

MEETER CENTER LECTURE  
**“Lift Up Your Hearts”:  
 John Calvin’s Catholic Faith**

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 11 October 2012<sup>1</sup>

*Offered as a prayer for a fellow laborer in the cause  
 of Reformed Catholicity, J. Todd Billings<sup>2</sup>*

**Reformed *and* Catholic**

“Are you Catholic or Protestant?” I sometimes get this question from evangelical folks who don’t know me very well, but have heard me talk about liturgy or St. Augustine or spiritual formation or Graham Greene, or what have you. I usually simply answer, “Yes.”

As you might imagine, this engenders furrowed brows of consternation: “Is this guy out to lunch?, they must ask themselves. I asked an *either/or* question. You can’t answer, ‘Yes.’ You have to choose.” But do I? Can’t I refuse this as a false dichotomy? Is it possible to reject this disjunctive *or*? What if we don’t have to choose between being Protestant *and* Catholic? Indeed, what if being a (magisterial) Protestant is a *way* to be Catholic? Would that somehow denigrate the Reformation? Would this be a kind of cathedral-envy, making me a Protestant with a bad conscience, sort of a wannabe papist wolf who lurks about Calvin College in Kuyperian sheep’s clothing?

Admittedly, it doesn’t help matters when, in the Acknowledgments to my little book, *Letters to a Young Calvinist*, I admit that one of my primary models was George Weigel’s *Letters to a Young Catholic*.<sup>3</sup> In the same book, I confess that, for me, becoming Reformed was

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<sup>1</sup> It is a special treat to deliver this talk on John Calvin’s “Catholic faith” on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of Vatican II—when the Roman church *finally* began to listen to Luther and Calvin.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Todd Billings, “The Promise of Catholic Calvinism,” *Perspectives* (April 2006), available at <http://www.rca.org/page.aspx?pid=2996>.

<sup>3</sup> See also my review, “Remember You Are Catholic,” *Perspectives* (November 2004): <http://www.rca.org/page.aspx?pid=3395>.

a way of becoming Catholic, because in my pilgrimage to the Reformed confessional tradition I was inducted into a communion self-consciously in continuity with the ancient creeds. To be a member of a church that says the Creed—and whose catechism expounds the Creed—is to be Catholic.

This brings to mind the situation of a young Protestant lad in James Kelman’s remarkable novel, *Kieron Smith, Boy*. Written as the journal of an 11-yr.-old boy in working class Glasgow, his very name is a first sign of ambiguity. “Kieron” sounds Irish, like a Catholic name, and so young Kieron is already beset with doubts. Kieron Smith is an odd combination, sort of half Irish, half Scottish; in the Glawegian vernacular, Kieron feels half “RC,” half “Proddy.”

When he becomes fascinated with Bonnie Prince Charlie, his friends point out that he was a “Pape.” “The kilties too. They were all Papes.”<sup>4</sup> This further exacerbates his doubts. To top it all off, his teacher reads him a story of a young lad and lass who suffer at the hands of a wicked Scottish stepfather, until their aunt calls for them, and they journey to Italy, and are welcomed to into “just a wee Chapel” whose pictures captivate young Kieron, and he hears the priest’s words as if they were directed toward him, “Oh my son you have come home.” Kieron is willing to face the music:

So if they were Papes. They were. That was their home for the boy and girl and they did not know. So I could be one too. If really I was one. Maybe I was. I just did not know because they had not told me. My maw and my da got me as a Protestant and put me as a Protestant but all the time if I was not one, if I was a real Catholic. Kieron was for Catholics. People said it. I did not care. I would just do all the stuff. If it was horrible, I did not care.<sup>5</sup>

I want to suggest that a name like Kieron Smith need not be strange. (Or maybe you could say I’m arguing that Presbyterians can wear kilts!) We need not choose: we can be both

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<sup>4</sup> James Kelman, *Kieron Smith, Boy* (London: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Protestant *and* Catholic, that to be Reformed *is* to be Catholic. To refuse catholicity is to enact a sectarianism that makes it impossible for us to confess the Creed, that we believe “in the communion of the saints.”

