

The Reformation, Baptists, and Biblical Retrieval Theology¹

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INTRODUCTION

I'm thankful to Dr. Albert Mohler and Dr. Paul Akin for the invitation to give this address. And, thank you as well, all who are here this morning. I pray that this address benefits you.

As long as there have been Christians, they've cared about what their predecessors believed. But retrieval theology, so-called, does more than that. Seeing dangers all around, it looks back to the past and lets people and ideas from long ago set the agenda for the church's beliefs and practices in our day.

I'm not giving this address in a vacuum. Ours is a day, it seems, when more people than in the past are abandoning—or being tempted to abandon—evangelicalism under the guise of retrieval. Some are becoming Anglican (the church our Puritan forefathers labeled a “church but halfly reformed,” with its Protestant confession of faith but Catholic-like liturgical

practices²). Others are moving even farther away and joining the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church. I have in mind well-known figures like Matthew Barrett, Francis Beckwith, and Hank Hanegraaff.³ But I'm also thinking of people I've known personally who've left the Protestant faith recently.

Before I get to the heart of my address, let me give you my twofold thesis. First: the biblically-revealed gospel sits in judgment over aggressive retrieval theology that would lead people away from Reformation Protestantism. Second: Baptists—who are the full-flowering of the Protestant Reformation—have a unique way of guarding the biblical gospel and protecting our churches from aggressive retrieval.

THE ESSENCE OF RETRIEVAL THEOLOGY

As I begin, let me define retrieval theology. John Webster noted that there's not one dogmatic explication of this theology, but that "‘retrieval’ ... is a *mode* of theology, an attitude of mind and a way of approaching theological tasks."⁴ Since then others have similarly argued for retrieval theology's posture as the key to this movement. David Buschart and Kent Eilers say it's a "style of theological discernment that looks back in order to move forward."⁵ Gavin Ortlund concurs. He denominates retrieval theology as "an overall attitude guided by the conviction that premodern resources are not an obstacle in the age of progress but a well in the age of thirst."⁶ Michael Allen and Scott Swain label it "a theological sensibility, not a system."⁷ So, in sum, retrieval theology is "a mode of theology," "an attitude of mind," "a style of theological discernment," "an overall attitude," "a theological sensibility."⁸

Webster further delineates the "set of common concerns" driving those who pursue retrieval theology. Prominent among these are "dissatisfaction with the commanding role played by critical philosophy or by historical and hermeneutical theory in mainstream modern theology."⁹ The Enlightenment, then, and the theology that flowed from it, is the culprit. Rescuing theology from the academy and giving it back to the church, the goal is to be able to describe the Christian faith in a way that is "unharassed by current anxieties" thus "enabling a certain liberty in relation to the present."¹⁰

Evangelicals—those I'm talking about in this address—have tended to be more specific in their reasons for employing retrieval theology. When

I discuss retrieval theology among evangelicals, here is my definition. A methodological orientation—especially related to the doctrine of God and biblical hermeneutics—driven by dissatisfaction with modern trinitarian theology and the quest for “the author’s original intention” and a corresponding fear of the inroads of Enlightenment thinking on evangelicals’ treatment of God and reading of the Bible. This method seeks to jump over the errors inspired by the Enlightenment and answer them by retrieving resources from the medieval era of the church’s history.¹¹ This movement coincides with—or perhaps is fueled by—many evangelicals’ concerns with the hypocrisy they’ve seen in their churches and the militant nature of postmodernity that leads many to seek a better way of thinking about God and themselves, about the liturgy of worship, and about a more robust way of reading Scripture. It is the desire to go back in time to a better way of doing theology—offering an escape from and an answer to the power of modernity—that drives some evangelicals who seek “retrieval for the sake of renewal” actually to leave evangelicalism altogether.¹² In the process of seeking to protect the gospel, they come to conclusions that are antithetical to the biblical gospel.

I have six cautions I would like to offer against aggressive retrieval theology. These are Protestant and Baptist insights into letting Scripture judge retrieval theology.

CAUTION #1: BE HUMBLE AND WISE. FOR OLD IS GOOD, UNLESS IT’S BAD.

Retrieval theology desires to listen to the past.¹³ That’s a sign of humility, one of the key virtues we should all pursue. Someone, somewhere, at some time knew the Bible better than I do. Like Athanasius, who in order to qualify to be a deacon of the church in Alexandria—just a deacon!—had memorized the entire Psalter, one major prophet, one gospel, and all the Pauline epistles.

Someone at some time knew God more intimately than I do. I want to learn from the likes of John Owen who on his deathbed said, “I am going to him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love.”¹⁴ I want to learn how to apply God’s word in my life and in our time. From martyrs like Polycarp of Smyrna, from parents like Monica who prayed fervently for the conversion of her son, Augustine.

But humility must have guardrails. Whom should I follow and imitate? How much? After all, Arius also served the Alexandrian church; presumably he had as much Scripture memorized as did Athanasius. But I don't want to follow him.

Beware of assuming that because something is old it must *ipso facto* be good.¹⁵ Be careful not to have an over-realized eschatology about the past and how good it was. When someone tells me in frustration that they just wish their local church could be like the New Testament (NT) church, I'll often tell them to be careful which NT church they want to be like. Will it be the licentious church of Corinth or the verging-toward-heresy churches of Galatia? Even during the apostles' lifetimes things in the churches weren't going perfectly. Nor should we have the expectation that things have always be wonderful in the church's history.

