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VESTIGES OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY PROTESTANT REFORMATIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY: A STUDY OF EARLY LUTHERAN, REFORMED, AND RADICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

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The writers of the NT universally acknowledge that the primary purpose for the church's existence is to proclaim the salvation of humanity in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself spelled out this purpose in the Great Commission of Matt 28:18–20, and the writers of the NT emphatically confirmed it (1 Cor 1:23, 2 Cor 5:18–20, Phil 1:12–18, 1 Tim 2:5–6, 1 Pet 2:9). The secondary purpose of the church is to maintain and nurture the spiritual lives of believers through gathering together (Heb 10:25), mutual encouragement (1 Thess 5:11, Eph 4:12, 1 John 4:7–21), and practicing Christian virtues (1 Cor 13, 1 Pet 1:5–8). At the same time, however, the NT explicitly asserts that salvation is through Christ alone (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5–6).

During the postapostolic era, however, this carefully defined theological relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology morphed into an unbiblical entanglement between these two doctrines as the church gradually began to view itself as *altera Christi persona,* or as *Christus prolongatus,* that is perceiving itself an extension of Christ (or being one with Him in salvific function).[1] Originally conceived as the missionary instrument of Christ, the church gradually assumed His priestly function and identified itself as a sacrament of Christ.[2] While signs of this entanglement between soteriology and ecclesiology surfaced as early as the second century, particularly in the writings of Ignatius,

[1]Already anticipated by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, the understanding of the church as *altera Christi persona,* or *alter Christus,* was fully developed during the twentieth century and found its most recent expression in Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici corporis Christi* (Vatican City: Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1943), 218, 231. This concept of the church emphasizes the importance of sacraments, which carry a salvific function in the life of believers. Participation in the life of the church thus becomes necessary for salvation (Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* [New York: Image Books, 1978], 67, 72–76; Adriano Garuti, *The Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Dialogue* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 151; cf. Leonardo De Chirico, *Evangelical Theological Perpectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism* [Bern: Peter Lang, 2003], 250; Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 115; Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 236).

[2]Today, Catholic scholars openly appeal to the concept of the church as sacrament, an idea that found its penultimate expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and particularly in the constitutions on the church and liturgy, *Lumen gentium* and *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966], 14–96, 137–78).

Irenaeus, and Tertullian, its mature expression is found in the writings of Cyprian and Augustine. In the middle of the third century, Cyprian gave it the most unambiguous voicing when he exclaimed, "*quia salus extra ecclesiam non est,*" or "outside the church there is no salvation,"[3] an expression reiterated by popes and affirmed by church councils throughout later centuries.

As a result of this doctrinal entanglement, the middle ages were increasingly characterized by ecclesiastical abuses of various kinds, all of them related to the belief that the church dispensed salvation and that believers were dependent on the church for salvation. These abuses resulted in growing dissatisfaction, ultimately resulting in the rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church that is known as the Protestant Reformation. Thus, the Magisterial Reformation of the sixteenth century could be characterized as an attempt to disentangle soteriology from its unwholesome relationship with ecclesiology and to restore a biblical understanding of salvation.[4] This monumental endeavor found its classical expression in the famous five Protestant slogans of *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus,* and *soli Deo gloria,* all uniquely protesting the historical Catholic enmeshment between soteriology and ecclesiology; however, without diminishing the achievements of the Magisterial Reformation, one must ask whether the reformers were entirely successful in their attempt to mend the dysfunctional relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the doctrine of the church in early Protestantism and to examine how it related to the Protestant doctrine of salvation. In the process, we will explore the vestiges of the soteriologico-ecclesiological entanglement in the writings of the magisterial reformers, as well as to briefly address the response of the radical reformers. In order to grasp the ecclesiology of the Reformation and to draw appropriate conclusions, we must begin by briefly exploring its medieval background.

The Medieval Ecclesiology of the Catholic Church

Medieval Catholicism inherited an almost complete soteriologico-ecclesiological system from the Patristic era. Roman Catholic historian Bernard Otten acknowledges that the notion of salvation and the church that developed during the Patristic era was simply "taken over by the Scholastics of

[3]Cyprian, Epistle 72.21 (*ANF* 5:384). While Cyprian's dictum was originally formulated to counter the view that baptism and Eucharist were valid if performed by heretics, his pronouncement was eventually appropriated into Catholic medieval theology to emphasize inability of being saved outside of the Catholic communion. Recognizing the bluntness of the phrase and its negative connotations the post-Second Vatican Council Church has attempted to reformulate this teaching in a more positive manner. See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside of the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1992).

[4]This was the essence of Luther's 1520 treatise *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* (in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy F. Lull [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 267–313).

the Middle Ages, and then was handed down by them, practically in the same condition in which they had received it, to their successors who came after the Council of Trent."[5] Mostly devoid of the genius of Irenaeus, Cyprian, or Augustine, medieval thinking was thus devoted primarily to the development and defense of Patristic achievements. The only significant exception was the development in the realms of papal/episcopal supremacy and sacramental theology, a development that significantly strengthened the salvation-church amalgamation initiated by the Patristic thinkers, and that found its most obvious expression in the medieval overemphasis on the visibility of the church.

The Visible Church

While reflection on the spiritual or invisible aspect of ecclesial reality was not entirely neglected,[6] the medieval church was more often conceived primarily in terms of a visible, hierarchically-structured reality, organized around its bishop and his ministry.[7] Robert Bellarmine's classic definition of the church aptly captures the main tenets of medieval ecclesiological thinking. "The one and true Church," wrote Bellarmine, "is a group of men bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith and by the communion of the same sacraments, under the rule of the legitimate pastors, and especially of the vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff." For Bellarmine, the church was no different from other visible groupings of people, such as "the Roman people, or the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice."[8] The chief purpose of the church was to mediate salvation to individual members.[9] The most important precondition for this mediation was the presence of the episcopally ordained priesthood, which had to be historically linked to the NT church. The existence of such a ministry was understood to be central to the continuity of Christian faith and the safeguarding of the church's existence through the means of ruling, teaching, and the administration of the sacraments.[10] Thus,

[5]Bernard J. Otten, *A Manual of the History of Dogmas: The Development of Dogmas During the Middle Ages and After, 869–1907* (St. Louis: Herder Book, 1918), 214; cf. Richard McBrien, "Church," *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 314.

[6]Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 101–2. The distinction between the visible and invisible church (or church as a mixed body) appeared already in Augustine and had not been completely abandoned by medieval Catholicism (Augustine, *Doctr. Chr.* 3.31–34 [*NPNF* 2:568–71]).

[7]Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 113; Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1967), 34–38; cf. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 9–10.

[8]Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis,* vol. 2 (Naples: Guliano, 1875), 75, quoted in Avery Dulles, *The Dimensions of the Church* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1967), 4–5.

[9]Congar, *Lay People,* 113.

[10]Cooke, *Word and Sacraments,* 258–60.

the episcopally ordained ministry became indispensable, not only for the essence and identity of the church, but also for the salvation of its members.[11]

The medieval emphasis upon the church as a visible channel of salvation was accompanied and strengthened by the growth of papal authority, which reached its zenith during this period of history. Originally limited to the spiritual realm, the papal powers were now believed to extend to temporal jurisdiction over the entire world.[12] This became evident when the popes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries moved beyond the regular title of the "vicar of Peter" and began to refer to themselves as the "vicars of Christ." As such, the voice of the pope was identified with the voice of Christ. The pope, it was believed, acted in place of "the true God on earth," i.e., "as mediator between God and man, beneath God, but above man: less than God, but greater than man."[13] The authority of worldly rulers, thus, was derived from the pope's own authority which, in turn, was given to him by God. As such, the pope was considered to be the ruler of the world, not just the church, and was believed to have power to intervene in worldly affairs.[14]

It is not surprising that such developments continued to strengthen the patristic distinction between laity and clergy. Some medieval thinkers pushed this to the extreme, promoting the concept of two different orders within society. This concept found its expression in the classic declaration *Duo sunt*

[11]Already in Cyprian we find statements such as, "Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if anyone be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church . . ." (Cyprian, Letter 68 [*ANF* 5:374–75]; cf. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 1045). In fact, medieval Catholic theology would go as far as identifying the church with its hierarchy. "The universal Church," one Catholic theologian asserted, "is virtually the Roman church which consists representatively in the cardinals, but virtually in the pope" (quoted in Ronald Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953], 41).

[12]The height of papal authority occurred in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, beginning with the reign of Innocent III (1198–1216) and ending with that of Boniface VIII (1294–1303). The popes of this era claimed authority over both the church and the state. This was clearly expressed in 1302, when, confronted with numerous threats to his authority, Boniface VIII issued a bull, *Unam sanctam*, in which both the doctrinal and the temporal powers of the bishop of Rome were strongly asserted and the unity of the Church under the rule of the Roman pontiff was emphasized (J. Derek Holmes and Bernard W. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church* [New York: Paulist, 1984], 100–102).