Now admittedly, if this is going to make any sense, I need to explain what I mean by “Catholic.” And if the *protest* of the Reformation means anything, then surely there is a dichotomy, or at least a difference, between being Reformed and being a *Roman* Catholic. On that, I completely agree. However, I don’t think Rome owns Catholicity. Our “catholic” faith is the historic faith of the church, rooted in the Scriptures, received from the apostles, elucidated and articulated in the creeds and ecumenical councils, reformed in our confessions, with the conviction that the Spirit of God has guided the church through history. The Protestant Reformation is not a “paradigm shift,” the “emergence” of a “new faith.”<sup>6</sup> Rather, we should see the Protestant Reformation as an Augustinian renewal movement within the church catholic.

My point here is that the Reformers were not revolutionaries; that is, they were not out to raze the church to the ground, get back to some “pure” set of New Testament church principles, and start from scratch. In short, they didn’t see themselves as leapfrogging over the centuries of post-apostolic tradition. They were *re-forming* the church. And in that respect, they saw themselves as heirs and debtors to the tradition that came before them. Indeed, they understood the Spirit as unfolding the wisdom of the Word over the centuries in the voices of Augustine and Gregory the Great, in Chrysostom and Anselm. To say the Reformed tradition is “catholic” is just to say that it affirms this operation of the Spirit *in history*, and thus receives the gifts of tradition as gifts of the Spirit, subject to the Word. Today I’d like to consider ways that John Calvin exhibits such “Catholic” faith.

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<sup>6</sup> As Phyllis Tickle seems to suggest in *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

## John Calvin's Catholic Faith

John Calvin is one of those figures we often want to remake in our image. (This paper being yet another example of that, to be sure!<sup>7</sup>) I think there is especially a tendency for free church Protestants to concoct a John Calvin shorn of his Catholicism. In an era when Baptists are those most widely identified as being “Reformed,” perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised that their John Calvin is more of a Zwinglian. But it’s becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a picture of John Calvin as a low-church Puritan who would have been comfortable on the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Calvin’s project of reform was not a rupture with the catholic tradition. Indeed, as Richard Muller seems to suggest, we might see Calvin’s opposition to 13<sup>th</sup>-century Roman Catholic scholasticism as rooted in his affirmation of an *older* scholasticism. As he notes, “it was characteristic of the Reformers to admire the older tradition, from Augustine to the close of the twelfth century.”<sup>8</sup> Randall Zachman makes a similar point in his Introduction to *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism*: “Calvin did not envision himself as the founder of a new tradition called ‘Calvinism,’ but rather as one who sought to restore the Catholic Church to what he called its ‘purer form’ under the apostles and early church writers.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Zachman argues that Calvin’s understanding of “reform” was itself informed by “older Catholic thought.”<sup>10</sup> Rather

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<sup>7</sup> I work under the shadow of Richard Muller’s maxim: “A clever theologian can accommodate Calvin to nearly any agenda; a faithful theologian—and a good historian—will seek to listen to Calvin, not to use him.” Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 188. I hope this paper isn’t “clever!”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Randall Zachman, “Why John Calvin and Roman Catholicism?,” in *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism: Critique and Engagement, Then and Now*, ed. Randall Z. Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 9.

<sup>10</sup> This is the argument of Zachman’s contribution to the book, “Revising the Reform: What Calvin Learned from Dialogue with the Roman Catholics,” in *ibid.*, 165-191.

than a protest against the Catholic Church *per se*, we might see Calvin as spearheading a *Catholic* protest against the abuses of *Roman* Catholicism.

