limitations. Rundell centers this theme and traces it across his poetry and his lesser-known works of prose, which she surveys chronologically, situating them well against the backdrop of Donne's sometimes-hectic but never dull journey from aspiring man of law to esteemed senior clergyman.

In Rundell's telling, despite the marked change from his amorous youth to his pious old age, Donne never lost his grand ambitions for fame and social status—he simply achieved them via different means than those which the young Donne would have imagined for himself. However, while there may be some truth to this (Rundell frequently reports biographer Izaak Walton's somewhat hagiographical version of an episode in Donne's life before giving a more fully rounded picture), it is in her view of "Donne the social climber," which she insists upon well into Donne's senior years, that the book's ultimate shortcoming lies.

To read this biography is to have one's appetite whetted by Rundell's gift for the poetic and yet, more often than not, to be left yearning for something beyond the poetic: the transcendent. It is difficult at times to imagine Rundell's Donne as having anything like an interior religious life. Her Donne is a man of ideas and ambition—part poet, part politician; fascinated by this world and the metaphysical realities behind it. But Rundell's Donne seems to reduce religion—that is, the questions of actual doctrine, worship, and such, as distinct from spirituality and metaphysics—to a mere tool of his social ambitions. While this is quite possibly true of Donne at times—he was from strong Catholic stock, a great-nephew of Thomas More, and his brother died in the Tower of London whilst detained for harboring a Jesuit priest, and so he had more than a few social hurdles to climb—it is a register that Rundell works in unconvincingly for the majority of the book. It is difficult to imagine her version of Donne writing "Batter

3. Katherine Rundell. *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne.* London: Faber & Faber, 2022. 353pp. £14.99.

my heart Three-Personed God," or "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," or indeed any of Donne's divine poems, which do not feature nearly as heavily in Rundell's book as his earlier love poetry, elegies, and satires.[4] At times she seems to ignore the spiritual dimensions of his poetry altogether. For example, in a chapter called "Donne and Death," speaking of "Death, be not proud," Donne's famous sonnet mocking death with the hope of the resurrection, Rundell writes:

> When Donne wrote about suicide there was urgent pain: but when he wrote about death *in itself*, there is great serious joy, and occasional rampant glee. Spiritually speaking, many of us confronted with the thought of death perform the psychological equivalence of hiding in a box with our knees under our chin: Donne hunted death, battled it, killed it, saluted it, threw it parties. His poetry explicitly about death is rarely sad: it thrums with strange images of living (277, emphasis original).

IT IS DIFFICULT AT TIMES TO IMAGINE RUNDELL'S DONNE AS HAVING ANYTHING LIKE AN INTERIOR RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Rundell goes on to quote the first eight lines of the poem, before moving on to discuss death in one of Donne's youthful love poems, "The Relic," but at no point does she note that behind Donne's seeming enthusiasm about death, even in the poems of his youth, is a steadfast, unwavering Christian hope in the resurrection. For Donne, death is not the end, as the triumphant end of "Death, be not proud" boldly proclaims: "One short sleep past, we wake eternally/And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die" (13–14). For the Christian—or for a literary biographer who has adequately inhabited the mind of her Christian subject—there is nothing "strange" about "images of living" coming hot on the heels of a discussion about death. So is the resurrection of the dead: it is sown in corruption, it riseth in incorruption.

This is not to say that Rundell sees no sincere inner life in Donne, cynically reducing him to nothing but a climber of the greasy pole. Despite her sometimes-head-scratching refusals to consider the interior-religious dimensions of Donne's life alongside the political and philosophical, she is helpful in understanding how a man who wrote such profoundly moving, cerebral, searching poetry could sometimes seem, at times, to outright contradict his religious motivations. The answer, for Rundell, comes in Donne's obsession with the body—his own and others—and his refusal to pretend that he was not an embodied being, both finite and sinful. In her chapter simply entitled "The Dean," she writes,

> Donne is at his most remarkable when he speaks about how very hard it is to seek God at all. More than anyone else, he acknowledged the way that the human heart darts about like a rat. His body, he found, so readily present in desire for other humans, betrayed him when he sought the same intensity in prayer. Donne was a man so in control of his poetry that he could layer it with ten dozen references; he could write a twelve-line sonnet that would take you a week to read, but he was not in control of his mind (257–58).