[13]*Quanto personam* (*Decretales* 1.7.3) quoted in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, c.1198–c.1300*, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 118; cf. Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 207.

[14]This state of affairs, however, was significantly challenged by the growth of nationalism during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* [New York: HarperCollins, 1994], 627).

genera Christianorum (there are two types of Christians), i.e., those who concern themselves with the sacred and those whose concern it is not.[15]

Sacramental Theology

While the organizational aspects of the Catholic Church were certainly fine-tuned soteriologically, this organization was even more evident in the area of sacramental theology. Through various medieval controversies, sacramental theology was developed, refined and, by the time the scholastic era ended, presented as the bulwark against any new theological innovations.[16] It was during medieval times that the sacraments received their final and authoritative definition and their number was limited to seven.[17] Aided by the newly rediscovered Aristotelian philosophy, medieval theologians were able to work out the mechanism of sacramental efficacy, i.e., to explain how the sacraments convey grace upon the recipients. The consecratory words of a duly ordained priest and the idea of *ex opere operato*[18] assured that the sacraments fulfilled their promise to those who were properly baptized into the Catholic Church.[19] Thus, like the presence of an episcopally ordained ministry, the sacraments were considered to be absolutely necessary for salvation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that medieval theologians saw the church as the divinely appointed instrument of peace on earth, necessary for human

[15]Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, the Ideal of the Imitation of Christ, the Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 294; cf. Congar, *Lay People*, 13.

[16]For a detailed description of some of these controversies, see, for example, Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 2:119–23.

[17]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)* vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 210.

[18]Literally, "on account of the work which is done." This simply means that the sacraments convey God's grace by the sheer act of their performance. This phrase indicated that the conferral of grace depended upon the act itself, rather than on the merits of either the administering priest or the recipient. The presence of faith on the part of the believer was helpful but not necessary. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 28; cf. Bernhart Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 152.

[19]*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 2004), 292. In his study on sacraments Joseph Pohle states that "the justification of the sinner . . . is ordinarily not a purely internal and invisible process or series of acts, but requires the instrumentality of external, visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ, which either confer grace or augment it. Such visible means of grace are called Sacraments" (*The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, 4 vols. [St. Louis: Herder, 1942], 1:1; cf. Cooke, *Word and Sacraments*, 147, 258).

beings if they were to prepare for heaven.[20] In the words of Cyprian, Catholics saw the church as the divine "ark of Noah,"[21] or *societas perfecta,* as it became known during the medieval era,[22] outside of which there was no possibility of forgiveness of sins, no true sacraments, and, in short, no possibility of salvation.[23] This exclusive identification of the visible church with the kingdom of God made the spiritual life of believers completely dependent upon the mediation of the church. Separating oneself, or being excommunicated,[24] from this one true visible church on earth, thus, was a development of catastrophic proportions, as it automatically meant exclusion from salvation.[25]

The emphasis on visibility, as well as the exclusive identification of the kingdom of God with Roman Catholicism, played an important role during late medieval times when Catholic church leadership faced challenges against its authority, instigated by various schismatic movements as well as many new ideas flooding the European intellectual arena during the Renaissance.[26] Despite such challenges, however, Catholic Christianity emerged from the Middle Ages possessing a fine-tuned soteriologico-ecclesiological system. This system was further refined and confirmed during the Council of Trent and continued virtually unchallenged until the Second Vatican Council. This background forms the immediate context within which Luther initiated the sixteenth century Reformation and established the main tenets of his ecclesiology.

[20]Ian McNeill, "Attitudes to Authority in the Medieval Centuries," in *Problems of Authority*, ed. John M. Todd (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962), 159.

[21]Cyprian, *Unit. Eccl.*, 6 (*ANF* 5:423).

[22]Widely used by nineteenth century popes, the notion of the church as a "perfect society" was developed by the Counter-Reformation theologian Robert Bellarmine, but its origin can be traced to Aquinas (Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* [New York: Paulist, 2004], 248).

[23]Cyprian, Epistle 72.21 (*ANF* 5:384).

[24]The medieval term "excommunication" (Lat. *excommunicare*, "to put out of a community") meant that individuals under sanction were not allowed to receive the sacraments, such as the Eucharist, effectively ending the possibility of their salvation.

[25]For the medieval believers, this co-dependent soteriologico-ecclesiological relationship offered some concrete advantages. First, according to Avery Dulles, the church, like a mother nourishing her child at her breast, was structured in such a manner that it provided believers with everything they needed for their earthly survival. Second, through the doctrine of apostolic succession, the church provided believers with an assurance that they belonged to the true church of God on earth that stood in clear historical continuity with NT Christianity. Finally, and most importantly, through the ministry of the church's officers, and provided they did not abandon "the boat of Peter," believers received an assurance of entry into the heavenly realms (*Models of the Church* [New York: Doubleday, 1978], 46–48).

[26]Cooke, 124, 136; cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 146–50.

The Lutheran Reformation

It is indubitable that a challenge to the soteriological conventions of medieval Catholicism was at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation.[27] Since medieval soteriology had a symbiotic relationship with ecclesiology, however, the inevitable challenge to medieval ecclesiology had to follow. The quest for Luther's views on the doctrine of the church, however, is complicated by several factors. First, it is generally acknowledged that, unlike John Calvin, Luther was not a systematician and never created a theologically-systematic work.[28] Second, his ecclesiological views were often defined in the heat of controversy and tended to change over time.[29] Finally, being a medieval man and an unwilling revolutionary, Luther was not particularly interested, at least initially, in providing Christianity with a new ecclesiological vision.[30] Being an unwilling revolutionary, he was hesitant to entertain a notion of a permanent schism within Christendom and, only reluctantly, gave up his hope for reunification.[31] Thus, his early years as a Protestant reformer were dedicated to fighting the obvious soteriological abuses perpetrated by medieval Catholicism. However, once it became apparent that Catholicism would resist his ideas, he was forced to not only reflect on the nature and identity of God's church, but also to address the question of where to find the true church of God.[32]

The Visible and Invisible Church

One of the earliest works in which Luther addressed a number of these issues was the tractate *On the Papacy in Rome* (1520), written under the threat of excommunication. Influenced by his predestinarian thinking,[33] and in

[27]Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208; cf. Otto W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 318.

[28]Roger Olsen, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 379; cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 174–75.

[29]Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 175.

[30]Ibid., 177–88; cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 200–201; Heick, 315–16, 318.

[31]Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 201; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism, Its History, Its Beliefs, Its Future* (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 53; cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 201. Still in the late 1520s, Luther was able to write, "I contend that in the papacy there is true Christianity, even the right kind of Christianity . . . . The Christendom that now is under the papacy is truly the body of Christ and a member of it . . . . So we are still under the papacy and therefrom have received our Christian treasures" (Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958], 40:232).

[32]Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 178.

[33]Luther's emphasis on the invisible church as the true or "essential" Christendom dovetails with his belief in double predestination, a doctrine that he inherited from

a thoroughly Augustinian style, in it Luther posits the existence of the oft-mentioned distinction between the "two Christendoms."[34] "The first, which is natural, basic, essential, real and true, we shall call 'spiritual, internal Christendom.' The second, which is manmade and external, we shall call 'physical, external Christendom.'" This true or "essential Christendom" is not visible to the human eye because only God knows to whom it belongs.[35] On the other hand, Luther believed that there is also another church, the visible one. Luther's purpose was not to juxtapose two separate "churches," as opponents of the Reformation sometimes interpreted,[36] but to pose a challenge to medieval thinking, which identified, and gave divine sanction to, the kingdom of God with the visible forms of the hierarchical church.[37] To this, Luther emphatically asserted that the institutional church of his days was too corrupt to be identified with the kingdom of God and that "there is not a single letter in Holy Scripture saying that such a church . . . is instituted by

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Augustine. While it is not widely known, Luther was just as staunchly predestinarian as John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli (Harry Buis, *Historic Protestantism and Predestination* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958], 2, 48). For Luther on predestination, see Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1957); cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 846; Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 388; Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28. Influenced by Philip Melanchthon, Luther's successor, later Lutheranism rejected the predestinarian doctrines as incompatible with the gospel.

[34]No serious work dealing with Luther's ecclesiology ever leaves out discussion on the "two churches." This distinction was first enunciated by Augustine and developed or "rediscovered" by Luther (see Augustine *Doctr. Chr.* 3:31–34 [*NPNF* 2:568–71]; cf. Wallace M. Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 53). It must be further noted that Luther disliked the word "church" in preference to such terms as "community," "congregation," or "assembly" (Eric W. Gritsch, "Introduction to Volume 39," in *Luther's Works*, ed. idem [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970], 39:xiii).

[35]Luther, *On the Papacy in Rome*, in *Luther's Works*, 39:70.

[36]G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1976), 37. This was indeed the charge that was at times leveled at Luther and the other reformers by Catholic apologists such as Robert Bellarmine (cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 565).