Some of the most important work on Calvin's "Catholic" theology has emphasized the shape and importance of Calvin's sacramental theology. Todd Billings, for example, has rooted this in Calvin's emphasis on "union with Christ" which yields a "theology of participation" that undergirds what he calls Calvin's "sacramental metaphysics." As he summarizes,

Calvin's theology of participation... has a great deal of common ground with Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox theologies of participation. [It] is both sacramental and ecclesial, emphasizing the centrality of the Word and sacraments for the life of Christ's Body, which can receive the sacraments only in the communion of the church. The church itself is a participation in Christ the Head by the Spirit, with its members active in choosing church officers, who fill functionalized roles in service to Christ, the Head. Participation for Calvin also involves a love of neighbor that extends to the broader society; this love expresses itself in a concern for equity and justice, as well as an eschatological orientation that keeps a place for voluntary participation, when possible, in the civil order.<sup>11</sup>

So rather than just forensic themes and metaphors, Billings sees at the heart of Calvin's theology a picture of union and participation that generates an ecclesial and liturgical account of sanctification that resonates with "catholic" spirituality.<sup>12</sup>

Similar themes have been considered by Laura Smit, in response to Radical Orthodoxy's critique of Protestant theologies of the Lord's Supper. Explicating Calvin's doctrine of the "true presence" of Christ in the sacrament, and showing its difference from flattened Zwinglian memorialism, Smit at the same time shows the centrality of Calvin's sacramental theology to his theology of creation. "Even though creation is (from our perspective) chronologically prior to incarnation, it is epistemologically tertiary. We must experience the justifying results of Christ's

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<sup>11</sup> J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 196-197.

<sup>12</sup> I think this is also why Tom Wright argues that Calvin's theology is completely hospitable to the so-called "new perspective on Paul," which emphasizes similar themes of participation and union.

incarnation and ascension, and we must then be instructed and sanctified through word and sacrament before we can read the book of nature aright.”<sup>13</sup> This is why the Eucharist shows us what it is to be human. Following Brian Gerrish, Smit argues that “for Calvin ‘authentic humanity is constituted by the act of thanksgiving to the Maker of heaven and earth, whose goodness has prepared a table before us; that is the truth of our being, grounded in creation.’ It is therefore appropriate to think of all human existence as ‘eucharistic.’”<sup>14</sup>

So we could consider Calvin’s “catholic” faith in his sacramental theology, as Billings and Smit have done. But rather than repeat their work here, let me instead consider another case study for highlighting Calvin’s nuanced relationship to “Catholic” Christianity: his critique of monasticism, which is as an outworking of his sacramental theology, and his theology of sanctification (or spiritual formation) more broadly. Calvin’s take on monasticism is also a way to appreciate that the Catholic tradition is not just a doctrinal inheritance but also a liturgical heritage—indeed, that the Catholic doctrinal heritage is *carried* in the practices of Christian worship handed down to us. In Kuyperian terms, returning to Calvin can be a catalyst to reconnect the church as institute with the church as organism—a way to re-center worldview in worship.<sup>15</sup>

### **Calvinist Monasteries?**

Christian worship and formation, as practices of *divine* action, culminate in Christian action—being sent as ambassadors of another “city,” witnesses to kingdom come, to live and act

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Smit, “‘The Depth Behind Things’: Toward a Calvinist Sacramental Theology,” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, eds. James K.A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 205-227 at 224.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>15</sup> As Kuyper himself emphasized. See Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

communally as a people who embody a foretaste of God's *shalom*.<sup>16</sup> This is not to “instrumentalize” worship as merely a means to an end, nor is it to reduce worship to a strategy for moral formation; nor should it be confused with an activism which sees Christian action as some Pelagian expression of *our* abilities. Worship and related practices of Christian formation are first and foremost the way the Spirit invites us into union with the Triune God. Worship is the arena in which we encounter God and are formed by God in and through the practices in which the Spirit is present—centering rituals to which God makes a promise (the sacraments). As Matthew Boulton observes, John Calvin persistently emphasized a “preferred suite of formative practices”<sup>17</sup> as “disciplines of regeneration;” however, he also constantly emphasized that these were not routines of spiritual self-assertion or human accomplishment:

disciples may and do perform these sanctifying practices, but their performances are themselves divine gifts, and they take place properly and fruitfully...only by way of divine accompaniment and power. [...] Thus following Calvin, we may reframe “spiritual practices” as in the first place works of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, the sanctifying, regenerating, restorative labor of God with us and in us. [...] Each of the church's key practices is still something human beings do, but they do it neither alone nor as the act's primary agent. Rather, in and through the practice, they participate in divine work.<sup>18</sup>