Donne's concern with the quality of his devotion occupied him for his entire adult life. He was truly vexed by his inconsistency, and ashamed of his inability to conquer sin. As Rundell writes, "This is the same Donne who, in the Holy Sonnets…seeks a force so great that it will sweep away doubt, exhaustion, distraction, and leave behind something stripped back and certain: 'And burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeal/Of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating heal.' Both verse and sermons are the voice of a man seeking to have doubt torn away" (258).

Ultimately, what emerges from Rundell's portrayal of Donne is neither the young rogue pretending to be a priest in his old age nor the hagiographic saint-in-the-making of Walton, but a man wrestling with his inability to keep control of his own heart; a man fascinated by the gift of embodiment, but sometimes frustrated by the limits of human finitude. However true this may be, this is not the final word that Donne would have wanted. In writing about the oscillations of the soul from

4. For an account of the general neglect of Donne's divine poetry, even among Christians, see Rhys Laverty, "Retrieving John Donne: Poetic Companion for Conflicted Protestants," in *A Protestant Christendom? The World the Reformation Made*, ed. Onsi A. Kamel (Landrum, SC: Davenant Press, 2021), 93–108.

irreverence to shame, what C. S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* refers to as the "law of undulation," Donne describes a middle ground between them:

> I durst not view Heav'n yesterday; and today
> In prayers, and flatt'ring speeches I court God:
> Tomorrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
> So my devout fitts come and go away,
> Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
> Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.
>
> —Holy Sonnet 19.9–14

For Donne, his best days are those in which he not merely understands but *feels* his proper relationship to God and stands before him, shaking with fearful reverence but present nevertheless. Donne realized that from the oscillations of the soul, what he calls "inconstancy's constant habit," God draws out the Christian's proper orientation toward himself: an awe-filled boldness as a middle ground between a repelling fear and patronizing irreverence. Thus, while Donne knew that to inhabit a body meant to struggle against the inclinations of his heart, pulling him in one direction or the other, he also knew that out of this struggle, God was faithfully drawing Donne closer to himself.

In short, Rundell unfortunately adds to a widespread trend in contemporary reflections on historical religious figures, namely a refusal to take religion seriously as a motivating impulse. It is an odd experience to watch such a post-Christian appraisal of Donne. Thus, readers will come away from certain chapters with a sense that Rundell stops herself short of the transcendent in reflecting on Donne's work, richly waxing poetic with Donne but never quite following him to the heights of religious ecstasy he reaches. Yet, even as the central motivation in Donne's life goes misunderstood, readers will still come away with a deepened appreciation for Donne as a thinker who, in both prose and poetry, refused to abandon the question of what it means to be an embodied soul. By tracing the vexations and contrarieties of that question, *Super-Infinite* lives up to its name in its account of a life that wove multiple, seemingly incompatible threads together to form a single person—one who stands in history as a profoundly impactful instrument of God's grace on nearly anyone fortunate enough to pick up a volume of his poetry. Rundell's biography is the most enjoyable volume on Donne's life in recent memory, but, despite its widespread accolades this past year, it should not be taken as the final word on him. For the Christian reader, or the reader sincerely interested in Donne's religious life, it is no substitute for reading Donne himself.

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A Tale Of Two Gardens

BY MALCOLM GUITE

God gave us all a garden once
And walked with us at eve
That we might know him face to face
With no need to believe.

But we denied and hid from him
Concealing our own shame
Yet he still came to look for us
And call us each by name.

He found us where we hid from him
He clothed us in his grace
But still we turned our backs on him
And would not see his face.

So now he comes to us again
Not as a Lord most high
But weak and helpless as we are
That we might hear him cry.

And he who clothed us in our need
Lies naked in the straw
That we might wrap him in our rags
Whom once we fled in awe.

The strongest comes in weakness now
A stranger to our door
The king forsakes his palaces
And dwells amongst the poor.

And where we hurt he hurts with us
And when we weep he cries
He knows the heart of all our hurts
The inside of our sighs.

He does not look down from above
But gazes up at us
That we might take him in our arms
Who always cradles us.

And if we welcome him again
With open hands and heart
He'll plant his garden deep in us
The end from which we start.

And in that garden there's a tomb
Whose stone is rolled away
Where we and all we've ever loved
Were lowered in the clay.

But Lo! the tomb is empty now
And, clothed in living light,
His ransomed people walk with One
Who came on Christmas night.

So come Lord Jesus, find in me
The child you came to save
Stoop tenderly with wounded hands
And lift me from my grave.

Be with us all Emmanuel
And keep us close and true
Be with us till that Kingdom comes
Where we will be with you.