[37]This identification can be traced directly to Augustine, who presumably was the first to identify the Catholic Church and its institutional structures with the Kingdom of God. He also linked the millennium with the period of history between the first and the second coming of Christ (Augustine *Civ.* 20.6–8 [*NPNF* 2:425–30]; cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Millenial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 49; cf. Carl E. Braaten, "The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed, Peter Crafts Hodgson and Robert Harlen King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 336.

God,"[38] as the Catholic Church of his day could not possibly "give a correct view of the reality of Christ's Church."[39] Through his distinction between the visible and invisible church, Luther intended to highlight the fact that Christians need to find a firmer foundation for their faith and salvation than a mere trust in an earthly institution.[40] Luther's allegations constituted a significant threat to the Catholic Church of the sixteenth century, as they implied that the institutional church, with its papacy, forms of worship, and episcopally ordained ministry, was a human invention that had little to do with early Christianity and did not guarantee its continued existence.[41] Despite his criticism of the sixteenth century, institutional church, Luther nevertheless recognized the need for an objectively real presence of the visible church on earth.[42] Yet having argued that the true visible church of God was not found in the structures of Catholicism of his day, Luther was ultimately forced to define it himself and search for it somewhere outside the confines of medieval Catholicism. What, then, is "church," according to Luther, and where can it be found?

What is Church?

In his *Schmalkald Articles* of 1537, Luther penned these famous words: "God to be praised, a seven-year-old knows what the church is: holy believers and 'little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.'"[43] While this definition appears simple and uncomplicated, there was nothing simple about Luther's ecclesiology. Heinrich Bornkamm observes that "theological research has always viewed this seven-year-old child with some envy," for, in search of a balanced ecclesiology and amidst bruising sixteenth century ecclesiological battles, Luther had often taken his positions to one or the other extreme and his views changed over time.[44] Certain consistent patterns of Luther's ecclesiological thinking, however, can be identified.

While rejecting the prevalent institutionalism of his day, Luther had no desire to follow in the footsteps of his more radical followers who rejected any form of organization.[45] Throughout the years following his excommunication,

[38]Luther, *On the Papacy,* in *Luther's Works,* 39:70.

[39]Berkouwer, 37; cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology,* 202.

[40]Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 283–85; cf. Berkouwer, 38.

[41]Luther, *On the Papacy,* in *Luther's Works,* 39:70.

[42]Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 288.

[43]Luther, *The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 32.

[44]Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Word and Thought* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 134.

[45]For a meticulous account of Luther's struggle with the Radicals, or Enthusiasts as he preferred to call them, see Harry Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1974); cf. McGrath, *Reformation Thought,* 197; cf.

and knowing only these two alternatives, Luther struggled to find an appropriate definition of the true church on earth that would fit in with the rest of his theology and especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Thus, rather than defining the church in institutional terms,[46] Luther tended to consistently refer to the true church of God as the "congregation," "spiritual assembly," "assembly," "a communion of saints," "a holy community," or "fellowship."[47] Thus, the church was no longer considered the depository of God's blessings, but rather, as a gathering of people who had *already* been blessed and justified by God's grace. This was a momentous paradigm shift that constituted one of the main points of difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism right up until the Second Vatican Council in the twentieth century.[48] But how was such an assembly to be recognized? Where did it exist?

Where is Church?

Already, early in his years as a reformer and in his tractate of 1520, *On the Papacy in Rome*, Luther argued that the presence of the true church of God could be discerned by three marks: the preaching of the gospel, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. These, he wrote, "are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally."[49] The Augsburg Confession of 1530, written by Melanchthon but approved by Luther, struck a similar note when it stated that, "The Church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly."[50] Already in

Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997), 1:139–40.

[46]Althaus notes that "an institutional concern is . . . missing from Luther's description of the 'church,'" (*Theology of Martin Luther*, 288).

[47]Gritsch, "Introduction to Church and Ministry," 39:xiii; Luther, *The Large Catechism* (Adelaide: Lutheran, 1983), 120–22; cf. idem, *Sermons on the Catechism in Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1961), 212. Such wording is also found in one of the earliest Lutheran definitions of the church found in the *Augsburg Confession*. Written by Melanchthon, it was certainly written with Luther's consent. Gritsch points out that Luther disliked the word "church" (*Kirche*) because of its institutional connotations. Gritsch, 39:xiii; cf. Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 287–89, 294–95.

[48]The bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council recognized the deficiencies of defining the church in terms of pure institutionalism and have produced a revolutionary document that, in ecumenical fashion, blends traditional Catholic ecclesiology with Protestant thinking on the church. See "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen gentium," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 24–72; also Avery Dulles, "The Church," in ibid., 10.

[49]Luther, *On the Papacy*, in *Luther's Works*, 39:75.

[50]*Augsburg Confession* VII (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 89; cf. Luther, *Sermons on the Catechism*, 212–13, where Luther defines the church as the gathering where the

these statements we find the fundamental characteristics that mark Luther's entire ecclesiology, namely, the primacy of the Gospel, or the Word of God, and the importance of the sacraments, which are to be "rightly" administered. These statements, of course, raise the question of what "rightly" means, or who has the authority to decide what is the "right" teaching of the Gospel? As it will be shown, these issues ultimately posed a significant challenge to Luther's early idealistic ecclesiology.

As the prospect of reconciliation grew increasingly remote, Luther was impelled to further develop and refine his ecclesiology. In two of his treatises, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539) and *Against Hanswurst* (1541),[51] he expanded on the *notae ecclesiae* found in his earlier writings. As in the early years, the Word of God continued to hold special preeminence. "First," Luther wrote, "the holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the holy word of God. . . . Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number is very small."[52] Consequently, the true church exists only where the Scripture holds a primary place, "for since the church owes its birth to the Word, [and] is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word."[53] This, he contended, was no longer true of the Catholicism of his day, where the emphasis upon human additions replaced the primacy of the Scripture.[54] Second, God's holy people are recognized by possessing the sacrament of baptism, "wherever it is taught, believed, and administered according to Christ's ordinance."[55] Finally, as the third mark, Luther wrote that God's people may be recognized "by the holy sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ's institution."[56]

While freshly packaged and unorthodox, Luther's marks of the true church, thus far, were not particularly controversial. The issues of scriptural primacy and the importance and number of sacraments and their administration were,

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gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered.

[51]Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 41:143–67 and Luther, *Against Hanswurst*, in *Luther's Works*, 41:194–98.

[52]Luther, *On the Councils*, in *Luther's Works* 41:148, 150.

[53]Luther, *Concerning the Ministry*, in *Luther's Works* 40:37.

[54]Thus Luther writes: "Some possess the word in its complete purity, others do not" (Luther, *On the Councils*, in *Luther's Works*, 41:148–49).

[55]Ibid., 151.

[56]Ibid., 152.

after all, part of medieval theological discussions.[57] What, by the standards of the sixteenth century, made Luther's theology most controversial was the fourth mark, namely, "the power of the keys." This mark of the visible church flowed from Luther's most important principle that put him on a collision course with Rome right from the outset of his ministry, "the priesthood of all believers."[58] Building his argument on Matt 18:15–20 and 1 Pet 2:9, Luther maintained that all true Christians share a common priesthood and are called to use the "power of the keys," which represents the ministry of reproving, forgiveness, reconciliation, and salvation. "These keys," Luther proclaimed, "are the pope's, as little as baptism, the sacrament, and the word of God are, for they belong to the people of Christ and are called 'the church's keys,' not 'the pope's keys.'"[59] There are no Scriptural reasons, he argued, why the "keys" should belong only to the hierarchy of the church. It is the entire church that has been called to the gospel ministry. There is nothing ontologically different between "layman and priest, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but for the sake of status . . . all are truly priests, bishops, and popes."[60] Clearly, such views rendered redundant the entire hierarchical and sacramental structures of medieval Catholicism that separated clergy from laity, and these formed the major reason for the Catholic grievance against Luther. Did that mean, however, that the church was supposed to be devoid of duly constituted ministry?

The Leadership of the Church

Despite his enthusiastic endorsement of the idea of the "priesthood of all believers," Luther clearly perceived a need for ordained ministry in the church and, in his later years, provided guidance for selection of church leadership. He believed that for the church to function according to Christ's design, the church's membership must include those who would "publicly and privately give, administer and use . . . [the] holy possessions [viz. the Word, baptism, sacrament of the altar, keys] on behalf of, and in the name of, the church."[61] Luther's injunction, however, goes beyond the desire for order in the church,

[57]See, for example, Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 54–65, where he discusses the antecedents to the Lutheran principle of *Sola Scriptura* in the medieval tradition.

[58]This principle is also built upon some strands of medieval thought where it was emphasized that all the baptized believers share in the priestly office of Jesus Christ (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 3:373).

[59]Luther, *On the Councils*, in *Luther's Works* 41:153–54. In another place, he proclaimed that "the keys of the pope are not keys but husks and shells of the keys" (Luther, *The Keys*, in *Luther's Works* 40:349).

[60]Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 44:129.