So in the practices of Christian worship, and related spiritual disciplines, we encounter the Lover of our souls. We are drawn into the life of the One our hearts were made for, the Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Consider Graham Ward's careful parsing of just what counts as “Christian action,” analyzed in terms of six key elements: the agent who acts, the nature of the action, evaluation of the action, the object of the action, the effect of the action, and the intentions and affections (“pro-attitudes,” after Donald Davidson) that lead to action. See Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 181-201. In many ways, I see *Imagining the Kingdom* as expanding and deepening our analysis of the sixth aspect.

<sup>17</sup> Boulton, *Life in God*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

And it is that creating and re-creating God who tells us to *go* even as he goes with us, “even to the end of the age.” Christian worship culminates with a sending (“Go!”) accompanied by a promise (“And as you go, you go with his blessing”)—the benediction that is both a blessing and a charge, a *co-mission*-ing accompanied by the promise of the Spirit’s presence. So while we are sent to act, to labor in love for God and neighbor, because the Spirit of Christ goes with us even “our” Christian action, undertaken as we are recruited into the *missio Dei*, is never merely “ours.” Worship is not merely time with a deistic god who winds us up and then sends us out on our own; we don’t enter worship for “top up” refueling to then leave as self-sufficient, autonomous actors. Instead, the biblical vision is one of co-abiding presence and participation (“I in you and you in me”). In other words, our Christian action is bound up with the dynamics of incorporation. “By the act of receiving the Eucharist,” Graham Ward says (in words that echo Calvin more than he’d realize), “I place myself *in* Christ—rather than simply placing Christ within me. I consume but I do not absorb Christ without being absorbed into Christ. Only in this complex coabiding are there life, nourishment, and nurture because of, through, or by means of this feeding; there is both participation of human life in God’s life and participation of God’s life in human life.”<sup>20</sup> So our action is not merely motivated by worship of the Triune God; rather, it is in worship that we are caught up into the life of God, drawn into union with Christ, and thus recruited into this participation that generates Christian action as we “go.” “The Christian act,” Ward continues, “has to be understood in terms not just of the church but also of the church’s participation in Christ, the church as the body of Christ. That is, the Christian act is integral to the church’s participation in the operations of the Triune God within realms created in and through Christ as God’s Word. Discipleship is thus not simply following the example of Christ;

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.



it is formation within Christ, so that we become Christlike. And the context of this formation is the church in all its concrete locatedness and eschatological significance.”<sup>21</sup>

To emphasize the *s/ending* of Christian worship is not to reduce worship to moral formation or to treat the presence of God as a tool for our self-improvement. Rather, the centrifugal *end* of Christian worship is integral to the Story we rehearse in Christian worship; sending is internal to the logic of the practice. To emphasize that Christian action is the end or *telos* of Christian worship is not to instrumentalize worship but is rather to “get” the Story enacted in the drama of worship—the “true story of the whole world”<sup>22</sup> in which we are called to play our part as God’s image-bearers *by* cultivating creation. And integral to that story, and to the practice of Christian worship, is the sense that we are now enabled and empowered to take up this mission precisely because of the gift of the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17). At the same time, the Spirit meets us where we are as liturgical animals, as embodied agents, inviting us into that “suite” of disciplines and practices that are conduits of transformative, empowering grace. So even if there is a centrifugal *telos* to Christian worship and formation, there is also a regular centripetal invitation to recenter ourselves in the Story, to continually pursue and deepen our *incorporation*.<sup>23</sup> It’s not a matter of choosing between worship *or* mission; nor are we faced with the false dichotomy of church *or* world, cathedral *or* city. To the contrary, we worship *for* mission; we gather *for* sending; we center ourselves in the practices of the body of Christ *for the sake of* the world; we are reformed in the cathedral to undertake our image-bearing commission

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 184. As he puts it a little later, “we might characterize Christian acting as a *praxis* that participates in a divine *poiesis* that has soteriological and eschatological import” (201).

