Introduction

Innovation and Its Discontents

At a key moment in Umberto Eco's 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose,* set in a fourteenth-century Benedictine monastery, an elderly and severe monk named Jorge takes the pulpit during Mass to deliver a homily on the human pursuit of knowledge. His sermon hinges upon the distinction between the "preservation" of and the "search" for knowledge:

> But of our work, the work of our order and in particular the work of this monastery, a part—indeed, the substance—is study, and preservation of knowledge. Preservation of, I say, not search for, because the property of knowledge, as a divine thing, is that it is complete and has been defined since the beginning, in the perfection of the Word which expresses itself to itself. Preservation, I say, and not search, because it is a property of knowledge, as a human thing, that it has been defined and completed over the course of the centuries, from the preaching of the prophets to the interpretation of the fathers of the church. There is no progress, no revolution of ages, in the history of knowledge, but at most a continuous and sublime recapitulation.[1]

Within the novel, Jorge's opposition to the pursuit of novelty in the realm of knowledge becomes the defining feature of his villainy,

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1. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harvest, 1994), 399.

including his willingness to commit murder and biblioclasm (that is, setting the monastery's library itself on fire) in order to hide the existence of a manuscript of the (fictional) second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*. He is, therefore, somewhat of a caricature.[2] However, the power of Eco's villain stems from the manner in which Jorge's extremism is grounded in ideas that have held deep currency in the tradition that the monk represents.

Indeed, ambivalence concerning the praiseworthiness, and even the necessity, of authorial innovation (as opposed to "recapitulation," however nuanced) in theological discourse is a familiar motif in Christian theology. That same intellectual tradition, however, has given rise to over two thousand years' worth of theological innovation that is astonishing in its scope—and utterly irreducible to any ultimate harmonization. Regardless of whether one views this near-constant introduction of novelty as "progress," it surely does not constitute simple "continuous and sublime recapitulation" of formerly established truths. How to account for this? How is it that a tradition so fecund in its production of theological discourse retains such wariness of novelty in theological discourse?

Evidence concerning the tradition's ambivalence toward authorial innovation in matters theological can be found already in the Bible. Genesis's mythological account of humanity's fall into noetic sinfulness (or, in some accounts, its "rise" into intellectual and ethical responsibility) begins with an act of hermeneutics on the part of Eve, the first rabbi: faced, in Gen. 3:1, with the serpent's question "Did God say . . . ?" Eve commits an act of interpretation that both recapitulates and extends the divine prohibition concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[3] Significantly, like all human acts

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2. One could argue, however, that, in both the stridency of his tone and the substance of his position, Jorge is not wholly dissimilar from the extreme prejudice against novelty represented by someone like Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. See Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

of interpretation, this hermeneutical encounter occurs in the absence of God's direct presence; whereas, just a few verses earlier, Adam enjoyed a direct line of communication with God, the scene between the humans and the serpent at the tree is stark in its depiction of humans left to fend for themselves in "the conflict of interpretations."[4] Regardless of whether one follows the (predominantly Augustinian) tradition of viewing Genesis 3 as an account of the origins of human sinfulness, it is surely striking that the expulsion from the relative simplicity of life in the garden has as its most proximate cause the "first" human act of theological authorship. Once humans become theological authors, they cannot be denizens of paradise.

The Bible also displays several incidents of theological innovation in which it is precisely the question of authorship—who is it that is speaking?—that is most pressing. In the gospel of John, Jesus' elevated proclamations concerning his own identity and mission are met with skepticism, because he, as a speaker, is tied to a familiar origin and locale: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (John 6:42). The question of what Jesus' speech might mean, not to mention its veracity, cannot escape the prior question of the identity and qualifications of the discourse's author. Similarly, one could read the entire Pauline corpus as being, among other things, a series of negotiations between Paul and his readers concerning Paul's *authority* to produce innovative theological discourse—negotiations in which, not insignificantly, Paul has recourse to denying that he is innovating at all (such as in 1 Cor. 11:23: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you . . ."). This Pauline ambivalence

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3. See Matthew Myer Boulton, *God against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 71ff.