[61]Luther, *On the Councils*, in *Luther's Works* 41:154.

as argued by radicals.[62] The ministry was necessary, as it existed *jure divino*, and, as such, it functioned as another mark by which the true church of God might be recognized in the world.[63] Rejecting the Catholic emphasis upon the power and authority of the office, however, Luther grounded his theology of ministry in the Pauline principle of spiritual endowment. The office of ministry must be given to an adequately gifted man, and he alone should be allowed to fulfill the ministerial functions. The others, Luther noted, "should be content with this arrangement and agree to it."[64]

Sacramental Theology and the Necessity of the Church for Salvation

Notwithstanding his critique of the prevalent ecclesiology of his day, in some ways Luther struggled to move beyond the conventions of Catholic medievalism. A careful reading of his writings dealing with sacramental theology reveals a surprising, if not disconcerting, tension between his emphasis on justification by faith alone and the role the sacraments play in the life of a believer.

While faith always remained central to Luther's understanding of salvation, he also repeatedly underscored the necessity of the sacraments in the life of the believer,[65] as they—the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist[66]—represented the promises of God, mediated through material objects of everyday use.[67] Ideally, the Word of God and its promises should come to believers through Jesus Christ, the Scripture, and the preaching of the gospel.[68] However, because of human imperfection and slowness in accepting God's promises, preaching needed to be supplemented by the external signs of God's favor, whose purpose was to enhance the believer's trust in God. Thus, while closely related to faith, sacraments functioned as "another form

[62]James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 41.

[63]Luther, *On the Councils*, in *Luther's Works*, 41:154.

[64]Ibid. Within the same context, Luther categorically excludes everyone except "competent males," as only such can fill the office of ministry according to Paul's injunction.

[65]Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, in *Luther's Works*, 40:252–53; E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 448.

[66]Early on in his ministry, Luther challenged much of Roman Catholic sacramental theology and concluded that, on the basis of the Scripture, there were only two sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist. The church, he believed, had no authority to institute sacraments for which there was no explicit command in the Scriptures (Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959], 36:92–94).

[67]Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther's Works*, 36:63–66; cf. Darius Jankiewicz, "Sacramental Theology and Ecclesiastical Authority," *AUSS* 42.2 (2004): 375–78.

[68]Justo L. González, *Christian Thought*, 3:64.

in which the Word was heard in faith."[69] So, while on the one hand, Luther strongly affirmed the idea that salvation was through faith alone and did not depend on human works, on the other hand, he insisted that the sacraments were still necessary for salvation.[70]

With his Catholic opponents, Luther agreed that a person becomes a Christian and enters the church through baptism.[71] While baptism was unbreakably bound with faith, the centerpiece of Luther's soteriology was the rite of baptism, administered only once, which effected the new birth and regeneration.[72] "Truly, good works," Luther wrote, "can only be performed by those who have been born anew, namely, born anew through Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is active, making new persons of them."[73] It follows that the water used in baptism was not just ordinary water, "such as a cow may drink," but "godly, blessed, fruitful water full of grace."[74] Once "the Holy Spirit is added to it, we have more than mere water. It becomes a veritable bath of rejuvenation, a living bath which washes and purges man of sin and death, which cleanses him of all sin."[75] Thus, Luther had no qualms connecting baptism with salvation when he wrote: "But we must so consider it as to exercise our faith in it and have no doubt whatever that, once we have been baptized, we are saved."[76] Faith did not necessarily need to precede baptism. Instead, baptism was considered the initiative of God, who bestowed his faith

[69]Ibid., 64.

[70]Luther, *The Large Catechism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 168–75; cf. idem, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 221–22, where Luther insisted that "bptism is a thing of great force and efficacy;" cf. Schwiebert, *Luther,* 448.

[71]Luther, *Large Catechism* (Adelaide: Lutheran, 1983), 181.

[72]Luther, *The Gospel of St. John*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 22:283, 286. Eeva Martiiainen, "Baptism," in *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment,* ed. Olli-Pekka Vainio (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 102. For Luther, Baptism was also the means through which the Holy Trinity "recreated the natural man's soul" (Schwiebert, *Luther,* 448). It is clear that this was also one of the ideas inherited by Luther from Augustine (Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981], 143).

[73]Luther, *St. John*, in *Luther's Works,* 22:286.

[74]Luther quoted in Schwiebert, *Luther,* 448–49.

[75]Luther, *St. John*, in *Luther's Works,* 22:283.

[76]Luther, *Babylonian Captivity,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 36:59. This does not mean that Luther connected baptism with salvation in an absolute way. As D. Patrick Ramsey wrote, "while it [baptism] is not absolutely necessary, it is ordinarily necessary for salvation" ("*Sola Fide* Compromised? Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Baptism," *Them* 34.2 [July 2009], 189). Under extreme circumstance Luther would allow for salvation without baptism, but never apart from faith (Luther, *Genesis,* in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan [St. Louis: Concordia, 1961], 3:274).

upon those who believed.[77] This explains why Luther opposed the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism.[78] Denial of such a baptism on the grounds that an infant did not have faith would amount to the negation of the power of baptism, and to the affirmation that the sacrament depended on the human ability to receive it, thereby implying a new form of justification by works.[79]

With regard to the Lord's Supper, it is well-documented that Luther rejected the Catholic teachings that considered it a sacrifice. He also rejected the medieval notion of transubstantiation and the doctrine of priestly mediation (sacerdotalism).[80] At the same time, he strongly affirmed the traditional Catholic idea that Christ's body and blood are physically present in the elements. Consequently, he proposed a theory of the simultaneous presence of both the bread and wine and the body of Christ. This view became known as consubstantiation, although Luther himself never used this term.[81] Luther maintained that, through partaking in the Eucharist, a believer received forgiveness of sins and was given strength to lead a Christian life. "For here in the sacrament [the Eucharist]," Luther wrote in his Catechism, "you receive forgiveness of sins from Christ's own lips. Forgiveness includes and implies God's favour and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, and power against death, the devil, and every trouble."[82] "For Luther," notes Charles Hodge, "eating and drinking [is] essential for salvation."[83]

The sacraments, therefore, were very important for Luther's ecclesiology, as they conveyed God's grace and were constitutive of the church.[84] Through

[77]Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, in *Luther's Works* 40:252, 258.

[78]Ibid., 252–53.

[79]Ibid., 252–54.

[80]Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 283–86; cf. Olson, *Christian Theology*, 391–94, and Schwiebert, *Luther*, 449.

[81]Luther used an analogy of a heated iron to illustrate the mystery of the presence of Christ at the Eucharist. When iron is placed in a fire and heated, it glows, and in the glowing iron, both the iron and heat are present (*Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther's Works*, 36:32, 35). The analogy of sacraments being like glowing iron was apparently first used by Origen and later reiterated by Augustine (Jayson Scott Galler, "Logic and Argumentation in *The Book of Concord*" [PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2007], 178).

[82]Luther, *Large Catechism*, 201.

[83]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 3:645. Hodge states that on this point Lutherans and the Reformed are in agreement. Reformed sacramental theology will be explored in detail below.

[84]This was clearly understood by Luther's radical critics. Caspar Schwenckfeld, for example, wrote: "I do not know how to agree with Luther [when] he writes that the revered sacrament imparts life, grace, and salvation, yea, that it is a fountain of life and salvation" ("An Answer to Luther's Malediction," in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George Huntston Williams [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957], 170).

baptism, people were received into the kingdom of God and their faith was initiated; through the Eucharist, their faith was maintained. Thus, it appears that Luther did not intend for the *sola* in *sola fide* to exclude the Word of God as it comes to believers through the sacraments. "Properly understood," writes Jaroslav Pelikan, "the sacraments were an epitome of the very gospel; without them no one could be a Christian."[85]

Taking into consideration Luther's sacramental theology, it is not surprising to find in him echoes of Cyprian's *quia salus extra ecclesiam non est.*[86] One of the most explicit statements on the matter is found in his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper,* where he writes, "Outside this Christian Church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation."[87] Thus, for Luther, it appears that being part of the true church of God on earth was not optional for a child of God; rather, it was part of the grand design of God,[88] hence, Luther did not hesitate to speak of the "Mother Church [who is] a true housemother and the bride of Christ."[89] In another place he affirms that "he who wants to find Christ, must first find the church. . . . The church is not wood and stone, but the assembly of people who believe in Christ. With this church, one should be connected and see how the people believe, live, and teach. They certainly have Christ in their midst, *for outside the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.*"[90] Therefore, despite his emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, on justification by faith, and on individual relationship with God, Luther's acceptance of Augustinian predestination ultimately led him to embrace a sacramental theology

[85]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 178.

[86]As noted above, this expression can be directly traced to Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), who also tied it with his sacramental theology. This view was eventually incorporated into Catholic theology.

[87]Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. Robert H. Fisher (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 37:368. The fact that this statement shows up in Luther's treatise on the Lord's Supper further accentuates Luther's position on sacraments viewed as the means of grace and salvation. Further elaboration on Luther's understanding of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* may be found in his *Large Catechism* where he makes a close connection between being part of the church and forgiveness of sins (122–23).