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> In a rich footnote, Boulton suggests that proposals by Willimon and Hauerwas differ from Calvin insofar as their “Anabaptist” conception of the church is more centripetal than centrifugal (*Life in God*, 219n.8). I think he’s right to feel a difference here; I would only caution that even the centrifugal *telos* requires persistent centripetal gathering *for* formation. In other words, centrifugal mission is only possible to the extent that we are centripetally recentered in Christ through Word, sacrament, and that repertoire of formative Christian practices. For the sake of Geneva, one might say, the saints needed to regularly gather in St. Pierre’s cathedral.

to reform the city.<sup>24</sup> So it is precisely an expansive sense of mission that requires formation. It is the missional telos of Christian *action* that requires us to be intentional about the formative power of Christian practices.

This dynamic interplay between formation and action, worship and mission, is wonderfully illustrated in Boulton's lucid, provocative account of Calvin's vision for Geneva. At the heart of Calvin's vision for Reform was the sanctification of ordinary life. This generated a vision for reforming not only the church but also the city.<sup>25</sup> Not only should worship be re-ordered and renewed, all of cultural life should reflect God's designs and intentions. God is not only Lord of the soul but also the body, the Ruler of not just heaven but also earth. The Gospel is good news not just as a rescue plan for embattled souls but as a word from the Creator that he is redeeming *all* things (Col. 1:15-20). The grace of God has ripple effects not just in the church but also the world, which is precisely why our *sending* is integral to the story. And so we get something of the "activism" that is often associated with the Calvinist tradition, seeking to claim every square inch for Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly then, Calvin articulates a critique of monasticism, that medieval institution that epitomizes the opposite sensibility: elitist withdrawal from the messiness and domesticity of ordinary life. However, as Boulton so carefully points out, what Calvin rejects in monasticism is *not* their commitment to formative practices and regular observance of spiritual

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<sup>24</sup> There are a host of knotty questions and issues here regarding Christian engagement with the "politics" of the earthly city that I will address in detail in volume 3, *Embodying the Kingdom: Reforming Public Theology*.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the social implications of this, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 211-233, with further consideration in *idem.*, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 77-84. I will discuss this in more detail in *Haunting Immanence: Reading Charles Taylor in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> For a classic summary of this vision of the Reformation as unleashing "world-formative" Christianity, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

disciplines—*rituals* that we might tend to think of as “Catholic.”<sup>27</sup> What he rejects is the elitism and separatism of monasticism, not the “rituals” associated with it. So Calvin “storms the monastery” as it were, not to demolish the disciplines of the community but to *liberate* these formative practices from their separatist captivity. “For Calvin,” Boulton observes, “monastics are mistaken only insofar as they make elite, difficult and rare what should be ordinary, accessible, and common in Christian communities: namely, whole human lives formed in and through the church’s distinctive repertoire of disciplines, from singing psalms to daily prayer to communing with Christ at the sacred supper.”<sup>28</sup> The upshot of Calvin’s critique of monasticism is not a de-ritualized, sermon-centric, intellectualist piety but rather a generalization of monastic practices—a celebration of the “monkhood of all believers.”<sup>29</sup> And what’s celebrated here is precisely the pedagogical wisdom implicit in the monastic disciplines which were really just an even more ancient heritage of the church’s wisdom about spiritual formation. The “suite” of disciplines practiced by the monastery were indebted to an ancient Christian *paideia*, “the church’s ancient disciplinary treasury.”<sup>30</sup> Immersion in the disciplines of this Christian *paideia* did not require withdrawal from the labor of the city to the isolation of the desert; but it would require remaking the city as a kind of desert: “Geneva as a whole would become a *magnum monasterium*”<sup>31</sup> insofar as the consistory in Geneva—at least if Calvin had his way!—would see to it that butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers would have ample opportunity to immerse themselves in these formative spiritual disciplines that were gifts of God for the people of God, conduits of grace given for their sanctification. As Boulton comments, “Calvin ultimately