If we advance just a matter of decades into the life of the church we see Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, separating the offices of bishop and elder (which are the same biblical office, according to Acts 20, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5), and thus introducing a lynchpin of the episcopal system which fueled the whole Catholic enterprise.¹⁶ And a mere 500 years later, we see Gregory I advocating for the unbiblical doctrine of purgatory—the doctrine that in many ways is the root of the Catholic sacramental system and its accompanying practices that led to Martin Luther's protestation. We could layer more and more examples like this: the rise of infant baptism after the time of Augustine; the use of icons in worship; etc., etc.

We must have some criteria by which to judge what is best from the church's doctrinal heritage. In other words, how do we know what to retrieve? I would suggest that some eras of the church's history, and some of its thinkers, are more important than others.

Consider how we evaluate Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the thirteenth century. Craig Carter's *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition* is his attempt to "recover the genius of premodern exegesis." Carter puts forth Thomas as the hero because of the medieval scholastic theologian's ability both to embody and promote Christian Platonism's recovery of classical theism and to exemplify biblical interpretation that is not hampered by "the neopagan philosophical naturalism of the Enlightenment" out of which "methodological naturalism became *the* central presupposition of exegesis."¹⁷ According to Carter, the thirteenth century of Thomas was

“the peak of Western Christendom.”¹⁸ Following a traditional Thomistic decline narrative of the middle ages, Carter avers that “The tragic breakdown of the medieval synthesis of faith and reason, which had been founded on the existence of universals and the doctrine of the analogy of being, after Thomas Aquinas’s majestic work in the thirteenth century, created the chaos and ferment in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries out of which the Enlightenment emerged.”¹⁹ The “late Middle Ages,” he posits, “saw the tragic breakdown of the Christian Platonism of the High Middle Ages, symbolized above all by Thomas Aquinas’s great work of genius, the *Summa Theologica*.”²⁰ Carter, as he asserts, is “seek[ing] to promote Thomas Aquinas.”²¹ Matthew Barrett joins Carter in making Thomas Aquinas the hero of his lengthy book, *The Reformation as Renewal*. Not only does Thomas receive the longest chapter in the book (a glowing account of how good his “pure Scholasticism” was²²), but there’s very little in his thought that was not repeated by Martin Luther and John Calvin, according to Barrett’s account.²³

Although Carter and Barrett laud Thomas and medieval scholasticism, that has not been the view of many significant Protestant thinkers.²⁴ We can see this by examining their evaluation of the most significant eras of the church’s history.

Calvin had high regard for the first four ecumenical councils, up to Chalcedon in 451, labeling that period “the purity of the golden age.”²⁵ Indeed, he argued that “for about five hundred years [after the apostles] ... religion was still flourishing, and a purer doctrine thriving.”²⁶ Disputing with Catholics about who was the true heir of the church, Calvin brought Chrysostom, Basil, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine in as allies of Protestantism. As Anthony Lane observes, “The significant figures to whom Calvin appealed had all died by the middle of the fifth century.”²⁷

Calvin judged that only Gregory I and Bernard of Clairvaux were “great champions of the truth in the Middle Ages.”²⁸ Absent from Calvin’s consideration is Thomas Aquinas, whom Calvin only cited four times.²⁹ The early church was significant for Calvin, especially Augustine theologically and Chrysostom exegetically. To Calvin, it seems that Thomas and most of the medieval period was quite irrelevant.³⁰

Four stalwarts of Protestantism agreed with Calvin in promoting a decline narrative of the church in the Middle Ages after a period of relative purity in the ancient church of the first five or six centuries. In the seventeenth-

century Francis Turretin highlighted the significance of the “fathers” of the early church going up to Augustine, but included no one after him.³¹ He referred to the first six centuries of the church’s history as the period “of purer (or at least of less impure) Christianity.”³² The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century, he argued, was “nothing else than the purging of errors and corruptions brought by the papacy into the doctrine of faith and practice delivered by Christ.”³³ Turretin’s contemporary Petrus van Mastricht (Jonathan Edwards’s favorite theologian) also posited a decline narrative. The NT marked the beginning of the six “purer centuries” of the church’s history. The period from the sixth to the “bleak” tenth century was a rapid decline, interrupted in the centuries before the Reformation only occasionally by reform movements like the Waldensians.³⁴

The eighteenth-century Baptist, John Gill, held a similar view, having little regard for the medieval church, though highly esteeming many patristic authors.³⁵ Finally, Charles Hodge, the nineteenth-century Princetonian, identified three areas of doctrinal progress over the span of church history. They were, first, the trinitarian and Christological definitions of the fourth and fifth century. Second came the clarification of the nature of human sin and divine grace in Augustine’s controversy with Pelagius in the fifth century. The third era of progress was the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on justification and imputation. Hodge knowingly left out the entire Middle Ages. Even the most devout of the medieval scholastics, he urged, got the relationship between justification and sanctification wrong and were thus unhelpful guides.³⁶

Many Reformed thinkers, then, argued that some eras of church history are more important to us than others. The earliest centuries of the church—including the trinitarian and Christological controversies culminating in the Nicene Creed of 381 and the Chalcedonian definition of 451, as well as the codification of Augustinian soteriology—are of great importance. Somewhere after Augustine, especially, the church fell into a period of decline regarding the doctrine of salvation (including notions of purgatory, transubstantiation and the propitiatory character of the mass), and also regarding the power and purity of the institutional church, especially the papacy. These were both addressed in the third essential period, the Protestant Reformation, which was, as B. B. Warfield quipped, “the triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the church.”³⁷

So, my first caution is: Be Humble and Wise. For Old is Good, Unless it's Bad.

CAUTION #2: DON'T OVERREACT IN A TIME OF CRISIS.

Many retrievalists fear that we're in a time of crisis that needs outside voices from the past to come in and correct our wrongheadedness and lead us into right thinking and action. The nemesis seen to have caused most of our problems is the Enlightenment.