[88]Luther, *Sermon at Torgau Castle Church,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 51:337. It is clear that Luther's sacramental theology appears to be strongly undergirded by his predestinarian beliefs. On this issue, he is clearly in agreement with Augustine.

[89]Luther, *Commentary on Psalm 68,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 13:14.

[90]Luther, "The Gospel for the Early Christmas Service," in *Luther's Works,* ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 52:39–40 (emphasis mine); cf. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology,* 280; Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther,* 291.

that exhibited the same elements of medieval soteriologico-ecclesiological enmeshment. Thus, it is not surprising that Luther continued to insist on the need for an institutional church[91] that would mediate individuals' access to the Word of God and regulate the spiritual and moral lives of believers.

Relationship Between State and Church

Luther's views on the relationship between church and state must at least be touched on, as here also, Luther had difficulty breaking away from medieval Catholicism. A short description such as this one cannot possibly do justice to the complex social, religious, and political milieu of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, something must be said of the dilemma faced by Luther. As a consequence of his rejection of the Catholic vision of the church, Luther found himself facing a vacuum of authority. Sixteenth century Roman Catholicism had clearly defined lines of magisterial, juridical, and coercive authority, with the state often serving as an executive arm of the church. In line with his *sola fide* principle, Luther was forced to challenge the medieval soteriological status quo, thus, he precipitated the shift of authority from the church to the individual. As a consequence, he could no longer rely on the church's magisterium, with its canon law, for protection and guidance in ecclesiastical matters. The politico-religious situation at the time, and the lack of appropriate ecclesiastical structures that could deal with various matters relating to these issues, impelled Luther to search for a new locus of authority. To account for this, he, in his later years, endowed the Christian ruler[92] with a significant measure of authority that related to ecclesiastical matters. As with the ministry, he grounded such action in the principle of spiritual gifting, where the Holy Spirit calls upon various people to serve the Church in whatever capacity they are able, according to their gifting.[93] While the authority of the Christian ruler was not to be absolute and was to be exercised only in an emergency, there seems to be no doubt that, in Lutheranism, the Christian ruler assumed much of the authority that previously belonged to the pope and bishops. This development prompted a careful student of Protestantism, J. S. Whale, to conclude that:

> It seems that circumstances proved too strong for the author of *The Liberty of the Christian Man*, even during his own lifetime. Not only Melanchthon and later German Lutherans, but the great Reformer himself began to swim with the political current which was everywhere bringing the absolute

[91]Alister E. McGrath notes, that while Luther and the other Reformers "rejected the definition of the church offered by Catholicism, . . . the magisterial Reformation found itself defending a more 'institutional' definition of the church against their radical opponents" (*Reformation Thought*, 198).

[92]During the sixteenth century, it was still reasonable to assume that kings, princes, and magistrates were committed Christians.

[93]Luther, *Temporal Authority*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 45:95–100; cf. Eric G. Jay, *The Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 167–69.

> ruler to port, and to acquiesce in the political opportunism of his princely protectors. The prophet who began by proclaiming the priesthood of all believers at last found himself virtually exalting the temporal prince as *summus episcopus* or as *membrum praecipuum ecclesiae*.[94]

It may be concluded that, while Luther challenged the medieval soteriologo-ecclesiological conventions and proclaimed justification as *sola gratia et fides*, much of Catholic medieval theology with its sacramental emphases persisted in his teaching. With this in mind, we now turn to an examination of the Reformed tradition's soteriological/ecclesiological system of thought.

The Reformed Tradition

To tell the difference between the Lutheran and the Swiss Reformation, it became customary to refer to the latter as the Reformed tradition. While this branch of the Reformation traces its beginnings to the teachings of Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), and his successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), it eventually became most closely associated with the Genevan reformer, John Calvin (1509–1564).[95] The two branches of the sixteenth century Reformation share much of their theological heritage. All of their leaders committed themselves to the principal teachings of Lutheranism, the Reformation's *soli*: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia et fides, solus Christus,* and *soli Deo gloria* as well as the foundational principle of Protestantism: the priesthood of all believers.[96] Therefore, the differences between the German and the Reformed branches of the Magisterial Reformation were not necessarily of a theological nature, but rather in the different emphases they placed upon various aspects of their theology. Consequently, it is sometimes argued that while Luther placed a great emphasis upon the doctrine of justification by faith, John Calvin and his followers tended to emphasize the sovereignty of God.[97] Our exploration of Reformed ecclesiology begins with a brief comparison between the ecclesiologies of Luther and Calvin.

[94]*The Protestant Tradition: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 303–4; cf. Jay, *The Church,* 169.

[95]The minor differences between Zwingli and Calvin's approach to ecclesiology, especially in the area of sacramental theology, will be referred to later in the paper; however, following the lead of the majority of Reformation scholars, I will conflate the Reformed Tradition with Calvinism, as it was Calvin who eventually became the principal exponent of this branch of the Reformation (cf. Urban, *Christian Thought,* 338).

[96]G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 302–3.

[97]Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 257. It must be emphasized that Luther was as predestinarian in his views as was Calvin; however, because the sovereignty of God and predestination are not as visible in Luther's soteriology as they are in Calvin's, the doctrine of unconditional predestination has almost exclusively become associated with Calvin.

Luther Versus Calvin

There are many areas in which Calvin's ecclesiology resembles that of Luther.[98] In agreement with Luther, Calvin made a distinction between the visible and invisible church,[99] defining the church as a "communion of saints,"[100] and enumerating similar marks of the church.[101] He was also in agreement with Luther when he wrote that the visible church of God can be certainly found "wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution."[102] In tune with sixteenth century mentality, he also concurred with Luther, and Zwingli, that the civil government, or the magistrates, must be supportive of Christian endeavors and, at times, play a decisive role in ecclesiastical affairs.[103] It is from this belief that the Reformation has received its adjective "magisterial."

While there was a significant amount of agreement between Calvin and Luther on the essentials of the Reformation's theology, there were some notable differences. Most importantly, Calvin clearly perceived the threat of individualism that caused so much distress to Luther and sought to provide a theological and practical remedy. In his greatest work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Calvin provided the Protestant world with the first systematic explanation of the Reformation's doctrine. On a practical level, he sought to make Geneva a place where Protestant theology could be expressed in the daily life of its citizens. "The greatest difference," asserts Bainton, "lay in the activism of Calvinism."[104] It is not surprising, therefore, that a significant section of the *Institutes* (Book IV) is entirely devoted to ecclesiology.[105]

[98]Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), 237–38.

[99]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* iv.i.7, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:1021.

[100]Ibid., iv.i.3 (2:1014–16).

[101]Ibid., iv.i.9 (2:1023–34).

[102]Ibid., (2:1023).

[103]Thanks to Calvin's work, the state-church relationship in the territories influenced by the Reformed churches was much more fine-tuned than in the Lutheran territories. On Calvin and his views regarding the state-church relationship, see the last chapter of the *Institutes* (iv.xx [2:1485–1521]).

[104]Bainton, *The Reformation,* 111.

[105]It must be recognized that during Calvin's life, the *Institutes* went through five editions, each adding to the previous one as he attempted to respond to the various controversies that arose during his time in Geneva. Thus there seems to be a distinction between the more idealistic Calvin of the first, 1536, edition of the *Institutes* and much more realistic Calvin of the subsequent editions. Whale further points out, for example, that while the first edition focuses on the invisible church, the subsequent editions tend to emphasize the visible church and its marks (*Protestant Tradition,* 146–58).

Predestination and the Visible Church

Not being a systematic theologian, Luther largely managed to sidestep the need for grounding his ecclesiology in the doctrine of God. Calvin, however, had no such luxury. Accordingly, in attempting to systematize the teachings of Protestantism, he was forced to come to terms with his view of God and only then to begin exploring ecclesiology. Thus, he situated his doctrine of the church firmly within a framework of predestination.[106] It could be argued, however, that placing the doctrine of the church within the overarching scheme of God's eternal decrees would render the visible church redundant, its structures and ministry unnecessary to those whose fate was sealed by the *a priori* decision of God.[107] Calvin solved the problem by insisting that the existence of the visible church has been decreed by God to be the way through which the elect are saved. It was within the bounds of the visible church that the faith of the believers was to be born, nurtured, and sanctified.[108] Hence, while the membership of the visible church of God on earth consisted of both the elect and the reprobate, for the elect, this membership was a necessity.[109]

The Church as the Means of Salvation

Calvin's predestinarian ecclesiology allowed him to unabashedly, and almost in a Roman Catholic fashion, designate the church as the means of salvation, as indeed the title itself of Book IV of the *Institutes* indicates: "The External Means of Aids by Which God Invites us into the Society of Christ and Holds us Therein." It is perhaps for this reason that Calvin is at times referred to as the "Cyprian of the Reformation," for he considered the visible church as the place where the predestination of believers is completed.[110] He even used language that was reminiscent of Cyprian when he referred to the church as "mother." "For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until . . . we become like angels. . . . Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for forgiveness of sins or any salvation. . . . It is always disastrous to leave the church."[111] He proposed that the elect were then gathered in the church, and were not to abandon it, believing that they were a part of the invisible church. Their salvation depended upon their membership in the visible communion. If they did leave the church, it was a

[106]Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 48–49.