BOOKS AND ARTS

America on Trial: In Defense of the Founding

BY ROBERT R. REILLY
REVIEWED BY BRAD LITTLEJOHN

A GENRE MASH-UP?

At first glance, Robert Reilly's *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding* appears to be simply another installment in the "celebrating the intellectual roots of the American Founding" genre, in the venerable tradition of Russell Kirk's *Roots of American Order* and similar studies.[1] With its dual genuflections toward Athens and Jerusalem, and its eulogistic survey of the fruits of medieval civilization, ending with a hagiographic ascent into the temple of the American Founding, it reads almost like the Platonic form of the Hillsdale College curriculum (at least, as I imagine it to be)—and indeed, it is preceded by an enthusiastic foreword by Hillsdale President Larry P. Arnn.

Unlike Kirk's work, however, Reilly's has a polemical edge—or two polemical edges, to be precise. The first situates it in the genre of increasingly cliched modernity criticism, epitomized by Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation*. Alongside Reilly's narrative of the great ideas that gave us Western civilization, freedom, representative government, and finally, America, is a parallel narrative of the *terrible* ideas that have led to Western decadence, tyranny, arbitrary government, and the unraveling of America. In Chapter 3, a serpent invades the beautiful garden of medieval thought in the form of William of Ockham. The usual suspects are subsequently lined up and tied to their designated whipping posts for a good thrashing: Ockham, Martin Luther, Thomas Hobbes; nominalism, voluntarism, Protestantism. This constellation of ideas and thinkers supposedly shattered the medieval synthesis of faith and reason, and collapsed the dynamic medieval tension of Church and state, while opening the door to arbitrary government. Reilly's thesis can be summed up in these three quotations, from Chapters 3, 6, and 7 respectively:

> "The nominalist view of morally indifferent acts was pregnant with two developments that occurred shortly afterward, within a few years of each other. The first was from Niccolo Machiavelli, who understood that, if nature no longer defines what is good for man (and there is no certain God to define

1. Robert R. Reilly. *America on Trial: In Defense of the Founding*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021. 408pp. $18.95.

> it either), then man can. Man's will fills the vacuum left by nature; he can define his own end. Nominalism's moral indifference also provided a preview of Martin Luther's belief that man's actions are indifferent to his salvation because there is no necessary connection between moral goodness and redemption." (120)

> "Once divine voluntarism has been theologically posited, there is a very short bridge to cross to arrive at its human version in political absolutism, whether secular or royal." (173)

> "The Divine Right doctrine fits comfortably within the voluntarist perspective of the primacy of will. If God, as the primary cause, acts without intermediaries, then he may constitute political authority the same way. Kingship is the immediate and unmediated result of the Creator's will. It is miraculous. No acts of rational free will or consent by the members of the political community are required for its institution or justification." (196)

THE INTRAMURAL QUARREL AMONGST ROMAN CATHOLICS ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF THE AMERICAN PROJECT IS A MATTER OF URGENT INTEREST AND CONCERN TO PROTESTANTS.

If, then, all that was good and holy was unraveling in early modernity, how is our world today not a much darker place than it seems to be? For our continued enjoyment of ordered liberty, Reilly argues, we have the American Founders to thank above all. They, channeling Anglican divine Richard Hooker (1554–1600) along with the rich legacy of Catholic political thought, represented the true reformation—a turning back of a decadent voluntarist and oppressive early modern political order to its authentic moral, spiritual, and philosophical roots in the rich soil of classical and Christian civilization.

This, then, represents the second polemical edge of Reilly's book. While many of both his heroes and his villains may be familiar to readers of recent works of modernity criticism, Reilly positions himself firmly against many of his fellow Roman Catholic political philosophers and historians. Indeed, it is for this purpose that the book was written, as both the title and a pointed concluding chapter, "Critiquing the Critics," make clear; America is "on trial" from Roman Catholics like Patrick Deneen and Michael Hanby.[2] These, seeking to account for the moral bankruptcy of late liberalism, are convinced that America itself is hopelessly infected with this disease, for it was written into our constitutional documents, and made up the worldview of leading Founders. The consequences of this reading, as Reilly notes, are grim:

> "To the extent to which it is accepted, their misdiagnosis demoralizes our youth and disarms us in the face of our enemies, who are further empowered by the disavowal of the country's Founding principles. This school of thought has penetrated higher education. Courses on American political thought at some Catholic and other universities are imbued with it, causing real, deleterious consequences" (317).