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<sup>27</sup> I already noted Calvin’s affirmation of a “holy and lawful monasticism” in *Desiring the Kingdom*, 209n.118.

<sup>28</sup> Boulton, *Life in God*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

sought to expand the sanctuary not only out to the walls of the church’s worship space, but also beyond them, all the way out to the Genevan city walls—or better, out to the limits of a Christian disciple’s life and work wherever she may go, and in that sense out to the limits of creation.”<sup>32</sup> Calvin’s concern was that these practices be accessible and practicable for Christians in *all* vocations.<sup>33</sup> This is because they could only carry out their missional vocations in every sphere of culture insofar as they were adequately formed and shaped by the Spirit of God. And for Calvin—as for ancient Christian faith—the way to “put on” the virtues of Christ (Col. 3:12-15) was to be immersed in the practices of prayer and worship (Col. 3:16-17). The worship practices and spiritual disciplines of the church were the “paideutic repertoire” needed to form agents who could carry out their mission and vocation in and for the world.

Again, note the interplay of the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics here: Calvin’s vision of reforming is clearly creational in its scope. We are called to participate in the cosmic redemption by which Christ is redeeming all things, which is why every nook and cranny of the city *matters*—and hence all sorts of cultural labor can be taken up as expressions of the *missio Dei*. However, undertaking that cultural labor “to the glory of God” (Col. 3:17)—in a way that is rightly ordered—requires that we regularly discipline our habits and desires to God’s desires for his creation. That requires that we regularly immerse ourselves in that repertoire of practices and disciplines that recenter us in Christ. And while Calvin rejects monastic withdrawal and Anabaptist “alternative societies,” he still emphasizes a fundamental *antithesis* here. It is precisely because “the conventional everyday life of his time” was “deeply at odds with the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. The latter qualification is important if we are to avoid concerns about a “theonomist” project. Again, I will take up these questions in volume 3.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Calvin proposed a daily prayer cycle, “in effect a version of the divine office designed to be practicable to all Christians” (*ibid.*, 39); he also advocated more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper for the sake of Christian formation (40-42).

needs of Christian piety”<sup>34</sup> that Calvin saw the need for countermeasures: regular, persistent opportunities to be immersed in counterformative Christian disciplines that would counter the formative power of other disciplines, other liturgies. So while Calvin does not advocate a retreat from “the world” to the desert, he still emphasizes the set-apart-ness of the Christian life. As Boulton so well summarizes it:

for Calvin, Christian life does involve being set apart, not via a geographical, social retreat to a monastic campus, but rather via a moral, existential brand of practical withdrawal from “the world” and “the depravity of disposition.” That is, Calvin envisions a reformed way of life robustly engaged in ordinary affairs that is nevertheless unconformed to their prevailing patterns and protocols, in effect a *dispositional deflection* from the world while remaining ensconced within it.<sup>35</sup>