4. For more on this point, see Robert Saler, "The Transformation of Reason in Genesis 2–3: Two Options for Theological Interpretation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36, no. 4 (August 2009): 275–86. The phrase "the conflict of interpretations" is Paul Ricoeur's; see his *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

toward innovation is also manifest in the instructions of Paul (and those speaking in Paul's name) to the various nascent church communities to "hold fast" to the instructions that have already been given to them and to shun the introduction of novel ideas (see, for example, 2 Thess. 2:15).

These biblical patterns for suspicion of innovation resonated throughout subsequent centuries, wherein the theological controversies that defined Christianity in both the East and the West (such as the various Christological and Trinitarian debates) found the various parties exploiting the rhetorical advantages of linking "novelty" with "heresy." This tactic came into particular crisis during the Reformation, in which it became clear (as we will discuss presently) how incumbent it was upon the Reformers to demonstrate that their opponents' position, and not their own, was "innovative" in relationship to God's own revelation as enshrined in the Scriptures.[5] This was, for instance, a key argumentative strategy deployed by Luther in his *On the Councils and the Church*, in which the Reformer extends his allegations of novelty past the medieval period and into the patristic era, all for the purpose of demonstrating that the Reformation's view of justification and faith was less "novel" than the regnant Roman Catholic theology of Luther's time.[6] This Protestant narrative—that it was the medieval Catholic Church and not the later Reformers who were guilty of "novelty" and, therefore, corruption of the original faith—became so entrenched that versions of it would continue to arise even in much different historical settings.[7]

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5. "Thus Luther and his followers sought ever and again to establish the *catholic* credentials of their teaching; they accused the papists of being the innovators, the modernists." Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 231. (Emphasis in original.)

6. Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church,* in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

7. For instance, the same narrative of medieval corruption of "original Christianity" plays a prominent role in the early-twentieth-century Social Gospel movement in general and in

When we arrive at modernity, however, things change. Indicative of the standard historical narrative is the following comment from John E. Thiel concerning the emergence of the theologian as self-conscious author in the nineteenth century:

> Modern theology emerged as theologians embraced an understanding of their discipline that took account of the central sensibilities of the Enlightenment. But theologians also adopted a new understanding of their own role in the theological enterprise. In the early nineteenth century, theologians began to assume that their own individual talent contributed to the integrity of theology, even to the most fundamental respects in which theology could be considered meaningful for both the church and society at large. Theologies appealed to theories of the imagination current in intellectual circles of the time to explain the creativity they now claimed on behalf of their own work. In a manner analogous to understandings of the practitioner in artistic and literary endeavor, theologians conceived of themselves as authors and measured the authority of their work, its value for the church, not only in terms of its faithfulness to ecclesial tradition but also in terms of its creativity, its resourcefulness in explicating the contemporary meaning of ancient religious truths.[8]

On this understanding of what the term *author* denotes, *theological* authorship becomes an identifiable locus of inquiry at the intersection of tradition and the nineteenth century's valorization (particularly, though not exclusively, in romanticism) of originality and even innovation as essential elements of the authorial craft. The claim here is not that Christian theologians prior to this time period did not understand themselves to be authors in the sense of having a

Walter Rauschenbusch's writings in particular. See, among others, Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992) and *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Rauschenbusch's work is notable for the way that it adapts the narrative's original concern for correct doctrine into a polemic against the medieval church's obscuring of the practice of social justice (which Rauschenbusch ascribes to the early church).

8. John E. Thiel, *Imagination and Authority: Theological Authorship in the Modern Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 9.

vocational responsibility to produce theological discourse and its attendant artifacts (that is, texts); rather, the issue is the relative value placed upon the exercise of creativity as a constitutive element of the theologian's vocational responsibility.