Consider how concern about the Enlightenment factors into a movement to reconsider the way that evangelicals approach biblical interpretation. The argument goes like this. The Enlightenment led inexorably to German higher critical attitudes towards Scripture. The biblical text was no longer taken at face value; the goal was to get beneath the words of the text to find the real words of Jesus, not the accretions of later communities; God was no longer viewed as the ultimate author of Scripture.³⁸ To deal with this crisis, then, many retrievalists teach that we need to circumvent the Enlightenment's negative hermeneutical effects and recover the quadriga of the early and medieval church. The quadriga, that is, the "fourfold sense" of Scripture, which stressed the importance of the "spiritual" interpretation of Scripture alongside the literal reading of the biblical text, said there were three senses of Scripture in addition to the literal: the allegorical taught what to believe, the tropological showed how to live, and the anagogical pointed out what to hope for. Retrieval theology thus argues for the foolishness of resting in the "author's original intention" model of exegesis, which flowed from the Enlightenment.

Let me be as clear as possible: of course we should reject the higher criticism of Scripture! But there are several reasons to question the wisdom of reverting to the quadriga. First of all, not all medieval interpretation stressed the fourfold way of reading the Bible. There was a large vein of "literal" interpretation going on prior to the Reformation.³⁹ Second, there were many Bible-believing Christians in the post-Enlightenment era who didn't succumb to higher criticism, but who also didn't adopt the quadriga.

In addition, there's more historical reason for my caution. So third, the Reformers' hermeneutic was generally more literally-oriented than

veering into a spiritual-reading of the text. This is especially true of Calvin's commentaries and sermons and reminds us why he appreciated Chrysostom's work as much as he did.⁴⁰ Fourth, when the Reformers and their early followers addressed biblical hermeneutics, they regularly criticized the quadriga and promoted a literal reading of Scripture. And they did this prior to the onslaught of modernity!

This is the five-hundredth anniversary of William Tyndale's English NT. Tyndale once wrote that

The greatest cause of ... [the] captivity and the decay of the faith, and this blindness wherein we now are, sprang first of allegories. For Origen and the doctors of his time drew all the scripture unto allegories. Whose example they that came after followed so long, till they at last forgot the order and process of the text, supposing that the scripture served but to feign allegories upon; insomuch that twenty doctors expound one text twenty ways, as children make descant upon plain song. Then came our sophisters with their anagogical and tropological⁴¹ sense with an antitheme [that is, the opposite of the true meaning] of half an inch, out of which some of them draw a thread of nine days long.⁴²

One hundred years later, writing in 1626, Johannes Wollebius promoted a single meaning in the Bible. He taught that "The meaning [*sensus*] of any Scripture passage is always single [*unicus*]; however, in the Old Testament (OT) the meaning of prophecies is often composite—historical and typical."⁴³ Later that century Turretin agreed, arguing for only one sense in Scripture, the literal. The other three, he averred, are not different senses of Scripture but are varied ways in which one can apply the meaning of the text.⁴⁴ Mastricht followed suit. He explicitly opposed the fourfold sense of reading Scripture. The orthodox, he maintained, only allow the literal sense, that is, "that which the writer himself intends by his words." They certainly allow for figures and types in the Bible, and for "varied application" of the meaning of Scripture. But they did not allow the quadriga.⁴⁵

Here is my point. We need to be careful not to overreact in a time of crisis and adopt methods of interpretation that are unnecessary. We do live in tumultuous times. We've seen the pagan, secular tenets of Enlightenment thought coming to roost in postmodernity's preposterousness all around us.

But we need to realize that this is really not such a big deal. After all, our Lord told us that “in this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). In fact, the church has always experienced crisis. Just consider a few of the crises our brothers and sisters have faced over the centuries: The empire-wide persecution under Decius and Diocletian. The rise of Islam, its remarkable assent by 732, and its encroachment upon “Christian” Europe. The death of perhaps half of all Europeans by the black death in the span of five years in the fourteenth century. The murder of Anabaptists, of Protestants in France, of Protestants in England, of Christians right now in Nigeria. Black brothers and sisters suffering under the indignity of chattel slavery in America. Faithful believers feeling overwhelmed by the proof for evolution in Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in the middle of the nineteenth century. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century-American Christians being pushed out of their churches as the modernists won the seminaries, the missions boards, and the churches.

Every era of the church has felt like it was enduring a period of crisis, perhaps a period more intense than any that the church had experienced before. That makes sense to me. We can do our best to understand people from the past. But we can’t experience the reality of their day—I mean viscerally feel it—the way that they did. Every era of Christians has felt things are worse for them than for any other period in history. But I’m not convinced that is true. Things are difficult now. Just like they’ve always been.

That’s my second caution: Don’t Overreact in a Time of Crisis.

CAUTION #3: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE AND ASSURANCE OF SALVATION ARE STILL CENTRAL.

Those advocating a return to “classical theism” and the Great Tradition of the church insist that we must begin all things with God himself, examining who he is *ad intra* (that is, intrinsically to himself) rather than with what God thinks about or how he acts towards creation, especially humanity, *ad extra* (externally to himself).⁴⁶ This, they assert, is what the Nicene tradition, Augustine, Aquinas, Owen, and Turretin did.