Here, then, is the heart of matter: We gather to be sent, and we are sent to do—to undertake Christian action that participates in the *missio Dei*. “Mission,” then, is just shorthand to describe what it is for Christians to pursue their vocations to the glory of God and in ways that are oriented to the *shalom* of the kingdom. But as I emphasize in *Desiring the Kingdom* (and even more so in *Imagining the Kingdom*), our action flows from our *dispositions*, our *habitus*, our nonconscious passional orientation to the world. Which is precisely why any Christian emphasis on mission and vocation and culture-making has to be rooted in a more fundamental concern with “dispositional deflection.” If the church is a centrifuge, sending out image-bearers to take up their commission in God’s good-but-broken world, it must also be a community of practice that centripetally gathers for dispositional reformation. And other missional institutions—such as Christian schools, colleges, and universities—will also need to engage in such dispositional deflection. In sum, any missional, formative Christian institution that is bent on sending out *actors*—agents of reformation and renewal—will need to attend to the reformation of our *habitus*. John Calvin invites us to consider whether such a vision doesn’t

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, emphasis added.

require an appreciation for “monkish” Christianity. Protestantism, on this account, is not the demolition of Catholic Christianity, but rather its expansion and democratization.

### **Conclusion: Implications**

I have briefly considered Calvin’s critical affirmation of monastic formation as a case of his “Catholic” faith. My real interest is to prime us to overcome our sense of the disjunction between being Protestant *or* Catholic; rather, I think it is important to see that being Reformed is a way of being Catholic, a distinctive accent within Catholic Christianity.

But what difference would it make for Reformed Christians to understand themselves as “Catholic?” Let me briefly suggest just a few implications:

- Embracing Reformed catholicity is an important antidote to our modern default of chronological snobbery. It invites us to what Robert Webber described as an “ancient-future” faith. You might say it introduces a kind of Burkean humility to our tradition: we won’t be so inclined to think we’re smarter than the ancient doctors of the church. (What we might call our “functional Zwinglianism” offers little anchor for resisting the spirit of the age.) It might prime us to appreciate that the wells that inform institutions like Calvin College & Seminary are older than 1898, older than 1857, even older than the 16<sup>th</sup>-century. (I’ll wait to float my proposal for renaming it Augustine College.)
- If being Reformed is a way of being Catholic, we should find new friends in the wider body of Christ. Indeed, I already see this happening in professional theology: commitments to orthodox, Catholic, confessional Christianity redraw old borders (a kind of theological redistricting!). The Protestant/Catholic divide is less important than those

differences of orientation between so-called “progressives” and those committed to a “confessional” understanding of the theological project. This is why I have much more in common with Catholics at Duke Divinity School or Marquette University than I do with liberal Presbyterians at Louisville Seminary. It’s why Calvinists can be devoted readers of *First Things*, why someone like Fr. Richard John Neuhaus could affirm the importance of the Reformation Commentary on Scripture, and why someone named (Hans) Boersma could emerge as an international authority on Henri de Lubac and *le nouvelle théologie*.

- Embracing a Reformed “catholic” identity should be a catalyst to recover the Reformers’ concern with ecclesiology.<sup>36</sup> In some ways, I think this is exactly the impetus behind the college’s new Congregational & Ministry Studies department—the exploration of a “liberal arts *ecclesiology*.” The upshot is countercultural: let us now praise institutions in this nondenominational age.
- Finally, embracing a Reformed Catholicism will help us appreciate the centrality and gift of our catholic liturgical inheritance. That there is a “logic” to Christian worship that is the accrued wisdom of the body of Christ, led by the Spirit, shared in common by “catholic” Christians. That liturgical heritage is not a foreign import; it is *ours*. These rituals are the gifts of God, for the people of God. They are the tangible means by which our bodies are recruited, by the Spirit, to believe in the holy catholic church.

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<sup>36</sup> I’m still mulling over the implications of James R. Rogers’ provocative blogpost, “The Definition of ‘Evangelical,’” at *First Things* (September 25, 2012: <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/09/the-definition-of-‘evangelical’>) in which he points out that most churches categorized as “evangelical” would consider paedobaptist denominations like the CRC and LCMS to be “mainline.” As he notes, “I have more than once overheard a group of earnest young evangelicals puzzling over Missouri Synod Lutherans, ‘They worship like Catholics and they baptize babies, but they also seem to believe the Gospel!’”