[107]Whale, 145.

[108]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.i.4–7 (2:1016–22).

[109]Ibid., iv.i.5 (2:1017–18).

[110]Donald K. McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87.

[111]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.i.4 (2:1016).

sure indication that they were not elected in the first place. Clearly, for Calvin, there was no salvation outside of the church.[112]

Having, in Cyprianic fashion, affirmed the necessity of the visible church at the very outset, Calvin wasted no more time discussing the invisible church and spent the rest of Book IV focusing on the various aspects of the church's visibility. "The invisible church is always in the background," notes González, "for the visible is only a sign and servant of the invisible. But when Calvin says 'church,' . . . he means the visible company on earth."[113]

Ecclesiastical Order and Ministry

Having firmly grounded the visible church's existence in the eternal decrees of God, Calvin proceeded to provide fledgling Protestantism with structure and an ecclesiastical order. In this he moved beyond Luther, as the latter was more hesitant in nominating a specific church order for the church. Calvin insisted that the ecclesiastical structure he was setting forth in the *Institutes* was not any humanly devised order, but one he believed was directly laid down in the NT and, thus, directly instituted by God.[114] While, for Luther, the order of the church depended on historical circumstances, Calvin understood it as belonging to the very nature of the church.[115] Church organization, therefore, was made to be a matter of doctrine.

Calvin found Biblical support for the model of the church which he championed—the Pauline metaphor of the church as the "Body of Christ,"—where Christ functions as the Head of the organization in which each member fulfills its God-given task.[116] However, he asserted that the church, as an organization, does not function according to God's design, unless it is bound "together with a knot that he [Christ] foresaw would be the strongest means of keeping unity."[117] For Calvin, this bond of unity was the ministry of the church. Functioning as the agents of the church's unity, the ministers "represent [Christ's] person" and distribute "his gifts to the church," the end of their ministry being the renewal of the church.[118] As pastors govern the church, Calvin insisted "God himself appears in our midst, and, as Author of this order, would have men recognize him as present in his institution."[119]

[112]According to the analysis provided by the Reformed scholar Louis Berkhof, at the center of Calvin's ecclesiology was the belief that "the blessings of salvation can be obtained only through the Church, since God in dispensing His grace binds Himself absolutely to the ordained means, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments" (*Christian Doctrines,* 238).

[113]González, *Christian Thought,* 3:162.

[114]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.iii.1 (2:1053).

[115]McGrath, *Reformation Thought,* 210.

[116]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.iii.1 (2:1054).

[117]Ibid., iv.iii.1 (2:1054).

[118]Ibid., iv.iii.2 (2:1055).

[119]Ibid., iv.i.5 (2:1017).

Basing his argument on Ephesians 4, Calvin proceeded to list those who were to preside over the church: the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The first three, termed as extraordinary, exercised their ministry at the beginning of the Christian church and continue to be raised up under special circumstances. The last two, however, hold "an ordinary office in the church" that "the church can never go without." The difference between pastors and teachers was that the former (also referred to as presbyters, elders, or bishops)[120] were charged with discipline, administration of the sacraments, and the ministry of reconciliation. These functions were to be fulfilled by them alone. The teachers were to limit themselves to the task of interpreting the Scripture.[121] A separate order, referred to as the deacons, was entrusted with the care of the poor. These were not, however, allowed to perform functions reserved for the ministry.

At their ordination, the pastors received "the power of the keys," which enabled them to serve their congregation in a manner that would "strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness."[122] This was in contrast to Luther, who taught that the "keys" were given to the entire congregation. Reading through the sections of the *Institutes* dealing with the ministry in the church gives one a clear impression that Calvin placed the ordained ministry in the church on a higher, almost distinct, level than the remainder of the congregation. "No ecclesiology," notes Geddes MacGregor, "has ever more exalted the ministry, under Christ, than does Calvin's."[123]

Calvin also provided instructions for the choice and ordination of ministers. He asserted that before they are allowed by the congregation to exercise their ministry, they must show evidence of having both an "outer and inner call." They must be selected from among those who "are of sound doctrine and of holy life" by other ordained ministers, "for no one can duly perform this ministry unless he has been called by God."[124] They must first carefully examine the candidates and present them to the people for acceptance.[125] Therefore, in Calvin's writings, as in Luther's, we see the reversal of the Catholic model of ministry and a move towards democracy, although clearly not, as Kenneth Latourette points out, towards equalitarianism.[126] Women, Calvin vigorously argued, are prohibited from fulfilling the ministerial functions

[120]Ibid., iv.iii.8 (2:1056–60).

[121]Ibid., iv.iii.4 (2:1056–57); cf. iv.i.22 (2:1035), iv.iii.6 (2:1058–59).

[122]Ibid., iv.i.22 (2:1035).

[123]MacGregor, 57. The phrase "under Christ" is significant here and this distinguishes Calvin from the Roman Catholic conception of Christian ministry (cf. Jay, *The Church*, 174).

[124]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.iii.13 (2:1064).

[125]Ibid., iv.iii.15 (2:1066).

[126]Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1953), 757.

and their service for the church is strictly limited to caring for the poor.[127] Once approved, the specially gifted male candidates for ministry were to be ordained through the laying on of hands by previously ordained ministers.[128] It is noteworthy that, in contrast to medieval Catholicism, Calvin insisted that the ordination binds the pastor to the local church. This perhaps flows from Calvin's rejection of the Catholic teaching that regarded "church" as some kind of ontological "superstructure" embracing the whole world.[129]

Calvin may thus be recognized as the first Christian theologian to establish the representative model of church government, also known as government by presbytery. While the ministry of the church constituted a separate order within the membership of the church, its authority was derived from below, rather than from above, as in the Catholic model of ministry. Yet, in agreement with the Catholicism of his day, only the ministers were allowed to administer the sacraments of the church. And, like the ministry and order in the church, Calvin's sacramental theology was firmly placed within the framework of predestinarian ecclesiology.

Sacramental Theology of the Reformed Tradition

In his beliefs regarding the sacraments, Calvin found himself much in agreement with Luther. Like the latter, he rejected the Roman Catholic notion of the seven sacraments and narrowed their number to two: baptism and the Eucharist, as only these two found their origin with Christ. With Luther, he believed that sacraments were truly efficacious, although not in the Roman Catholic sense.[130] Rather than being channels of God's grace in the Catholic sense, they strengthened or augmented the faith of the participant.[131] Finally, he agreed with his German counterpart that correct preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments indicated Christ's presence. Wherever Christ was present, there His church was to be found as well.[132]

A perusal of the sacramental sections of the *Institutes*, which follow the sections on ministry and church order, reveals an interesting tension in Calvin's sacramental theology. On the one hand, he described the sacraments as tokens, or signs, of belonging to God's elect as well as of His gracious favor on behalf of those who are decreed to be saved. By receiving them, the

[127]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.iii.9 (2:1061).

[128]Ibid., iv.iii.16 (2:1067).

[129]Ibid., iv.iii.7 (2:1059–60); González, *Christian Thought*, 3:164.

[130]Calvin strongly argued against "the error of a magical conception of the sacraments" (*Institutes* iv.xiv.14 [2:1289–90]).

[131]Ibid., iv.xiv.7–8 (2:1281–4). In the same volume, Calvin defines the term "sacrament" as an "outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith." Calvin added that his definition "does not differ in meaning from that of Augustine . . . but it better and more clearly explains the thing itself" (ibid., iv.xiv.1 [2:1277]).

[132]Ibid., iv.xiv.17 (2:1291–93).

elect were to be assured that God's promises regarding their election would be fulfilled.[133] On the other hand, Calvin stressed the efficacy of the sacraments and considered them as the genuine means of salvific grace. Thus he wrote: "God therefore truly executes whatever he promises and represents in signs."[134]

In accord with Luther, Calvin affirmed that baptism is more than simply a sign of forgiveness but actually offers God's power of forgiveness to save those who are baptized. This does not mean, however, that all who receive baptism are going to be saved, but rather that those who are elected must be baptized. If they were not, or refused to be, baptized, this was a sure sign of their reprobate status.[135] Consistent with his view on baptism as the means of grace, Calvin claimed that while in some way baptism's efficacy requires the presence of faith in the believer,[136] this is not always so because the primary purpose of baptism (and the sacraments in general) is to arouse, nourish, and confirm our faith. "Through the rite of baptism," he wrote, "the Lord effectively performs what it symbolizes."[137] Hence, it is self-evident that Calvin would find himself in agreement with Luther on infant baptism.[138] Baptism, he claimed, needed only be performed once. In its secondary function, baptism was seen as the sign of "initiation by which we are received into the society of the church."[139] Like circumcision, baptism thus confirmed that the infant belonged to the "household of God"[140] and allowed for further growth in faith.[141]

Regarding the Lord's Supper, the only true disagreement between Calvin and Luther was in the area of Christ's bodily presence. Calvin believed that Christ's body was in heaven and therefore could not simultaneously be present during the Lord's Supper. He spoke of a spiritual or dynamic, (as it is sometimes described) presence[142] of Christ during the Eucharistic meal. In marked contrast to Luther's position, Calvin wrote: "The body of Christ is [not] given us under the bread or with the bread, because it is not a substantial

[133]As such, to a large extent, he would argue against the traditional Catholic doctrine, *ex opere operato* (see ibid., iv.xiv.14 [2:1289–90])

[134]Ibid., iv.xiv.17 (2:1293); cf. iv.xiv.16–17 (2:1291–94), iv.xv.1–2 (2:1303–304), iv.xv.15 (2:1315).