As we will see in what follows, there is reason to be hesitant about fully signing on to Thiel's dependence upon the uniqueness of the modern paradigm shift that he describes; the task of assessing whether Augustine, Bonaventure, and Luther (to name just a few that Thiel's chronology would consign to the realm of the "classical" view) understood themselves to be self-conscious authors would certainly require more nuance than his broad distinctions admit. However, at this point we can give qualified assent to the notion that there is indeed a shift that occurs in early modernity that brings about a marked increase in regard for, and even arguments for the necessity of, the individual author's cultivation and application of his or her own innovative approach to theological reflection.[9] Although there was clearly no lack of what most of us would now praise as innovation at any period of the Christian tradition, a unique feature of the modern theological landscape is the freedom with which theological authors qua authors can name and even celebrate their own originality, and that of their colleagues, in a manner quite distinct from any previous Christian assessment of the theologian's vocational responsibility.

In our own time, we can recognize that this move to a more positive valuation of novelty, while surely aided by the contextual

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9. "In the classical [medieval] paradigm, however, distinctiveness and originality were not valued traits to be celebrated by a theologian's contemporaries. . . . Ironically, at least in terms of modern sensibilities, theological achievement in the context of the classical paradigm entailed the identification of the individual's theological labors with the tradition of authorities and thus the forsaking of any claim to originality or individual authority. In other words, consummate theological achievement in the High Middle Ages demanded the blending of individual theological voice into the harmonious chorus of the past authorities, the standard of theological responsibility from which individual authorship was finally indistinguishable" (ibid., 16–17). We will discuss (and problematize) this point in chapter 1.

factors of modernity that Thiel identifies, was not without precedence in the tradition. Even as the suspicion of authorial innovation persisted throughout the majority of the Christian tradition's existence (and even, as we shall see, beyond the advent of modernity and up to the present day), one can trace an equally venerable thread through the past two thousand years that discloses a different reality: the sheer range of authorial innovation on display in the Christian theological heritage.[10] This thread also has scriptural pedigree, in that the biblical canon itself enshrines a host of diverse (and often conflicting) theological worldviews, with the satire of Job and Ecclesiastes's chastening the moralism of Proverbs being a key illustration from the Old Testament and the diverse portrayals of Jesus among the four gospel accounts being paradigmatic for the New Testament.[11] Likewise, even a casual acquaintance with the history of theological thought in both the West and the East cannot but solidify the impression that the "Christian thing," to use G. K. Chesterton's phrase, encompasses such a variegated body of theological discourses that even to speak of the "Christian tradition" in the singular (as I have been doing) is to impose a level of uniformity and coherence that has never, in fact, existed.[12]

The upshot of all of this is that, regardless of whether one finally agrees with Thiel's periodization of this development or the degree to which he views the events of the nineteenth century as a substantial break from previous Christian accounts of authorship, it would be

10. Indeed, "the perennial warnings of theologians about philosophical speculation as an activity dangerous to sound doctrine invariably come in the name of a 'sound doctrine' that was the product of speculation and has incorporated elements of some other philosophical perspective." Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 67.
11. See David Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
12. The locus classicus of this position is, of course, Walter Bauer's work. See his *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

hard to dispute that today's theologian, particularly to the extent that she is ensconced in the North American or European academic milieu, is almost inevitably bound to operate with an understanding of theological authorship that places a notably high premium upon the exercise of individual creativity and the subsequent production of original, if not unprecedented, theological method or insights. Indeed, at the risk of oversimplifying, a quick glance at the ideal-typical itinerary of a twenty-first-century theological academician (church-affiliated or not) reveals a vocational course laden with both demand and praise for such innovation. As a graduate student, one applies for funding with the promise that one's research will provide fresh angles from which to view traditional loci or else to uncover new loci with the argument for their contemporary importance. One is awarded the doctoral degree upon the judgment that, with the dissertation, an "original contribution to knowledge" has occurred. In the quest for both academic appointments and tenure, the scholar seeks to demonstrate how her work has "reshaped," "revivified," "inaugurated," or otherwise crafted (or will do so) the course of the topics that it addresses. Academic publishing houses package new works by adorning them with collegial review blurbs, the most effective of which promise that the study in question performs its task in a manner unlike previous contributions to the field.[13] Finally, at one's retirement reception or in the introduction to a typical *Festschrift*, such terms as "groundbreaking," "redefining," and other accolades are standard fare. In all of these instances, contribution in the form of innovation is not simply rewarded, it is de rigueur.[14]

13. This holds true for such genres as introductory textbooks and summaries of existing discussions as much as for works in the vein of "constructive" theology. Publishers are not at financial liberty to back even the most rudimentary theological resources unless there is some sense that the book fills a marketable lacuna.