Webster has exercised tremendous influence in this regard. On more than one occasion, he rebuked modern theologians for failing to look at the most signal single issue: God. For instance, he wrote, “The principal object or matter

of Christian theology is God ... Christian theology considers God absolutely, that is, God in himself in his antecedent self-existent perfection, integrity, beatitude, and simplicity as Father, Son, and Spirit, prior to and apart from any relation to creatures.”⁴⁷ Webster critiques those who do not begin with “God in himself,” only focusing on God’s deeds.⁴⁸

It’s unfortunate that Thomas has assumed the mantle of “classical theism” in much of the discussion about God in our day. But it’s undeniable that he has. Thomas’s views are the norm for both Webster and for James Dolezal.⁴⁹ But Thomas’s trinitarian thought is not without its problems. Michael Reeves critiques Thomas cogently. He argues that “Because Aquinas gave preeminence to an Aristotelian, unrelational doctrine of God, his soteriology inevitably defaulted away from the idea of God giving us *himself* by his Spirit. What God seemed to offer, and what people thus began to desire, was this other thing, this ‘created grace.’”⁵⁰

Here’s my concern. In “classical theism’s” elevation of Thomas to almost the patron saint of orthodoxy, they’ve unwittingly opened the way for much more than Thomas’s doctrine of God proper to come into the evangelical stream of consciousness. Thomas’s theology is a system. Barrett and others may try to make it as Protestant-sounding as they can, but ultimately the effort fails.⁵¹ Beckwith is right: for Thomas justification begins with “the infusion of grace at Baptism” because “the baptized Christian literally partakes in the Divine Nature.” Thomas advocated praying for the dead, the sacraments as means of obtaining God’s grace, and transubstantiation as essential to the sacrifice of the mass.⁵² By elevating Thomas to almost canonical status, well-intentioned retrieval theologians may well have opened a floodgate that won’t be shut before many have abandoned Protestantism.

Yet, friends, we have extremely good reasons to remain Reformation Protestants. At its core, Protestantism answers the question: How can I, a wretched sinner, be saved by the holy God? That is, the heart Protestantism is about a relationship with a holy, forgiving, relational God.⁵³

Calvin certainly thought so. Calvin did not include a lengthy discussion of theology proper in his *Institutes*. David Wells demonstrates how Calvin’s anti-speculative doctrine of God contrasted sharply with medievals like Aquinas. Wells observes that for Calvin God was central. He writes that Calvin

had no place for mere, empty speculation about God. What is given to us is only what we have in God's Word and this revelation is given, not that we should speculate but, rather, worship and adore. This was (Wells continues), in fact, quite a departure from the way that God had so often been treated especially in the medieval period. And it is what led Warfield to say that what Calvin had done was to rediscover Christ "as religion." He meant by that that the knowledge of God, as revealed in Scripture and entered into through Christ, is knowledge that properly enters the soul, that sings, that worships, that inspires joyful obedience and self-giving service. This is the real knowledge of God.⁵⁴

Wells and Warfield are right. To go from Thomas to Calvin on the doctrine of God is to pass from idea to relationship.

Remember the very cause of the Protestant Reformation. Carter Lindberg paints a depressing picture of the late medieval Catholic church. The church "promot[ed] a type of pastoral care designed to make people uncertain about their salvation and thus more dependent upon the intercessions of the church."⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas was no better than the later nominalists (contra Barrett), for to Thomas, "we become righteous before God as we do righteous acts, as we do good works," since "grace does not do away with nature but completes it."⁵⁶ Dietrich Kolde's *Mirror of a Christian Man*, a popular Catholic catechism reprinted through the Reformation era, depicts the uncertainty that faithful Catholics lived with. "There are three things I know to be true that frequently make my heart heavy," it asserted. "The first troubles my spirit, because I will have to die. The second troubles my heart more, because I do not know when. The third troubles me above all. I do not know where I will go."⁵⁷

"I do not know where I will go" when I die. That was Luther's burden. And his zealous attempt for comfort and a definitive answer to that quandary alone explains the Reformation. The Reformation was a concerted effort to be able to say: I know where I will go when I die. I have trusted in Jesus, whose righteousness is mine, and so I will indeed go to heaven.⁵⁸ The biblical gospel led to assurance of salvation. According to Luther, the gospel renounces "the wicked idea of the entire kingdom of the pope, the teaching that a Christian man must be uncertain about the grace of God toward him. If this opinion stands, then Christ is completely useless ... Therefore the papacy is a veritable torture chamber of consciences and the

very kingdom of the devil.” Rome propounded “the monster of uncertainty” (he said) that was antithetical to the gospel. What sinful, doubting believers needed was a theology that “snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive.”⁵⁹

Assurance of salvation was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. It’s central to Calvin’s discussion of faith and justification. It’s front and center in Puritanism as well.⁶⁰ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* asserts that Christians can have certainty of their salvation due to the finished work of Christ for them.⁶¹ And Richard Sibbes argued that “comfort [for believers]... came most of all from assurance of one’s salvation,” which served as a “balm after the Roman ‘doctrine of doubting.’”⁶² For this reason, Sibbes and other Protestants urged that “popery” and its sacraments “are physicians of no value, [but] rather tormentors”⁶³ because of “the popish doctrine that I ought to [i.e., must] doubt.”⁶⁴

This is no small matter. Some, it seems, are being deluged by the weight of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, failing to see that his soteriology holds together as a whole. You might like Thomas on participation, or on realism, or on the beauty of the so-called divine liturgy, but beware. Thomas’s doctrine of salvation is synergistic. Michael Horton summarizes Thomas’s doctrine of justification in this way. For Thomas “there are two types of grace (operating and cooperating), five effects (healing the soul, movement of the will to the good, good acts, perseverance and attaining glory) and four requirements of justification (infusion of grace [at baptism], faith, repentance and forgiveness).”⁶⁵ According to Francis Beckwith, Thomas “was more a Proto-Tridentine Catholic than a Proto-Protestant.”⁶⁶ Carl Trueman argues that “The insight of the Reformation on assurance was key, theologically and pastorally.” It is so central that (he asserts) “it is one thing that every convert to Roman Catholicism from Protestantism must lose.” That’s why Trueman concludes: “Speaking for myself, all the liturgical beauty of Rome, all the tradition, all the clarity of the authority structure (and that clarity is often, I think, more in the eye of the beholder than in the Church itself) cannot compensate for the loss of this: I know I have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ.”⁶⁷

Friends, it will be all the difference in the world to you on your deathbed if you are trusting in Christ plus your efforts, or if you trust in Christ alone.