[135]Ibid., iv.xv.1–3 (2:1303–6).

[136]Ibid., iv.xv.15 (2:1315).

[137]Ibid., iv.xv.14 (2:1314). Thus we find Calvin in strong agreement with Augustine's views on baptismal regeneration (ibid., iv.xv.16 [2:1316]).

[138]Ibid., iv.xvi.1 (2:1324–25).

[139]Ibid., iv.xv.1 (2:1303).

[140]Ibid., iv.xvi.4–5 (2:1327–28).

[141]In another context, Calvin says of baptism: "The Holy Sprit . . . is he who brings the graces of God with him, gives a place for the sacraments among us, and makes them bear fruit" (ibid., iv.xiv.17 (2:1293).

[142]The phrase "dynamic presence" in reference to Calvin's doctrine of Christ's presence in the Eucharist was first used by the Princetonian theologian Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, 3:628).

union of corruptible food with the flesh of Christ that is denoted, but sacramental conjunction."[143] To illustrate his ideas, Calvin used the analogy of the sun. As the sun was far removed from earth and yet its warmth and light were present on earth, so Christ was spiritually, or dynamically, present at the Eucharist.[144] The radiance of the Spirit communicated the communion of Christ's flesh and blood; thus, the partakers were spiritually nourished by the bread and wine. Through the sacrament, the Holy Spirit brought them into a closer relationship with Christ, the head of the church, and the source of spiritual vitality.[145] In this way, participation in the Eucharist sealed the love of Christ for believers and assured them of the reality of salvation.[146]

To further elucidate Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper, his views must briefly be compared to those of Huldrych Zwingli's, as the position of the former represented the middle ground between Luther and Zürich's reformer. In agreement with Luther and Calvin, Zwingli viewed the sacraments as signs of belonging to the Christian community.[147] The main purpose of the sacraments was, above all, to show that a person belonged to the community of faith.[148] Baptism, like circumcision in the OT, was a public declaration that an infant, (or an adult) was now a member of the church. Likewise, participating in the Lord's Supper symbolized a continuing loyalty to the Christian community.[149] Zwingli categorically refuted the Catholic, as well as Lutheran, understanding of how the sacraments worked. He explained his views with the help of a military analogy. Just as soldiers revealed their allegiance by wearing the appropriate insignia, so Christians demonstrated their commitment to the church publicly, first by baptism, and subsequently by participating in the Eucharist. Like Calvin, Zwingli rejected Luther's views regarding the real presence of Christ in the elements, but he would most likely have found himself in disagreement with Calvin's teachings on dynamic presence.[150] "Until the last day," he vigorously argued,

[143]John Calvin, "Best Method of Obtaining Concord," in *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 576.

[144]Calvin, *Institutes* iv.xvii.12 (2:1373).

[145]Ibid., iv.xiv.12 (2:1287).

[146]Ibid., iv.xiv.5 (2:1280); cf. iv.xiv.20 (2:1296–7).

[147]"Zwingli," *ODCC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 1784.

[148]Thus, in the treatise, *Of Baptism*, Zwingli defines the term "sacrament" as "a covenant sign or pledge" that signifies a person's belonging to the church (Huldreich Zwingli, "Of Baptism," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953], 131).

[149]Ibid., 131, 148.

[150]By the time Calvin produced the first edition of the *Institutes*, Zwingli was no longer alive, having died in the Second Kappel War in 1531. Calvin, on the other hand, was strongly critical of Zwingli and his views regarding the Eucharist (see

"Christ cannot be anywhere but at the right hand of God the Father."[151] For Zwingli, the Eucharist was no more than what it meant: "the remembrance of that deliverance by which he [Christ] redeemed the whole world . . . that we might never forget . . . but that we might publicly attest it with praise and thanksgiving."[152] Thus, the Eucharist was a memorial of the historical event that led to the establishment of the Christian church.[153] Notwithstanding his "memorialism" and a clear departure from Luther's views on the real presence, Zwingli appears to be in agreement with Luther and Calvin with regard to sacramental efficacy. Like Luther and Calvin, he believed, especially with regard to the Lord's Supper, that physical eating might still be a means of grace through which the believer's "soul [is] being strengthened by the faith which [he] attests in the tokens." Therefore, in Zwingli's theology, the sacraments "augment faith and are an aid to it." "This is particularly true," he writes, "of the Supper."[154] It appears, therefore, that Calvin misunderstood Zwingli when he strongly criticized the latter in a letter to a friend, where he referred to Zwingli's memorialism as "wrong and pernicious."[155] Against Luther and Zwingli, he wrote:

> Now here we ought to guard against two faults. First, we should not, by too little regard for the signs [Zwingli's position], divorce them from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached. Secondly, we should not, by extolling them immoderately [Luther's position], seem to obscure somewhat the mysteries themselves.[156]

For Calvin, mere "head knowledge" was most assuredly insufficient to communicate eternal life into the lives of the believers and nourish their faith. Through participation in the rite, the believer's soul was "quickened to spiritual life."[157] It is clear, however, that only those who are predestined to eternal life will experience such a "quickening."

As evidenced above, while the magisterial reformers insisted on the Protestant teaching *sola gratia et fides*, they were unable to entirely break away from their medieval soteriologo-ecclesiological enmeshment, mainly due to their emphasis on unconditional predestination. Having proclaimed salvation as God's gift to the elect alone, the theologians of the Reformed tradition placed all other aspects of Christian life, such as their sacramental theology, under the same theological umbrella. As a result, and in concert with Luther, they proclaimed the sacramental necessity of visible ecclesiastical structures.

Calvin, *Institutes* iv.xv.1 [2:1304] and Calvin's letter to André Zebedee, May 19, 1539, in *Calvin's Letters*, 4 vols., ed., Jules Bonnet [New York: Franklin, 1973], 4:402).

[151]Zwingli, *On the Lord's Supper*, in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 216.

[152]Ibid., 234.

[153]Ibid., 235.

[154]Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 259, 263.

[155]Bonnet, 402.

[156]Calvin, *Institutes*, iv.xvii.5 (2:1364–65).

[157]Ibid., iv.xvii.5 (2:1365).

It was the leaders of the Radical Reformation who, seeking to complete the task of reforming the church, addressed this unbiblical understanding of the relationship between salvation and the church.

The Radical Reformation

In contrast to the magisterial branches of the Reformation, many sixteenth century radical reformers, though fiercely opposed by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, appear to have recognized the radical implications of the foundational Protestant principles and brought them to their ultimate conclusion. At the same time, most of them came to reject the magisterial reformers' teaching on unconditional predestination.[158] It does not come as a surprise, then, that their ecclesiology developed its own "radical" flavor, distinct from that of Catholicism as well as that of their magisterial contemporaries.

While the various groups that came under the umbrella of the Radical Reformation may have had different agendas, they all tended to agree that the success of the Reformation depended on a complete return to biblical Christianity. As such many argued that although the magisterial reformers had emphasized the role of Scripture in the life of the church, they had not sufficiently freed themselves from Catholic thinking, as evidenced, for example, in their sacramental theology and their continual support of the alliance between church and state.[159] "A true Church cannot exist where the

[158]For example, Balthasar Hubmaier wrote about double predestination: "That would be a perfidious God who would invite all people to a supper, offer his mercy to everyone with exalted earnestness, and would yet not want them to come . . . That would be a false God who would say with the mouth, 'Come here,' but would think secretly in the heart, 'Stay there'" (Balthasar Hubmaier, "Freedom of the Will, II," in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism,* ed. H. Wane Pipkin and John H. Yoder [Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1989], 465–66). Similarly, Menno Simons spoke of the magisterial reformers's teaching on predestination as "an abomination above all abominations" (Menno Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons,* trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger [Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1984], 760). Other leaders of the Anabaptist movement, such as Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and Sebastian Frank, also rejected unconditional predestination (Stephen Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity* [Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2005], 143; K. R. Hagenbach, *A Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* [New York: Sheldon, 1867], 271; González, *Christian Thought,* 3:91).