14. Indeed, one of the tensions that lurks behind any discussion of theological novelty versus tradition—including this book—comes in the fact that, under the conditions of the contemporary attitude toward novelty as praiseworthy, even the assertion of a "traditional"

As Françoise Meltzer puts it, "the notion of the 'new' becomes tantamount to any claim of 'authorship.' New becomes opposed not so much to old as to unoriginal. Author, new, original and spontaneous are the good words as opposed to the bad: copyist, old, imitative (or stolen), and deliberate."[15]

My point here is neither to lampoon nor to critique the established channels by which academic theological careers are carried out.[16] Rather, it is this: to the extent that a given church's theological authors produce their discourse within the academic realm, the sense that creativity and innovation are requisites for and criteria of theological achievement by and large rests comfortably alongside any sense of obligation that a given author may (or may not) feel toward ecclesial tradition and/or the governing structures in place to mediate that tradition; indeed, the relationship between the two might seem to imply that to question the status and purpose of innovation within the task of theological authorship runs the risk of seeming odd at best and reactionary at worst.

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view is in some sense always already an act of innovation. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

15. Françoise Meltzer, *Hot Property: The Stakes and Claims of Literary Originality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 72.

16. However, Paul Griffiths, a thinker whose work we will consider extensively, has raised substantial reservations about the implication in modern theological authorship that the author somehow "owns" her or his words: "We [in late-capitalist polity] reward those who produce (and thereby own) words not previously produced, not previously owned. What better compliment for a writer than to say of her that she has a style all her own? What higher praise for a researcher or scholar than to say that his findings are new, challenging, will push back the frontiers of knowledge, will transform a discipline or lay the groundwork for a new enterprise? To say, as medieval commentators so often did at the beginning of their commentaries, that nothing new would be said here—that would, for those who think of speech as autonomously produced and owned by its producer, be an admission of failure." Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 228. As we will see, this critique of a "marketplace" of production and ownership is highly relevant to Griffiths's ecclesiological vision; indeed, related to Meltzer's point (referenced in n. 15), it is not coincidental that Griffiths's most recent work has advocated for the theological merits of plagiarism. See chapter 4.

However, the occasion for this book's investigation of authorship is precisely the fact that, at this point in contemporary theology, numerous theologians are bringing such critical questions to bear upon the notion that theological innovation and creative theological authorship are unqualified goods. Moreover, this critique, at least in the cases in which this book is interested, has located itself within the realm of ecclesiological theology. And finally, rendered as an ecclesiological question, the issue of *authorship* often comes down to one of *authority*: Who authorizes? And what sort of publics do these authorities occupy?

The Thesis

I will seek to advance a fairly modest set of theses that, taken together, constitute a constructive intervention into contemporary debates on both ecclesiology and theological authorship. In general terms, I will argue that the question of theological *authorship* and that of ecclesial *authority* posited by ecclesiological formulations are so thoroughly intertwined that responsible discussion of the one entails attention to the other. Moreover, different conceptions of the nature and function of how the church's magisterial authority underpins the identity of the church as an institution entail concomitantly differing understandings of how theologians self-consciously operating as *ecclesially normed* authors regard their own enterprise of authorial innovation.