That's my third caution: Justification by Faith Alone and Assurance of Salvation are Still Central.

My final three, and brief, cautions flow from the Baptist perspective on the Protestant Reformation.

CAUTION #4: KEEP THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH CENTRAL.

The Bible, and our Protestant and Baptist tradition, teaches that there are two churches: the universal church (all Christians, at all times, everywhere) as well as local churches (fellowships of believers in one place at one time). This matters when considering retrieval theology because the word "church" gets employed ambiguously by some promoting retrieval. In so doing they can seemingly allow "church history" to be the voice of God in "the church."

Take Barrett as an example. He is at pains to insist that the voice of the high scholastic medieval era was the voice of the true church. But Protestant reformers like Calvin took issue with that. We've seen that Calvin had a negative view of the medieval era. That was bolstered by the way in which he clarified that there were two distinguishing marks (*notae*) of the true (i.e., Protestant) church that set it apart from the Catholic church. The true church was marked, first, by the right preaching of the gospel; and, second, by the right practice of the sacraments (that is, practicing them in such a way that did not controvert the gospel, the very thing that the regenerative baptism and the Mass of Rome did). This is an inconvenient truth that conflicts with the narrative Barrett's creating in which the church is constant from its early days, across the Middle Ages, up to the Reformation, only being interrupted by the intrusion of nominalist thinking on the very eve of the sixteenth century. So, he merely notes in passing that Protestants disagreed with Rome on salvation and the church while they agreed on so much else (like so-called "classical theism").⁶⁸

Like Calvin, Baptists should disagree with Barrett. Baptists' only original idea in the whole history of the church has been in our understanding of the church. And it's a profound one: The church is to be composed only of those who have made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ and have

been marked out by believer's baptism. Regenerate Church Membership is the mark of the Baptist church.⁶⁹

Many implications regarding retrieval theology flow from this, the most important one regarding our understanding of the promises made to the church in the NT and where we seek their fulfilment. Allen and Swain, for example, teach that because of the on-going work of the Holy Spirit and his anointing of the church, as the church employs its renewed wisdom it will arrive at the truth. Church tradition possesses authority for them. They claim, "The Spirit of Christ teaches the church in sufficient and unmixed verity such that the church need not seek theological understanding from any other source or principle."⁷⁰ "Christ lays the foundation of the church in the prophets and apostles in order to build upon the foundation by the Spirit's illuminating work in and through the renewed reason of the people of God."⁷¹ As much as Allen and Swain go on to assert that tradition is still subordinate to Scripture, Baptists should be wary of such a positive view of the Spirit's guidance of the collective wisdom of self-proclaimed Christians if for no other reason than that the tradition of the church is diffuse and always in flux. Which voice exactly are we supposed to be listening to as the on-going voice of the Spirit? Baptists have not downplayed the ongoing role of God the Holy Spirit in guiding and caring for his church. But we have found that guidance related more closely to Scripture than some retrievalists do, as the next two cautions clarify.

That's my fourth caution: Keep the Biblical View of the Church Central.

CAUTION #5: BAPTISTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WILLING TO PART FROM THE CHURCH'S TRADITION.

The recovery of the gospel in the Reformation was carried to the next level in the Puritan tradition which began telling their infant-baptized children that they must be born again. The Congregationalists in this tradition began using local church covenants, marking commitments their church members would make before the Lord to each other. The English Baptists rose out of this soil.⁷² They considered themselves to be following in the footsteps of the teachings of Luther and Calvin. They also clearly considered themselves heirs of the Puritan tradition.⁷³ But Baptists did not remain Congregationalists.

They left. They abandoned the Puritans for one simple reason: they came to the conclusion that the Bible taught that it was only those who had been justified by faith alone, who had been born again, who were to be baptized and become covenanted members of local churches. Baptists, in this sense then, when judged according to the teaching of the NT, are the most thorough of all Protestant Reformers.⁷⁴ They rejected the *corpus permixtum* (“mixed body”) view of the church that had marked the church since at least the time of Augustine in the fifth century. They were willing to break with the unanimous confession of the church for twelve hundred years!

In other words, they put Scripture above tradition. When the Bible trumped the church’s received doctrine, they felt obligated to follow God’s word rather than what had been taught and practiced for centuries. The tradition of the church in this regard had no binding authority on them. Because they held to *sola scriptura*, they critiqued their fellow Protestants for bowing to tradition rather than the Bible’s clear testimony when it came to defining and marking the church. They taught that the defining characteristic of the church was regenerate church membership, which was marked by believer’s baptism.

Related to retrieval theology, then, we must remember that we are part of a group of churches that has stood for the authority of Scripture above that of tradition. We have prioritized fidelity to Scripture over fidelity to how the church collectively has organized itself and formulated its doctrine.

That’s my fifth caution: Baptists Have Always Been Willing to Part from the Church’s Tradition.

CAUTION #6: TRADITION HAS NO INDEPENDENT AUTHORITY.

Here I’m just drilling deeper on the previous caution.

