

Introduction

LIKE MANY FOLKS, I grew up in a hymn-singing church. At Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, we often sang “I Love to Tell the Story,” with its familiar refrain, “’Twill be my theme in glory, to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.” The hymn describes the story of Jesus as “old” but also ever new, inviting us to a continual performance of the gospel. How do we come to terms, though, with the fact that Christians have told this story differently from one another, often in ways that divide rather than unite? Some divisions have indeed secured the truth and vitality of the story: maintaining the divinity of Jesus, for example, over against the Arians’ version about Jesus as less than divine. If Jesus is not fully divine, Athanasius and others concluded, then the Son is not the One through whom God saves and recreates the world. In this instance, storytellers rightly discerned the difference between telling the “story differently and telling a different story.”¹

In the wake of the Reformation, however, Christians have accepted as normal telling different stories about Christ, the church, and the world. The result has been that Christians often tell their stories in opposition to one another. Some Baptists, for example, describe a key plot line by saying, “We are not a creedal people.” On this point, they tell a different story than Catholics and some other Protestants because of the belief that creeds stifle freedom.² Some Catholics, on the other hand, describe Catholicism

1. Barry Harvey describes the Christian drama as “an ongoing drama performed by a people who live in a wide variety of times and places.” Harvey adds, however, that we must attend “with all the critical tools at our disposal to the crucial difference . . . between telling a story differently and telling a different story” (*Another City*, 19). Harvey is quoting Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*.

2. For one example, Baptist historian and theologian Walter Shurden writes, “Sadly, tragically, Baptist denominations have a tendency to lose their way. They get waylaid with a dangerous case of historical amnesia. . . . They get dangerous because they move from a Christ-centered to a creed-centered faith. They get dangerous because they move from freedom for the individual to fear of the individual” (“Coalition for Baptist Principles”). While this is an emphasis amongst some modern Baptists, others have

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as a richly complex church in contrast to the simple Protestant churches down the street.³ To tell the story in this way is to contrast rich complexity with an often-benighted simplicity.

A deeper Christian conviction, however, calls the church to tell a shared story, one that enables Christians to look upon others—Protestant, Catholics, and Orthodox—as brothers and sisters in Christ. This calling is far more than learning to get along. It rests on the astounding conviction that God has created and continues to create *a people* (Israel and the church) to be Christ's body for the world, a light to enlighten all nations.⁴ This is not to deny that some might be better at telling and living the Christian story than others.⁵ One of the ways of living God's truth, however, is the humility to receive as well as give, seeing in even the im-

no objection to reciting the ancient creeds as hard-won summaries of the gospel, a view held by some earlier Baptists as well. See, for example, the work of contemporary Baptist theologians Stephen Harmon (*Toward Baptist Catholicity*) and Paul Fiddes (*Tracks and Traces*). Fiddes notes that "a model covenant service recently published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain includes the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople in its resources," and it urges Baptist readers to note that the creed is a "better vehicle than modern statements of faith for the making of covenant, because it sets out a story of salvation, not a set a principles." Fiddes adds that this Creed is "the great missionary story of the Triune God, beginning with the making of heaven and earth and ending with a new creation; it tells of the part played in the drama of creation and redemption by Father, Son and Spirit in the unity of the divine koinonia; it enables those who say the creed to be drawn anew into God's story, and so into God's own fellowship of life" (Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 217).

3. In *The Catholic Faith: An Introduction*, Larry Cunningham contrasts Catholic practice to that of the Baptists he knew growing up: "As a kid growing up in the deep south, I rather envied the simple church style of my overwhelmingly Baptist neighbors. They had a church, a preacher, a Bible, a few doctrines, two ordinances and a straightforward service: sing, pray, listen to the Bible readings and the preacher's sermon, and *go home*" (7; my emphasis). The difficulty for me with Cunningham's otherwise helpful introduction is that he feels the need to tell the Catholic story in a way that simplifies and thus distorts Baptist practice.

4. In saying this, I do not intend to suggest that Israel or Jews today are to be the body of Christ. They are, however, the original covenantal people that God called and continues to call into being, a people who carry the promise and covenant fulfilled in Messiah Jesus.