Expanded into my more substantive theological proposal, my thesis is as follows: although it is the case that those ecclesiologies which describe the church primarily as a distinct polis with its own structures for authorizing truth claims (particularly as underwritten by magisterial authority) are able to offer a coherent and theologically compelling account of theological authorship as an ecclesially

accountable, creative (poietic) enterprise in which *ecclesiology precedes epistemology*, it is also the case that a contemporary ecclesiology that offers a more event-based and diffusively spatialized account of the church, pace many critics, is able to offer a similarly viable model for the enterprise of theological authorship. This latter model retains many of the best features of the former (most importantly, the sense that some level of ecclesial "normativity" [pathos] is a constitutive feature of genuinely theological authorship) while simultaneously providing a better vantage point from which to engage crucial aspects of the contemporary theological task. Thus, construing the essence of "church" as *diffusively spatialized event* provides an ecclesiology suitable for articulating the strictures of the enterprise of genuinely ecclesial (pathic), constructive (poietic) theology.

So stated, this thesis contains a whole host of terminological distinctions that I will explore in great detail. From the outset, however, it may be helpful to signal to the reader the three basic steps contained in my argument:

1. Although contemporary literary theory concerning "authorship" advances very different understandings of the nature and functions of that category, I will be arguing that the best of contemporary theory points toward the reality that "authorship" is always a kind of political transaction with "authorization" and therefore *authority*. Rendered theologically, I will make the case that this implies the necessity of dealing with ecclesiology when one considers the location and functioning of specifically theological authorship.
2. Many prominent contemporary theologians have argued that, for the church to retain an identity as a concrete, enduring, and visible public distinct from other publics, it is necessary for

the church's discourse (theology, as "authored" by individuals or groups of individuals) to be subject to the teaching authority of a concrete and living magisterium. As a term of convenience, I will label these theologians "polis ecclesiologists"; moreover, I will be arguing that their thought continues a trajectory inaugurated by Newman. After exploring these arguments in some detail, I will take what might well be the most contestable step of my own argument and grant these thinkers their main assertion concerning the necessity of a magisterium for the realization of *their* ecclesiological vision. In other words, for my purposes I will agree that, should the church wish to think of itself as a concrete, visible polis, a magisterium that has among its functions the normative oversight of theological authorship will indeed be necessary.

3. Having granted that premise, however, I will contest a key conclusion that most of these thinkers advance on the basis of it: that only via a church that is so construed (that is, as a concrete, enduring, and visible public) is one capable of offering a robust vision of ecclesially normed authorship. Against this, I will argue that an ecclesiology that understands the church as a diffusively spatialized event contains its own resources for constructing a compelling account of creative theological authorship. I will endeavor to show that this second vision exists in continuity, albeit in heavily modified fashion, with the work of Schleiermacher. Regardless of whether one finds the ecclesiology that underpins this vision convincing, the point that I wish to make is that each of the two ecclesiological visions (polis ecclesiology and an ecclesiology of diffusively spatialized event) contains a viable understanding of creative theological authorship. Which of the two incompatible visions one chooses depends upon a host of factors, theological and otherwise;

however, there is no reason why each side cannot recognize in the other a consistent and theologically rooted understanding of authorial innovation. Removing barriers to that recognition is the achievement at which this study aims.

The Argument by Chapter

My argument in what follows is divided into three sections. The first section sets the theoretical and historical parameters for the study. In chapter 1, I will give a brief overview of contemporary disputes (drawn mainly from literary theory, but also from philosophy and history) regarding the very notion of "the author." Although few of the theorists I examine address the question of theological authorship specifically, any responsible discussion of theological authorship requires a basic grounding in the various contestations surrounding the very viability of the "author construct" in twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical theory. This is partly because, as we shall see, it is necessary to isolate the question of the "author" qua author from the larger issue of theological "method" under which it is so often subsumed. Here, I will be drawing heavily on the classic works of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, as well as recent literary theorists such as Sean Burke, Andrew Bennett, and Jacqueline Miller. My argument will be that the most helpful legacy of twentieth-century literary investigations into "the author" is the insistence that the authority claimed by authors is inextricable from specific negotiations with institutions whose own author-izing capabilities are never entirely stable.

In chapter 2, I examine two encounters (one historical and one theoretical) in the history of Western Christian theology in which the issues at stake between two distinct trajectories come into sharp relief. Although neither of these debates captures every component of contemporary discussions about theological authorship, together

they illustrate most of the key components that are of interest for our purposes.