Protestants want Scripture to be our ultimate authority and to give due regard to the church’s collective wisdom as we determine how to put our theology together. But the danger—for all the reasons already noted, as well as just for those of us who find history intriguing and inspiring—is that we’ll let the tradition (or at least the part of it we know about and are presently considering) begin to sit in judgment over what Scripture can mean. Many of us have had the experience of reading someone, realizing that he offers a scintillating view of God or some aspect of revealed truth,

and then — knowingly or not — started to see Scripture and reality through that person's lenses. I had that experience years ago when reading J. I. Packer who sent me into the thought of Calvin, Owen, and Edwards. I loved learning about the big God they taught. It was refreshing. Dare I say, it was at times almost intoxicating? So much so, that while in seminary I wrestled with whether or not I would abandon my Baptist principles and become a paedobaptist. I experienced what I think many retrievalists have experienced: they've (probably unconsciously) let someone else's theology start to determine the way that they interpret Scripture.

Unfortunately, some proponents of retrieval theology have begun characterizing those who disagree with their methodology and conclusions as "biblicists" (their word). These malefactors want to let Scripture determine their theology; they don't pay enough attention to the Great Tradition or classical theism. Barrett does this explicitly, describing biblicists as those who irresponsibly proof-text, undervalue the use of philosophy in theology, and overemphasize the human authorship of Scripture.⁷⁵

Let me suggest a better path forward. It comes from our Baptist tradition and the manner in which Baptists have dealt with this very issue. Baptists are a confessional people. We have always noted the importance of adopting written confessions of faith for our denominations, our associations, and our churches. Southern Seminary's *Abstract of Principles*, though, indicates Baptists' view of confessions. Our confession abstracted the gist of the meaning of both the First and Second London Baptist Confessions. Those confessions were too detailed to be useful for the seminary. So they shortened them to their main points, resulting in our *Abstract*.⁷⁶ Baptists have felt the freedom to edit confessions, to revise them, to change them according to their understanding of Scripture.

We can see this Baptist emphasis in a slight word change between the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its later adaptation by Baptists in the 1689 Confession. Westminster teaches that people are bound to what "is either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*" (1.6). Baptists clarified these words in this way: people must believe what "is either expressly set down *or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture*" (1.6). They highlighted this by the first sentence they wrote on Scripture, one absent from the Presbyterian confession: "The Holy Scripture is the *only* sufficient, certain,

and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.”⁷⁷ Baptists insist that the Bible alone is our ultimate source of authority.

This is a different orientation from some promoters of retrieval theology who see the tradition as almost on par with the authoritative Scripture.

Friends, we all come to Scripture with preconceptions and with a history that affects how we interpret Scripture. We need to test our biblical interpretations against those who have also studied Scripture. But *sola scriptura* means just that: the Bible is the *alone* authority in what we are to believe and how we are to live. The Bible must *always* sit in judgment over the validity of an opinion — even if I like how intriguing, or anti-modern, or “meaningful” that idea or practice is. My likes or dislikes, my feelings, must be subordinated to God’s authoritative, inerrant word.⁷⁸

In conclusion, the biblically-revealed gospel sits in judgment over aggressive retrieval theology that would lead people away from Reformation Protestantism. And Baptists — who are the full-flowering of the Protestant Reformation — have a unique way of guarding the biblical gospel and protecting our churches from aggressive retrieval.⁷⁹ May God give us grace to do that.

¹ This article was given as Dr. Shawn Wright’s Faculty Address at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky on February 4, 2026.

² See, e.g., “But Halfly Reformed,” in Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967; reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 29–44.

³ The literature on why people leave evangelicalism is extensive. See, e.g., Scot McKnight, “From Wheaton to Rome: Why Evangelicals Become Roman Catholic,” *JETS* 45/3 (2002): 451–72; Robert L. Plummer, ed., *Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 187–207, 253–73.

⁴ John Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” in Kathryn Tanner, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 584.

⁵ W. David Buschart and Kent D. Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 12.

⁶ Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 17.

⁷ Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 12. They denominate their view “Reformed catholicity” rather than theological retrieval, but the idea is the same as we can see from their subtitle.

- 8 This indiscriminate nature of retrieval theology explains why it has expressed itself in so many varieties in our day—the Roman Catholic *nouvelle théologie* and *ressourcement* of Henri de Lubac, Karl Barth's retrieval of the Reformation tradition, Donald Bloesch's "consensual Christianity," Thomas Oden's "paleo-Orthodoxy," Robert Webber's ancient-future Christianity, the theological interpretation of Scripture, Radical Orthodoxy, the emergent church, the *ressourcement* Thomism of Matthew Levering and Gilles Emery, evangelical retrieval theology, and others. For varieties of retrieval theology, see Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 4–12. Darren Sarisky, ed., *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), is a collection of essays on varieties of retrieval theology, as is the entirety of Buschart and Eilers's book.
- 9 Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," 584.
- 10 Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," 584–85.
- 11 Retrieval theology also has adherents who seek to retrieve the patristic era. Space limitations only allow me to deal specifically with those who are especially seeking to retrieve Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) from the medieval era.
- 12 For "retrieval for the sake of renewal," see Christopher R. Hanna, *Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal: Timothy George as a Historical Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022). "Renewal through retrieval" is also the goal of Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, "Introduction," *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 2.
- 13 This is the title of another book that advocates retrieval: Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).
- 14 Asty, "Memoir," p. xxxii, in Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 262.
- 15 Others disparage history and need a healthy dose of C. S. Lewis's critique of "chronological snobbery" and the value of reading old books. C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," to Athanasius, *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* (1944; reprint Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1982), 3–10.
- 16 See, e.g., Ben Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 79. The texts are Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; and 1 Peter 5:1–2. Others have recognized this. "In attempting to learn from ecclesiastical history what usages prevailed in the apostolic churches, there is danger of error from two causes: the writers of ecclesiastical history were uninspired men, and therefore fallible; and the churches of the times after the apostles, may have departed from the order first instituted." John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology. Second Part. A Treatise on Church Order* (1858; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1990), 90.
- 17 Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 250, x-xiii. I argue this even though Carter says that John Calvin is the hero of his story (250). Numerous others have pointed out the manner in which modern biblical interpreters should learn from the premodern tradition. Among them are David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980): 27–38; and Robert Louis Wilken, "In Defense of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 14.2 (1998): 197–212.
- 18 Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, xvii.
- 19 Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 11 n.14. For a traditional Thomistic account, see Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938).
- 20 Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 86.
- 21 Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 250.
- 22 For example, Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 204; cf. 164. The chapter on Thomas is 90 pages long, over 10% of the book's length.
- 23 This rising interest of evangelicals in the thought of Thomas has been ably discussed recently by Leonardo De Chirico, *Engaging with Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Approach* (London: Apollos, 2024).
- 24 For critiques of some aspects of Barrett's argument see Peter Opitz, "'Reformation as Renewal': Recatholicizing the Reformers by Manipulating Their Message?," *The Hanover Review: The Journal of the London Lyceum* 3.1 (2024): 36–58; and Daniel W. Houck, "Prolegomena to Any Future Account of Aquinas's Augustinianism: A Response to Matthew Barrett," *The Hanover Review: The Journal of the London Lyceum* 3.1 (2024): 59–66.
- 25 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.9.8; in Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 41. A summary of sorts of Lane's argument can be found in Anthony N. S. Lane, "John Calvin: Catholic Theologian," *Ecclesiology* 6 (2010): 290–314.
- 26 Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.13; in Lane, *John Calvin*, 40–41.