Reilly does not overstate his case here. I myself had the experience of teaching political theory at a (Protestant) liberal arts college just a few years back, and was shocked by the pessimism of the students: there was little to celebrate in the American Founding, they were convinced, because they had all read Deneen and knew it to be hopelessly infected with "liberalism." The only solution—to the extent they had any notion of one—was to be found in some romantic leap back into the mists of medieval Christendom. This intramural quarrel amongst Roman Catholics about the viability of the American project, then, is in fact a matter of urgent interest and concern to Protestants as well—at least so long as we Protestants continue to forfeit the intellectual leadership of American public life to our Catholic counterparts. Is America a project worth celebrating and worth saving? Deneen says no; Reilly says yes. To this extent, I range myself with Reilly and applaud his effort.

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2. See Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); and Michael Hanby, "The Civic Project of American Christianity," *First Things*, February 2015, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/02/the-civic-project-of-american-christianity.

IT'S NOT ALL BAD

And indeed, despite my somewhat caustic tone above and the somewhat absurd tenor of the quotations I supplied from Reilly, there is much to applaud in his book. Chapter 1, on the profound differences between the tribal worldview (almost universally ascendant until the sixth century BC) and the idea of human nature represented by biblical religion and Greek philosophy, I found to be richly insightful and instructive. Reilly celebrates the uniqueness of Christianity, whose transcendent God made limited government possible, and whose image-bearing creatures made the end of slavery imaginable, in terms reminiscent of Tom Holland's recent masterpiece *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. I also deeply appreciated Reilly's stress on the medieval roots of the basic ideas of constitutional government; drawing on the important work of Harold Berman and Brian Tierney, Reilly demolishes the idea that we are somehow dependent on the Enlightenment for the basic building blocks of modern liberty and representative government. I was also delighted to find that Reilly dedicates an entire (albeit short) chapter to the contribution of the judicious Richard Hooker, for whom Reilly shares my own veneration, and that the chapter presents a generally quite lucid and faithful summary of some of Hooker's key ideas and contributions. Reilly also renders a service by his retrieval of the redoubtable Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), a massive and untapped resource for Christian political thought, Catholic or Protestant.

I appreciated, moreover, Reilly's uncommonly nuanced treatment of John Locke (1632–1704), who for once is not tied to one of the whipping posts in the hall of shame. Reilly stresses that there were both profoundly conservative *and* profoundly radical elements in Locke's thought, and does not attempt the easy Straussian solution of pretending that the former were all mere play-acting to disguise the latter. He makes the very important methodological point that if we are assessing the Founders based on the fact that they cited Locke favorably, what matters is not what *we now* think Locke said and meant, but what *they then* thought Locke said and meant. Reilly argues (and I generally concur) that the American Founders, rightly or wrongly, read Locke in a much more conservative way than we generally do today, and thus appropriated him to much more conservative purposes. Thus, I broadly agree with Reilly's central thesis that the Founders were dependent for their basic categories more on the *philosophia perennis* of classical natural law and Christian political thought than on the *philosophia nova* of the radical Enlightenment—although, of course, it is more complicated than Reilly lets on, and many founding figures, like Jefferson, deserve the scorn heaped upon them by the likes of Deneen.

> **THOSE INTERESTED IN GRAND NARRATIVES FALL BACK ON A KIND OF HEGELIAN DETERMINISM, ASSERTING THAT IDEAS THEMSELVES HAVE A KIND OF INTRINSIC CAUSAL POWER, REGARDLESS OF WHO SAID WHAT WHEN.**

So much for the positives. But no one reads book reviews to hear about what the reviewer agrees with, do they? So, although I do genuinely want to stress the value of the points just noted, let me dedicate the remainder of this review to considering two rather profound flaws in Reilly's analysis.

HERDING IDEAS THROUGH HISTORY

The first flaw is the rather curious role that ideas play in the narrative. Historians of ideas, to be sure, always find themselves in a tenuous position, awkwardly bestraddling the chasm that separates the temporal flux of history from the eternal verities of philosophy. They may write in a more strictly historical mode, by documenting direct and explicit dependence: if Thomas Jefferson, for instance, directly quotes John Locke in support of some preferred conclusion, and seems to have no other means of arriving at the conclusion, one may plausibly assert that Locke exerted some causal influence on the development in question. Or, historians may renounce all interest in such causal questions and simply concern themselves, as a philosopher might, with questions of truth and agreement. Thus, if Aquinas can be shown

to have taught something about the nature of human equality, and Rousseau something different; and if, say, John Adams can be shown to hold a view more like that of Aquinas than Rousseau; well then, that may be an important and useful point to make, regardless of whether Adams ever read Aquinas. What the historian cannot responsibly do, however, is toggle vaguely back and forth between these two methods, as Reilly often does, suggesting that *simply* because Adams agreed with Aquinas means that the Angelic Doctor must in some way have helped cause the American Founding. Such cases may be built, to be sure, but construction projects of this sort require a lot more bricks and mortar than Reilly brings to the task.