I will first consider one of the most significant Reformation-era debates on the issue of church authority and the individual Christian's comprehension of theological legitimacy: the controversy between Thomas More and William Tyndale on the legitimacy of translating Scripture into the vernacular. In order to argue for the necessity of the church as the magisterial authority over individual interpretation, More has recourse to (and brilliantly articulates) several characteristic strategies by which the Roman Catholic magisterium argued for its own necessity: the presence of extrascriptural knowledge handed on from Jesus to the disciples onward (in apostolic succession) in the *depositum fidei*, denial of *claritas scripturae*, and the Christological/pneumatological inevitability of the Holy Spirit's preservation of the Roman church's indefectibility. Tyndale, for his part, locates the Holy Spirit's aid not in the church's magisterium but in the hermeneutical encounter between Scripture and the devout reader, and in doing so offers up a much different account of the role of the church in norming the faith and theological opinion of the individual believer. In short, an important strand of the More–Tyndale debate centers upon differences in each thinker's account of the constitution of sacred history and that history's role in ecclesiology; more specifically, the two thinkers disagree over the relationship between three competing sources for sacred history: scriptural texts, church tradition, and continued dispensations of the Holy Spirit. My argument is that this disagreement over the proper ordering and location of these three sources is central both to the divergence between More's and Tyndale's ecclesiological visions and to the continuing relevance of their controversy.

The second encounter that I will consider is, perhaps paradoxically, the more theoretical but also the more important. Two of the most

seminal nineteenth-century thinkers for contemporary theology, John Henry Cardinal Newman and Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, were fascinated with ecclesiological questions as well as theological method. Although the two lived a generation apart and thus did not have occasion to correspond, both partook in that century's general obsession with history and the impact of historicized thinking upon theological claims; significantly for my purposes, their theorization of historical thinking as applied to the task of dogmatic construction gave them both occasion to relate ecclesiology to the person of the theological author (as opposed to just the methodology of the theological task). My claim here will be that Newman, in his prescient 1845 text *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, laid the groundwork for what would become the chief argument associated with those contemporary ecclesiologists focused on the church as a concrete polis: doctrinal development that is aided by the innovation of theologians but is ultimately dependent upon the church as a (historically and visibly) unified public body with a sufficiently infallible magisterium. In particular, Newman's work (in the *Essay* and elsewhere) is a masterful application of the principle of reductio ad absurdum: either Christ instituted a visible institution with a reliable living authority to safeguard theological truth claims, or there finally can be no warrant for those claims. Schleiermacher, conversely, in his 1830 *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, created a theory of the theological virtuoso (the "prince of the church") who utilizes a particular kind of individual theological genius that mediates between that which has been received from tradition ("orthodoxy") and the innovation that is needed to move the tradition forward ("heterodoxy," to be distinguished from "heresy").

The main crux of my argument in this second chapter will be as follows: whereas several decades ago it was common to hear that theology in the twentieth century and beyond would be a choice

between Barth and Schleiermacher, my claim is that, *at least as far as ecclesiology and theological authorship are concerned, the choice is between Schleiermacher and Newman.* Both thinkers offer a sense of what it means for authorial innovation to be a matter of "thinking with the church" (the famous *sentire cum ecclesia*); however, as with More and Tyndale, one thinker (Newman) identifies the possibility of genuinely ecclesial theological authorship with its intellectual submission to a concrete, visible, unified, and magisterially underpinned church body, and also locates the engine of true doctrinal development within the implicit claims of the *depositum fidei* itself; meanwhile, the other (Schleiermacher), while being no less ecclesial in orientation, offers the template for the modern theological virtuoso as one that is normed by the church community (which is, for him, the repository of Christian consciousness) but is also empowered to blend creatively the new data from Christian self-consciousness and the always-new data from the cultural situation of the believer (including data from science, history, philosophy, and other disciplines). Put simply, for Newman, the church's magisterium both precedes and underwrites the task of genuinely theological authorship, whereas for Schleiermacher, the author and the church develop each other simultaneously. To anticipate terms to be introduced later, for Newman, poiesis is ecclesially legitimate only to the extent that it is preceded and normed by the pathos of the magisterially unified church, whereas for Schleiermacher, ecclesial pathos and authorial poiesis exist in a mutually determinative relationship where one does not necessarily have precedence over the other.[17] The former is the basis for the polis ecclesiologists' account of