- 27 Lane, *John Calvin*, 41. Lane notes that for Calvin, “After the golden age the church fell into decline. This took place gradually and there is no one date given when the church ‘fell’. Calvin gives different dates for different stages of the decline: belief in the carnal presence of Christ [in the eucharist] had prevailed for more than 600 years; the heights of papal power were reached only 400 years previously; compulsory confession is less than 300 years old; other errors and darkness have been around for ‘some centuries’” (Lane, 42).
- 28 Lane, *John Calvin*, 43.
- 29 Lane, *John Calvin*, 45. Whether this was from lack of engagement with Thomas personally (perhaps Calvin was citing from an intermediary source) or whether Calvin knew Thomas well and just didn’t appreciate him, we can’t determine.
- 30 This is not to say that Calvin was not familiar with aspects of medieval theology. See David C. Steinmetz, “The Scholastic Calvin,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 16–30; and Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39–61. On some reformers’ use of Thomas, see David S. Sytsma, “Sixteenth-Century Reformed Reception of Aquinas,” in Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 121–43. “Calvin found support for the Protestant doctrine of justification in Augustine, Ambrose, and Bernard—a very short list!” (Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots*, 85–86).
- 31 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed., James T. Denison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 3:4.
- 32 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:59. Certainly God still had his elect during the medieval period in groups like the Waldensians. Even within the Catholic church “the hearts of the hearers were often more holy than the mouths of the priest and teachers” so God has his elect there. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:66.
- 33 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:142.
- 34 Things were so bad, according to Mastricht, that prior to the Reformation there were times when no church existed that a Christian could be part of. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2025), 5:344–46.
- 35 John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (1809; reprint, Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1995), li. Note the fourth part of Gill’s defense of Calvinism, which is an examination of the so-called “five points of Calvinism” from the church fathers up to Jerome (d. 420), but not any medieval theologians. See Gill’s *The Cause of God and Truth in Four Parts* (1855; reprint, Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1992), 220–328. Gill’s use of patristic sources has received attention recently. See, e.g., Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51–68; Steven Tshombe Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 122–80; David Mark Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity: The Scriptures and the Tradition in the Theology of John Gill,” *Baptist Quarterly* 49.3 (2018): 108–16; David Rathel, “John Gill and the Rule of Faith: A Case Study in the Baptist Retrieval of Tradition,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 14.2 (2023): 55–72; and Christopher Green, “Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill (1697–1771),” *Themelios* 49.3 (2024): 643–55.
- 36 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 1:117–18. Note that Hodge, like Calvin before him, had high esteem for mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux for his opposition to the formality and ritualism that reigned in the church during his lifetime (1:79).
- 37 Benjamin B. Warfield, “Augustine and His ‘Confessions,’” in *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 383. I thus disagree with Ortlund’s critique of Warfield: “In Warfield’s method of retrieval, Augustine’s theology seems to get sifted through the grid of the Reformation such that the good in Augustine’s theological legacy is distinguished from the bad basically by its sixteenth-century consequences” (Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals*, 29).
- 38 This is the scenario put forward, e.g., by Patrick Schreiner, “Baptists, Classic Interpretation, and the Christian Tradition,” in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), 149–50; and Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, The 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 290–91.