Too often, lacking the patience for the detailed work of large-scale historical reconstruction, those interested in such grand narratives fall back on a kind of Hegelian determinism, asserting that the *ideas* themselves have a kind of intrinsic causal power, regardless of who said what when. Reilly is alive to the dangers of such determinism, which he spots in the tendency of modernity-critics like Deneen and Hanby to suggest that the Founders were simply at the mercy of the logic of ideas, whatever their own conscious protestations against those ideas. But he seems oblivious to his own adoption of the same method—albeit in reverse. Instead of seeing the Founders as hopelessly chained to the disastrous logic of liberal ideas of which they themselves were unaware, he portrays them as happily channeling the beatific logic of Catholic ideas of which they themselves were unaware. Indeed, over and over, Reilly adopts a deterministic framework for thinking about the role of ideas; one of his favorite words is "ineluctably," as in the sentence, "A voluntarist God ineluctably leads to voluntarist man. It is not so great a leap from the voluntarist exaltation of the will of God to the voluntarist exaltation of the will of man. If God is a voluntarist, we become voluntarists" (122). The dictionary defines "ineluctable" as "incapable of being evaded; inescapable."

If, however, Luther was the ineluctable fruit of Ockham, and Hobbes of Luther, then how did Hooker and the Founders avoid this dark fate? No doubt Reilly would say because they freely chose to adopt other ideas—although inasmuch as they remained Protestant, it is unclear how they avoided the "ineluctable" fruits of Luther's heresies (more on this in a moment). But what then may we say of Islam? Reilly himself notes that Ockham's exaltation of an inscrutable divine will as the immediate cause of all things is almost indistinguishable from that of Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) in Islamic philosophy. But if the idolatrous humanism of Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) and the technological dreams of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) are the "ineluctable" result of Ockhamism, as Reilly claims on page 124, how is it that Islam did not generate a Hobbes or a Hitler in short order? Reilly's own narrative betrays the problems with the crude essentialism and determinism that he brings to the key ideas in his story; the centuries between 1500 and 1800 are populated with a topsy-turvy tug-of-war between good guys and bad guys, good ideas and bad ideas, alternating with one another in rapid succession, or often indeed co-existing in the same locations and individuals. History simply does not display evidence that a set of bad ideas, cooked up in an ivory tower around the year 1300, unleashed a baleful descent into tyranny like so many dominoes falling one after the other.

PROTESTANTISM AS WHIPPING-BOY

The second grave flaw of the book is the villainous role of Protestantism in the story. Reilly and Deneen disagree deeply in their assessment of the American Founding, but they agree fundamentally in their diagnosis of the intellectual bogeymen lying behind our current predicament, Protestantism chief among them. The difference is simply that Deneen, sensibly enough, pegs the American Founding as Protestant, whereas Reilly insists, with an older generation of Catholic political philosophers like John Courtney Murray, that it was in fact profoundly Catholic. *Prima facie*, this is a curious claim, given that nearly all of the Founding Fathers were personally Protestants, were educated in a Protestant *milieu*, and were trained as statesmen within fundamentally Protestant legal regimes. Reilly is reduced to somewhat absurd special pleading, lining up various quotations from Bellarmine and Suarez alongside the Declaration of Independence and similar documents to insinuate the dependence of the latter on the former and then coyly denying that he is doing any such

thing: "Citing Bellarmine and Suarez is not meant to insinuate that America's origins were Catholic. Most of the Founders were Protestant, after all, but the provenance of their ideas was ultimately Catholic in that they invoked natural law and natural rights to justify their cause" (199).