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17. This claim will need to be tested, and perhaps nuanced, by my discussion of Schleiermacher. One thing that I will be doing, in contrast to much commentary on Schleiermacher, is to insist that his ecclesiology is quite robust and rather normative for his theological method. The entire *Glaubenslehre*, for instance, could plausibly be read as an extended argument for the need for the church as the sine qua non of the Christian self-consciousness.

theological authorship; the latter, notwithstanding the modifications that I will introduce, provides provisional shape to what will become my response to that account.

In the second section, chapter 3 will examine more closely the writings of those contemporary ecclesiologists who continue in the line of Newman's thinking. By assigning these thinkers the somewhat unwieldy label "polis ecclesiologists," I do not wish to imply that they represent a unified school or approach to ecclesiology; rather, the label denotes their shared conviction that, for the church to retain its (desirable) identity as a concrete, enduring, and visible public distinct from other publics, it is necessary for the church's discourse (theology, as "authored" by individuals or groups of individuals) to be subject to the teaching authority of a concrete and living magisterium. The theologians that I will examine most closely here include Reinhard Hütter, Ola Tjørhom, Carl Braaten, R. R. Reno, and Paul Griffiths. Chapter 4 will elaborate on how this ecclesiological vision, with its attendant view of authority, impacts these thinkers' understanding of the task of theological authorship and the person of the theologian as author.

As I have mentioned, a signal contention of my overall thesis is that the polis ecclesiologists are correct to insist upon the need for a magisterium to undergird the distinctiveness of the church's witness, if the church is indeed best understood as a concrete, visible public distinct from other publics. That being granted, the *onus probandi* is upon me to construct a different ecclesiological understanding (and a concomitant vision of theological authorship) that does not have recourse to magisterium. That task will be taken up in the third and final section of the book.

I will begin the final section by examining the latent ecumenical potential of the work of Joseph Sittler. My argument will be that, in the context of the 1961 World Council of Churches Assembly

in New Delhi that set the tone for much contemporary ecumenism, Sittler's oft-celebrated (but, apart from the work of ecological theologians, rarely engaged) speech "Called to Unity" (and its later elaboration, *Essays on Nature and Grace*) represents a subversive ecclesiological intervention whose significance for such notions as "church unity" has not been sufficiently elaborated. In the context of a discussion largely predicated on the longing for visible unity on the basis of ecclesiological consensus, Sittler's assertion that the basis for church unity is attentiveness to the presence of Christ's grace on a global, indeed cosmic, scale thoroughly problematizes any limitation of the space of ecclesiality to a concrete, visible polis, because such a vision is as constrictive of the biblical witness as it is dubious from the perspective of much contemporary philosophy. This feature of Sittler's work, alongside his enigmatic but repeated invocations of global pathos as a datum for theological reflection upon the gospel,[18] will be of paramount importance for my argument that the church must be *diffusively* spatialized.

Sittler's work will provide the backdrop against which to synthesize the work of other theologians to a specific end: the development of a vision of the church as a diffusively spatialized event (as opposed to a distinct public). However, these ecclesiological overtures are in service to a larger task. Chapter 5 will also complete the symmetry of the overall argument by taking seriously the fact that, if the polis ecclesiologists offer a compelling vision for how the church norms authorial innovation, then an ecclesiology of diffusively spatialized event must do likewise. That is, a reconfigured

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18. Part of the usefulness of Sittler's concept of *pathos* is that, in a manner structurally akin to how Hütter views church practices, he views the Christian's engagement with Scripture as nothing other than commerce with the very living God who is at work in the redemption of creation. My affirmation of this will demonstrate how unapologetically "Protestant" my contentions ultimately are.

ecclesiology requires a reconfigured understanding of theological authorship.