5. It is also the case that differences in storytelling can be complementary. The Second Vatican Council's "Degree on Ecumenism: *Unitatis Redintegratio*," states, for example, "In the study of revealed truth East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and confessing divine things. It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better. In such cases, these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting" (§17).

poverished Christian brother, sister, congregation, or denomination the light and presence of Christ. What Augustine says about himself applies to churches as well: “for I have been healed by the same doctor who has granted him the grace not to fall ill, or at least to fall ill less seriously.” Therefore, Augustine prays, “Let such a person love you just as much, or even more, on seeing that the same physician who rescued me from sinful diseases of such gravity has kept him immune.”⁶ Applied more broadly to the church, Augustine is describing how one Physician heals and preserves us all. Those “stronger” churches are sustained and healed by the same Savior who watches over the weak.

One of the ways that God heals the church is by providing saints from across time and place. God never leaves a congregation without at least one saint.⁷ The same concept applies to the church universal: God provides saints across time and space as gifts for the whole church. It is my conviction that these saints are potential sources of unity and of shared storytelling. As Geoffrey Wainwright states, “. . . a significant step towards ecclesial unity would be taken by the increased formal and mutual recognition of saints.”⁸ Such a statement rests upon the conviction that, as Pope John Paul II states in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (“May they be one”), our common heritage is “first and foremost this reality of holiness.”⁹ Such holiness is not about being better or more pure than others. In its scriptural sense, holiness has to do first of all with God setting a people or person aside for his purposes.

That holiness refers to a people means that the language of “saints” can describe all members of the church; the church, like Israel, is set aside to be God’s people for the sake of the world. Paul uses the language of “saints” to refer to all Christians in the early churches at Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and so forth. The disciples at Corinth, for example, are

6. Augustine, *Confessions*, 72.

7. I am indebted to Stanley Hauerwas for this point.

8. Wainwright, *Embracing Purpose*, 184. Wainwright acknowledges that recognition of the saints would necessarily involve questions about “canonization,” and this would become part of the dialogue about “the condition of the faithful departed in general.”

9. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, §84. John Paul II adds, “When we speak of a common heritage, we must acknowledge as part of it not only the institutions, rites, means of salvation and the traditions which all the communities have preserved and by which they have been shaped, but first and foremost this reality of holiness.” This reality of holiness refers to the saints that are not confined by particular ecclesial boundaries. As he notes, “This universal presence of the Saints is in fact a proof of the transcendent power of the Spirit.”

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“sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Cor 1:2, RSV). In the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess belief in “the communion of saints.” “Communion” indicates a *present* reality that is possible because the saints are not dead but alive in Christ. In this sense, “saints” refer to those often unnamed but faithful Christians who have kept the faith alive across generations.

“Saint” is also a term the church has used to describe those whom God has called in extraordinary ways—Saint Francis, for example. In my Baptist context, well-known saints include Lottie Moon (a missionary to China), Clarence Jordan (founder of Koinonia Farm), and Fannie Lou Hamer (African-American prophet for civil rights). Our saints represent our respective stories and histories, and might be unknown across ecclesial division. Even so, the great saints can be ecumenical luminaries, providing a way to move forward in our call to unity. It is my conviction that Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) stands out as a sixteenth-century luminary in this grand ecumenical parade.

If it is true that the saints are alive in Christ and that there is thus a shared communion, then it follows that the saints can continue to teach, preach, and prophesy in the present. It is therefore legitimate to ask of a particular saint, “How does she speak to the church today?” Just as the gospel enters into particular cultures and contexts in different tongues and ways, so also do saints expand the gospel so that it can be heard anew in different times. Luther's “justification by faith,” for example, was heard one way in the heated Reformation debates, but in quite another way during recent Roman Catholic-Lutheran efforts at reconciliation.¹⁰ Shifts and changes in context indicate that saints can continue to illumine the gospel in rich and creative ways. More fully stated, if it is true that holiness and sainthood are ultimately gifts from God, then God can continue to extend this gift across generations in the life of the church.