[159]Michael Novak, "The Free Churches and the Roman Church: The Conception of the Church in Anabaptism and in Roman Catholicism: Past and Present," *JES* 2 (1965): 429. While the various groups that were part of the Radical Reformation had this one goal in mind—complete return to biblical Christianity—they tended to differ on the methods in which this goal was to be achieved. While the more conservative Anabaptist groups were satisfied with freedom to worship, others, such as the leaders of the Münster Rebellion, embraced a much more radical agenda, which called for the establishment of a theocratic state. For a concise overview of the Anabaptist movement and its agenda, see Daniel Liechty, *Sabbatarianism in the Sixteenth Century: A Page*

secular rule and the Christian Church are blended together," they charged the magisterial reformers.[160] Radicals fiercely opposed such an alliance, which, they asserted, tended to curtail religious liberty by allowing the use of force to coerce doctrinal uniformity.[161] Salvation, they argued, in no way depended on church membership or assent to doctrinal formulations handed down from above. Thus, while some radical groups produced confessions of faith, such as the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527), for the most part they were "reluctant to issue writings of dogmatic content."[162]

The Nature of the Church

In relation to medieval Catholicism, the radicals tended to find themselves at the other ecclesiological extreme. Many of them believed that the visible church on earth was just an assembly of baptized and regenerated Christians who were allowed to interpret the Scripture according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. [163] The believers were certainly encouraged to gather together in bands, but the emphasis was upon an individual, unmediated relationship with Jesus Christ rather than on a sacramental association with a visible, organized body. All traces of church as *Christus prolongatus* thus vanish in Anabaptist ecclesiology. "The true church was a 'little flock' and had always been in the minority; yet because it was 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,' it was 'a pure and clean gathering, a holy church.'"[164] One could not be baptized into the church, as both Catholics and the magisterial reformers taught, but only accepted on the basis of certain qualifications. This did not mean another form of merit, but rather a willing submission "to the humbling concept of grace." Such humbling would certainly lead to an internal renewal of a believer. As a result, the church had a right to search

in the History of the Radical Reformation (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

[160]Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 37.

[161]Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959), 327; Bainton, 99–101. It is to be noted that prior to gaining the state's backing, the reformers also argued for freedom of religion according to the individual's conscience.

[162]Pelikan, *Reformation,* 314.

[163]Thus Sebastian Frank, a radical reformer who was admired by many Anabaptist groups, strongly asserted: "I believe that the outward Church of Christ, including all its gifts and sacraments, because of the breaking in and laying waste by antichrist right after the death of the Apostles, went up into heaven, and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth. I am thus quite certain that for fourteen hundred years now there has existed no gathered Church nor any sacrament" (Sebastian Frank, quoted in Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 400; cf. F. H. Littell, *The Origin of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* [New York: Macmillan, 1964], 69, 86–87, 89, 95–98; cf. Verduin, *The Reformers,* 116.

[164]Pelikan, *Reformation,* 316.

for such signs of internal regeneration. "In this sense, a 'walk worthy of the calling' [was] a prerequisite for membership."[165] Such membership, however, in no way guaranteed salvation.

Local congregations could choose their ministers, who, while not receiving any remuneration, facilitated the celebration of communion and baptism, yet held no special authority other than that which was delegated to them by the congregation. The ministry of the church tended to be simply a matter of order and nothing else.[166] According to Littell, the Anabaptists believed that "in its prime Christianity had been a lay religion" and only later "there arose a swarm of professionals, who did not comprehend the democratic simplicity of Christian brethren. The rise of the hierarchy was itself a sign of the Fall.'"[167] The Anabaptist notion of the church went hand-in-hand with their views on the sacraments, an area in which they subjected the magisterial reformers' teachings to vigorous criticism.

Sacramental Theology

The Radical Reformation critique of the reformers' understanding of the sacraments represents a complete departure from the concept of the sacraments as the means of grace. The Anabaptists were critical of the magisterial reformers, asserting that although these reformers had emphasized the *sola fide* principle, they had not sufficiently freed themselves from Catholic thinking by continuing to hold to the concept of sacramental efficacy, thus relying, in one way or another, on external works. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, argued that just as good works did not secure salvation but were a result of faith, so the Lord's Supper did not constitute the means of grace, but, rather, signified the grace already given.[168] Likewise, contrary to Luther's assertion that "baptism effects forgiveness of sins," the Anabaptists believed that baptism simply bore testimony to the already changed life.[169] Along this line, Menno Simmons wrote: "For we are not regenerated because we are baptized, as

[165]Verduin, *The Reformers,* 118. Arguing against the Anabaptist position that the church consisted only of regenerated Christians, Calvin vigorously argued that "we must think so highly of the Word and the Sacrament that wherever we see them we are to conclude without a doubt that the Church is there, regardless of how much vice and evil there may be in the corporate life of men." Quoted in Verduin, *The Reformers,* 124.

[166]Littell, *Sectarian Protestantism,* 91–93, 99; cf. González, *Christian Thought,* vol. 3:90–91; Pelikan, *Reformation,* 313–22.

[167]Littell, *Sectarian Protestantism,* 69.

[168]Thus, Conrad Grebel could write regarding the Lord's Supper: "Although it is only bread, *if faith and brotherly love precede,* it should be taken with joy. If the Lord's Supper is practiced in this way in the community, it should show us that we are truly one bread and one body, and true brothers of one another, and that we are God's" (Conrad Grebel, "Letter to Thomas Müntzer," in *The Radical Reformation,* ed. Michael G. Baylor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 39 [emphasis mine]; cf. Littell, *Sectarian Protestantism,* 68).

[169]Menno Simons, "Christian Baptism," in *The Complete Writings,* 244.

may be perceived in the infants who have been baptized; but we are baptized because we are regenerated by faith in God's Word. For regeneration is not the result of baptism, but baptism the result of regeneration."[170] For such reasons, they disagreed with Catholicism and the magisterial Reformation in that the church could not and must not hold any ecclesiastical control over the means of grace. This conviction was at the center of their rejection of infant baptism, as salvation could only be obtained through a personal relationship with Christ. According to the Anabaptists, the value of the sacraments lay simply in accepting, by faith, the benefits of Jesus's death. The sacraments were no more effective than other forms of proclamation, such as a sermon or a personal witness.[171] Consequently, Anabaptist theology, for the most part, constitutes a complete departure from the institutional ecclesiology prevalent in the sixteenth century, as well as a first serious theological attempt to disentangle the unhealthy soteriologico-ecclesiological enmeshment that permeated both the Catholic and magisterial reformers' theology.[172]

Conclusion

The Reformation of the sixteenth century proved to be a watershed in the history of the Christian church. On the one hand, by its insistence on *sola Scriptura, sola gratia et fides, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria* and a return to biblical Christianity, it offered a formidable challenge to the soteriologico-ecclesiological enmeshment of the time, ushered in a new era in biblical studies, and eventually led to a new understanding of the church, including its ordinances and government.

On the other hand, a careful study of the reformers' writings reveals that while the magisterial reformers repudiated many of the Catholic ways of understanding and conducting church, and while they attempted to harmonize ecclesiastical structures and sacramental theology with the foundational principles of Protestantism, they were unable, in many ways, to break away from medieval modes of thinking. Notwithstanding their rejection of the Catholic emphasis on the visible church, they struggled to free themselves from reliance on institutional structures for salvation. In the end, as

[170]Ibid., 264–65.

[171]Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 317–19; It must also be noted that, in agreement with Zwingli, the Anabaptists strongly reacted against the real presence of the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper. "For them, to worship the physical bread and wine was the most awful idolatry and materialization of the spiritual truth of the presence of Christ in the midst of believers assembled. The doctrine of the real presence was blasphemy, wherein Christ was martyred again" (Littell, *Sectarian Protestantism*, 69, 100).

[172]The rejection of such an ecclesiology, however, often resulted in the elevation of "the private judgment of the individual . . . above the corporate judgment of the church." This, in turn, resulted in many factions among the radical reformers. Thus the implications of *Sola Scriptura* and the "priesthood of all believers" appear to have been fully realized in the radical Reformation (McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 182).

documented above, both Calvin and Luther strongly affirmed the necessity of the visible church for the salvation of humanity. In His wisdom, they believed, God had decreed the church to be the means of grace, without which, no one could be saved. As a result, while a person could be in the church and unsaved, the option of not being in the church was not open to those who were elect by God's decree. Abandonment of the church was a sure sign that a person had not been among the elect. While each of the Reformation's *soli* represented some form of reaction against medieval Catholic soteriology, the fact that Reformational soteriology developed within the context of Augustinian monergism resulted only in providing an alternative doctrinal foundation for the continuing soteriologico-ecclesiological entanglement.

The Radical Reformation challenged both medieval Catholicism and the magisterial reformers with a bold departure from the medieval ways of thinking about the church. Many radicals took the Protestant principles of *sola Scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers to their radical extremes and had little use for any form of institutional ecclesiology, be it Catholic or that taught by the magisterial reformers. The earthly church was no more than a grouping of likeminded individuals who gather together to study the Bible, pray, and evangelize. The soteriologico-ecclesiological enmeshment of the medieval ages was finally emended.