To anticipate briefly: taking the "diffusion" in the spatialization of the church event seriously means taking into account not only the spread-out character of the church but also its weakness. Although it is precisely this line of thinking that triggers anxiety among the polis ecclesiologists, the possibility exists to view weakness and indeed failure as positive goods. Embrace of weakness and failure in theological discourse is a more radical posture than the "reconciled denominationalism" characteristic of much twentieth-century Protestantism; I will attempt to show how this is so via a somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, in conjunction with Westhelle and Spivak. It will also be my task in this chapter to demonstrate the plausibility of viewing this stance as a kind of heavily modified continuation of the Schleiermachean trajectory discussed in chapter 2.

Further Methodological Considerations

Having outlined my thesis, I must note some final methodological considerations that will govern the unfolding of my argument. First, in what follows, I will quite intentionally limit myself to consideration of Western Christian thinkers; thus, it may be that little of what I will have to say will apply in any direct way to Eastern Orthodox Christians. Incorporation of specifically Eastern concerns into these considerations would be a desideratum for future inquiry into this topic; however, I cannot hope to do that in any substantive way in this project.[19]

19. However, as we will see, Sittler in particular was interested in mining Eastern Orthodox theological sources in order to correct what he perceived as imbalances in Western treatments of grace and nature in particular. However, Sittler's engagement with orthodoxy on this front did not entail close textual reading of Eastern sources other than Irenaeus. For a useful discussion of understandings of ecclesial authority common in the Eastern church, see Bradley Nassif,

Second, one could also expand the scope of inquiry to consider the role of "innovation" in modes of human inquiry besides Christian theology, such as Western philosophy and science. Although I will have occasion, particularly in chapter 1, to consider the politics of "novelty" in authorship as conceived by contemporary literary theory, the main thrust of my inquiry will be into specifically theological (indeed, specifically Christian) negotiations between innovation and tradition. When necessary, I will endeavor to indicate in footnotes and references those materials which I have found helpful for placing the theological history within its wider context.

Third, as I have indicated, the range of theological trajectories that I will be considering has necessitated the repeated use of ideal-typical constructions such as "the marketplace" and the church as polis. I employ the ideal type heuristically in much the same spirit, and for much the same purposes, as did Max Weber: to highlight features of empirical reality without somehow mistaking the ideal-typical construction for that reality.

Regarding language, in my own prose I will endeavor to use gender-inclusive language to the fullest extent possible (largely by alternating gendered pronouns in cases where gender identity is irrelevant); however, in order to avoid both anachronism and imputation of inclusive-language strictures upon theologians either unaware or unconvinced by them, I will make no attempt to alter quotations that do not do so.

Finally, this book is an exercise in constructive theology, with all of the idiosyncrasy that often accompanies such endeavors. In this case, this means that, though I will be drawing upon a wide range of theologians and thinkers in service of my arguments, I will not

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"'Authority' in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," in *By What Authority? The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity,* ed. Robert L. Millet (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 36–54.

pretend to give exhaustive accounts of any thinker's work on par with what a more specialist inquiry might provide.[20] Kathryn Tanner articulates this methodological principle so well that I can do no better than to quote her words and endorse them as my goal as well:

> While I do not believe I have distorted any of the material I directly or indirectly quote, my thinking often pushes that material in directions beyond its own explicit statement, without any great defense of the uses to which it is thereby put. While I welcome specialist interest in the question of my faithfulness to sources, my main intent is simply to show the fruitfulness of a kind of internalizing of the history of Christian thought for its creative redeployment.[21]

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20. In particular, I will tend to focus on specific texts within a given thinker's oeuvre without pretending that my analysis of these single texts represents an accurate representation of the entire shape of that thinker's total canon. My reading of Barth's *Romans*, to take the most obvious example, will not depend upon my entering the myriad debates concerning the relationship of that early text to his later works. That said, I do not intend for any of my readings to be so discontinuous with the major outlines of a thinker's total oeuvre that the isolated reading becomes implausible by default, although whether and where that line might be crossed in this book is, of course, open to debate.
21. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ix.