> **PERHAPS THE FOUNDING REALLY DOES DESERVE DEFENDING AGAINST THE CHARGE OF BEING A REVOLUTIONARY ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT—BUT BY *AFFIRMING* RATHER THAN *DENYING* ITS DEEP PROTESTANT ROOTS.**

If by "Catholic" Reilly meant simply "catholic"—that is, that there was an immense domain of shared Christian principles between Romanists and Protestants, a genuinely catholic tradition to which the Founders were heirs—then I would warmly agree. But of course, he does not. He really seems to believe that all of the good, true, and beautiful ideas he surveys in the book belong distinctively to the Roman Catholic Church, and that any consistent Protestantism almost by definition must reject them. To be sure, he equivocates on this point, as indeed he must if he wishes to celebrate Richard Hooker, saying for instance, "The problem with Luther is not that he was a Protestant, but that he was a nominalist and a voluntarist" (128). However, given that he goes on to identify several of the fundamental pillars of Luther's theology, pillars shared by all faithful Protestants, as irreducibly tinged by this nominalist/voluntarist heresy, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the only way Protestants can be philosophically and politically saved is by a wholesale borrowing of Catholic principles, held in contradiction to their theological principles.

To make these arguments, Reilly has not only to operate throughout with rather crude caricatures of "nominalism" and "voluntarism," but to indulge in a really quite grotesque misreading of Luther's thought, one worthy of Johann Emser or Thomas More. This misreading rests on at least three key methodological errors.

First, he makes almost zero allowance for Luther's admittedly colorful and frequently hyperbolic rhetorical style, preferring to cherry-pick quotations, stripped of any context, from across Luther's *corpus* to portray him as something of a fideistic madman, hell-bent on the repudiation of human reason and human will in any form. At one point, conscious of the objection that he is cherry-picking, Reilly amusingly protests that the fact that he can find "this many cherries indicates that there is a cherry-tree" (136), despite the fact that most of his quotations from Luther are accompanied by footnotes saying, "Cited in Maritain/Hahn/etc." In other words, Reilly hasn't even gone to the trouble of directly cherry-picking from Luther's voluminous works to find the most incriminating quotes; rather, he has simply culled them from the writings of other Catholic polemicists. Needless to say, this is not a method calculated to maximize understanding.

Second, Reilly betrays almost no understanding of Luther's two-kingdoms theology, which provides the crucial framework for making sense of his thought, including many of these quotations. Within the spiritual kingdom of faith, reason is indeed dead and deadly, and human volition is useless; within the temporal kingdom of society and politics, reason remains a valuable tool, and human volition is essential. Thus, Reilly's attempt to show that Lutheran soteriology is necessarily mirrored in Lutheran politics runs into the flat contradiction of Luther's own stated principles.

Third, Reilly makes no effort to interpret Luther with reference to his myriad friends, associates, and followers, men like Philipp Melanchthon, Johannes Eisermann, or Niels Hemmingsen, who were profoundly Aristotelian, deeply committed to natural law, and engaged in articulating theories of constitutionalism and just human law-making based on natural law—all things that Reilly pronounces all but impossible on Protestant assumptions. Even if Reilly were to back off, saying that he is interested *only* in Luther's thought, not Protestantism as a whole, it would be very hard to explain why such a flatly anti-rational Luther positively endorsed Melanchthon's work as a faithful expression of his own theology. In any case, while Reilly is perfectly within his rights to stress the rich tradition of constitutionalist

thought in Bellarmine and Suarez, his attempt to portray early-modern Protestantism as somehow congenitally dedicated to the project of divine-right absolutism is laughable on almost any standard. The Whig theory of history, in which the Reformation led inexorably to resistance, revolution, and political freedom, clearly has its problems. But the solution is not to simply invert it and replace it with a mirror-image morality tale.

All of this suggests that neither Deneen *nor* Reilly has got their story of the Founding right. Perhaps there is a third alternative. Perhaps the Founding really does deserve defending against the charge of being a revolutionary Enlightenment project—but by *affirming* rather than *denying* its deep Protestant roots. Perhaps Richard Hooker was not, as Reilly implausibly suggests, a sort of *deus ex machina* who single-handedly sought to wrench a philosophically bankrupt Protestantism back onto the tried-and-true tracks of the medieval consensus, but on the contrary, simply a particularly lucid and profound exponent of a mainstream, reformed, catholic, magisterial Protestantism. Perhaps, rather than indulging in wild speculations about how Bellarmine's resistance theory might have influenced the American Founders, we could stick to the sober historical facts of how *Calvinist* resistance theory influenced them.

Of course, we Protestants can hardly expect the Roman Catholics to do this work for us. So long as we continue to cede intellectual leadership of American public life to Roman Catholic thinkers and writers, we can hardly complain when Protestantism is reduced to little more than a football in an intramural Catholic scrimmage. It's time for us to step forward and make the case for the essential catholicity—*because* of the essential Protestantism—of the American Founding.

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