In this light, then, I examine how Teresa continues to be a gift to the church—the whole church—today. I particularly look at how Teresa's embodiment and understanding of the Word builds up a way of being church together. As I discuss especially in chapter 1, many today assume Teresa's mysticism or spirituality is about the individual subject. At its best, this interpretation fosters personal holiness. At its worse, it makes the church irrelevant to “spirituality” and personal growth. By contrast, I argue that the dwellings that Teresa narrates are not simply about the individual soul

10. Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration.”

but are rather about God's gift of unity to the church. I do not wish to deny that in other times and places Teresa could have been heard in a different key. If and when "church" seems an extrinsic reality disconnected from ordinary lives, then Teresa might well be read as advocating a personal spirituality, where "personal" is here understood as friendship with Christ and others. It is my conviction, however, that in our late modern time a subjective emphasis has often distorted Teresa's wisdom. Instead of revitalizing the church, it has made the church a mere stage prop for an individual's spiritual quest. Even more worrisome, a focus on "spirituality" divorced from church (or, more broadly, religion) makes it possible to accept division in the church as normal. Thus, late modernity has easily come to assume that church divides, while spirituality unites.¹¹

In what follows, I explore how Teresa *illuminates* God's Word in a way that aims for unity in the body of Christ. More particularly, I argue that Teresa perceives and narrates how key providential patterns, grounded in Scripture, give form to the church in ways that extend Christ's body in the world. This analysis is not primarily an exercise in Teresian scholarship, much less late medieval Catholicism. Others have written on these topics in helpful and insightful ways. My focus is rather on how Teresa as a doctor and saint of the Catholic Church offers healing for the whole body of Christ. In my view, Teresa is not only a Roman Catholic saint, though Spanish Catholicism no doubt deeply shaped her. Nor is Teresa bound by sixteenth-century customs and worldviews, though she is naturally a product of her time in many ways. As a luminary in the communion of saints, Teresa is a gift to the church universal.

On a personal note, as I have already indicated, I am a Baptist, the granddaughter of a Baptist minister who served small churches in Louisa County, Virginia, for some forty years. Both of us attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, my grandfather in the 1920s and I some sixty years later. My parents faithfully raised me in the ecclesial life of the Baptist church: Sunday school, church training, G.A.'s (Girls' Auxiliary), Bible studies, prayer meetings, youth council, youth choir, dinner on the grounds, retreats, mission trips, and hundreds of folks who loved, encouraged, and prayed for me. So the reader might legitimately wonder how it is I am writing about a Catholic saint from the sixteenth century, a medieval figure who gave much of her life to reforming Carmelite monasteries. If this were purely an academic enterprise, one could safely assume, "She's a professor and this is an area of specialty, for those who

11. Such a conviction drives the common sentiment, "I'm spiritual but not religious."

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are interested in this type of thing.” Such academic categorizing, however, does not provide an adequate frame of reference. The reason I am writing about Teresa is that, while I am Baptist, I identify myself as a Baptist within the church universal. Some refer to this as Baptist Catholicity.¹² What exactly this means is not fully clear, but at minimum it names the attempt to see oneself as a member of not only a particular congregation or denomination but also as living within and as part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. This means that I share a passion for the unity of the church, which I hope colors my understanding of our various ecclesial worlds. Baptist philosopher Douglas V. Henry states well a conviction I share: “Though we carry on as divided and denominated Christians, our scattered, tattered ecclesial communities depend upon a legacy of Christian unity that antedates our brokenness and that still defines the better part of the faith we profess.”¹³ In a similar way, I would add that we carry on even though divided because we participate proleptically, through the gift of the Spirit, in the Son's unity with the Father, a unity already given to the church.

How this connection between Baptist, Catholic, and the church universal happened in my own life is hard fully to say. I had a wonderful campus minister in college, Dr. Betty Talbert, who introduced me to some of the lives and writings of saints such as Francis of Assisi. Dr. Ralph Wood introduced me to such powerful Catholic writers as Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. I also spent a semester in Spain my junior year in college, immersed in a kind of Catholic culture (albeit a dying one in the sense that the young people had mostly stopped going to church). When in seminary, I had the opportunity to live and study for a month at Saint Meinrad's, a Benedictine abbey and seminary in the beautiful hills of southern Indiana. Certainly, my studies at Duke with Geoffrey Wainwright, Stanley Hauerwas, and William H. Poteat opened ways of thinking about the church more catholic than I had previously imagined. Most significantly, however, I taught for twelve years at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. While many faculty were following the typical path of modern academia (which meant they believed that the Catholic faith belonged in campus ministry rather than the classroom), I still, nonetheless, partially “absorbed” what I will presumptuously call a kind of “Catholic” way of thinking. Perhaps better stated, I became aware—sometimes painfully so—that to be Baptist was to be Catholic in a sense. That is, I saw

12. See especially Harmon, *Toward Baptist Catholicity*; and Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?*

13. Henry, “End(s) of Baptist Dissert,” 13.

that Christian divisions cannot be kept in tight compartments, especially when the academic convictions of late modernity seek to banish all such convictions to a private space, separate from economics, politics and other academic disciplines and areas of life.