- 39 See Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 3–22; Ian Christopher Levy, "The Literal Sense of Scripture and the Search for Truth in the Late Middle Ages" *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 104 (3–4): 783–827.
- 40 See, e.g., the many times that Calvin used Chrysostom in Lane, *John Calvin*. On Calvin's literal reading of Scripture, see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995). Erik T. Lundeen has recently suggested that the categories of "literal" and "allegorical" were not tight when it came to Reformation Protestants' interpretation of Scripture. Erik T. Lundeen, *The Reformation of the Literal: Prophecy and the Senses of Scripture in Early Modern Europe* (London: T&T Clark, 2025). I would just observe that many in the history of the church have recognized the challenges of interpreting prophecy. The debated point is rather how to interpret non-prophetic biblical material.
- 41 Original: "chopological."
- 42 William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 1527–28, in *Tyndale's Works*, ed. Henry Walter (1848; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:307. I've modernized the old English. My thanks to Nathan W. Parsons for providing me with this quote.
- 43 Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 34.
- 44 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:149–53.
- 45 Maastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 1:168–69.
- 46 Not all stalwarts of the Reformed tradition fall neatly into the system of so-called "classical theism." See Thomas H. McCall, "A Hopeless Hodge-Podge of Theology? The Retrieval of 'Classical Theism' and the Curious Case of Charles Hodge," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 17 (2023): 261–77.
- 47 John Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological?," *Journal of Analytical Theology* 3 (2015): 2. Webster does go on to argue that after considering God in himself theology must consider him "in his works towards creatures." My point is not that Webster made no allowance for sinful humanity's relationship with God, but that the overwhelming force of his first point drowned out the power of his second.
- 48 Willem Maarten Dekker, "Review Article: John Webster's Retrieval of Classical Theology," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018): 61. Webster urges, "there is one principal Christian doctrine, the doctrine of God the Holy Trinity, immanently and transitively considered, of which all other doctrines are extensions" (Dekker, 60).
- 49 Willem Dekker notes that "Webster's theology is based on Aquinas. [Webster] basically takes over the entire structure of theology from him" (61). James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2017).
- 50 Michael Reeves, "The Holy Trinity," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 194. Reeves later noted that in his "Disputation against Scholastic Theology" Luther took "square aim at Aquinas's nonbiblical, Aristotelian foundations" (195).
- 51 Barrett's attempt is mirrored by others who argue that the first generation of reformers were quite Catholic. See, e.g., J. Todd Billings, "The Catholic Calvin," *Pro Ecclesia* 20.2 (2011): 120–34; Charles Raith II, "Calvin's Critique of Merit, and Why Aquinas (Mostly) Agrees," *Pro Ecclesia* 20.2 (2011): 135–66.
- 52 Francis Beckwith, "Doting Thomists: Evangelicals, Thomas Aquinas, and Justification," *Evangelical Quarterly* 85 (2013): 220–21. Gerald Bray similarly notes the ways in which Thomas's view of justification is anti-Protestant. Gerald Bray, "Late Medieval Theology," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Theology*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 87–88. Stephen Wellum shows the manner in which the Protestant reformers corrected "Rome's sacramental theology of merit" with their biblical notion of penal substitution. Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 175. Wellum notes that in medieval thought "[t]he grace that is communicated through the sacraments is infused so that our very nature is transformed, and by this infusion, we are enabled to cooperate with God to merit eternal life" (172).
- 53 Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues that the Protestant Reformation was a reaction against the corruption of the biblical gospel through the addition of non-biblical material in medieval Catholicism. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 36.
- 54 David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 101–102.
- 55 Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 58.

- 56 Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 63.
- 57 Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 63–64.
- 58 See Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 64–70.
- 59 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1–4*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963) 26: 386–87, in Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 67.
- 60 For instance, see William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholic*, in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Shawn D. Wright and Andrew S. Ballitch (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 7:25–26.
- 61 Chapter 18. See Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, American University Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 151–73.
- 62 Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 162.
- 63 Richard Sibbes, “The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax,” in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–64; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 1:77. Similarly, see Sibbes’s critique of the inadequacies of the medieval church (1:52).
- 64 Richard Sibbes, “A Learned Commentary or Exposition Upon the First Chapter of the Second Epistle of S. Paul to the Corinthians,” in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–64; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 3:467, in Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 181.
- 65 Michael Horton, *Justification*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1:122, in De Chirico, *Engaging with Thomas Aquinas*, 50.
- 66 Francis J. Beckwith, *Never Doubt Thomas: The Catholic Aquinas as Evangelical and Protestant* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 104, in Leonardo De Chirico, *Engaging with Thomas Aquinas*, 51.
- 67 Carl R. Trueman, *Crisis of Confidence: Reclaiming the History Faith in a Culture Consumed with Individualism and Identity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 110.
- 68 E.g., Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal*, 203–04.
- 69 According to John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2019), 91–116, who titles chapter four, “Regenerate Church Membership: The Baptist Mark of the Church.”
- 70 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 18.
- 71 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 41. Reflecting their Thomistic leanings, they also assert, “The fact that tradition can err does not disqualify its status as a divine institution.... In the case of this institution the principle applies as well: grace restores and perfects nature” (Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 21). Vanhoozer has a better view of tradition, saying it is valuable only when its teachings are parallel to what is revealed in Scripture. Vanhoozer, “Holy Scripture,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, 51.
- 72 See, for example, Timothy George, “The Reformation Roots of the Baptist Tradition,” *Review and Expositor* 1989 (86): 9–22. In the rest of my discussion, though, I will limit myself to the Particular Baptist side, out of which Southern Baptists sprang in the nineteenth century.
- 73 Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015): “Baptists are children of the Puritans” (14).
- 74 See John Quincy Adams, *Baptists, the Only Thorough Religious Reformers* (1876; reprint Rochester, NY: Backus, 1980); G. Stephen Weaver, “Baptists as Thorough Religious Reformers: The Reformation as Source of Seventeenth-Century Baptists” (paper presented at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society November 17, 2017, Providence, Rhode Island); Jason G. Duesing, “Baptist Contributions to the Christian Tradition,” in Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, ed., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), 329–50.
- 75 Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal*, 21.
- 76 Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31–33.
- 77 See the discussion in L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 44–51.
- 78 See John M. Frame, “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on *Sola Scriptura* and History in Theological Method,” *WTJ* 59 (1997): 269–91.
- 79 Compare the first three theses of Matthew Y. Emerson and R. Lucas Stamps, “Conclusion: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity,” in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), 353.