This juxtaposition of “Catholic” and “Baptist” will no doubt be jarring to some. Are not Baptists and Catholics at the opposite end of the church continuum? Is this not like trying to combine water and oil? My own conviction is that while the church is broken and divided in all sorts of ways, it is nonetheless one. This oneness has nothing to do with our ability to patch things up. It is rather a statement about the nature and grace of God. In Christ, through the gift of the Spirit, we are one body. The body is, of course, broken by our own sin, hardheartedness, and blindness; it is thus covered over, like the ivy that used to wrap around objects in my grandmother’s backyard, making it difficult to see or even know what was there. Yet, the oneness of the church is “there” because Christ is present, giving his body the unity he shares with the Father in the Spirit.

All this is to say that I think the phrase “Catholic Baptist” is not as odd as the belief that the church should remain forever divided. This is not to say that we should ignore our differences and celebrate a vapid pluralism. Genuine reconciliation requires prayerful attention, charity, and hope. It calls for seeking together the mind of Christ. It calls as well for paying attention to things we cannot, for now, fix. It can also mean feeling, at times, placeless. I have by no means resolved within myself “Catholic” or “Baptist” or “Protestant” identities. These currents run together in my life, as they do also in the church. I turn to Teresa as someone who can help navigate the waters, not only for me but also for a church divided by the rivers of time.

I write, then, with and about Teresa as a friend, albeit an odd one. How might we see in her person a glimpse of who God is calling all of us to be, divided though we are? How might Protestants see in Teresa’s understanding of the Word something of their own sense of the gospel, reflected from a different, illuminating angle? How might Catholics see Teresa as a reformer, as *protesting* that which diminishes Christ’s body? Such looking again at saints like Teresa does not mean that Baptists (or other Protestants) should become Catholic or vice versa. It does mean attending to one another with an awareness that God might yet transform us in ways that we cannot at this point fully imagine.

An initial word about my approach to Teresa is necessary. In what follows, I argue that Teresa ought to be read as a scriptural commentator. This is part of a larger claim about theology: that theology itself is a way

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of interpreting Scripture and, more fully, a way of participating in knowing God.¹⁴ In our day, as others have observed, the disciplines of biblical interpretation and theology have for too long been divorced, to the detriment of both. In my view, Teresa is a theologian *because* she is a scriptural commentator and vice versa.

It is no doubt true that Teresa could not have foreseen the varied ways that she would be received by the church; least of all could she have imagined becoming the first woman doctor of the church. Yet, what Matthew Levering says about Scripture is surely true of saints like Teresa as well: "God the Teacher may teach more through the human teachers' words than the human teachers know . . ."¹⁵ This book is an account of how God the Teacher may continue to teach through Teresa's words, words that are themselves deeply immersed in Scripture and scriptural figures. Michael Hanby makes the provocative claim about Augustine that "the best literal reading of Augustine would be a figurative reading of Augustine."¹⁶ As I interpret it, Hanby means by this that the more illuminative readings of Augustine will not be strictly literal ones, as if Augustine is only writing for his time and place. Rather, these readings will participate providentially and thus simultaneously in the same Triune communion that so deeply marks Augustine's life. I think the same is true for Teresa: the best literal reading of her is a figurative one. This means, to refer to the example mentioned above, that the journey that Teresa narrates in the mansions is not simply that of her own soul, much less that of the modern individual. Rather, to read Teresa figuratively is to "read" ourselves as participating in the same communion that Teresa charts. This means that the journey of the "soul" through the castle is ultimately the journey of the church universal since it is the church that participates through grace in the communion between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In what follows, I seek to make sense of this claim, aiming, as I believe Teresa also did, to attend to the wounds of disunity on the body of Christ.

14. Robert Jenson states, "Theology is thinking what to say to be saying the Gospel" (*Systematic Theology*, 38). For an illuminative account of theology, participation, and knowing God, see Hollon, "Knowledge of God."

15. Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 70.

16. Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 5. The statement that precedes this one is significant: "By Augustine's own lights, the best literal reading of Augustine's theology would be a new Augustinian theology."