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GREEK EXEGESIS AND *SEMPER REFORMANDA*: THREE PAPERS ON
AN IMPORTANT COMMON REFORMATION THEME

The year 2017 marked the five-hundredth anniversary celebration of the Magisterial Reformation by acknowledging the importance of Martin Luther nailing the ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517. We recognize that even the Magisterial Reformation involved far more than simply Luther's act of calling for formal debate over a number of pressing theological and related issues. Luther's relatively modest deed incited a number of subsequent actions that ultimately led to a major fissure within the western Church. There were of course many others involved in the Magisterial Reformation, each of whom was involved in similar acts of thinking and rethinking fundamental theological tenets. We also recognize that there were many other proto-reformers and non-magisterial reformers who played arguably equally important roles in what has come to be characterized as the Protestant Reformation. In fact, use of the term "Protestant Reformation" is itself a misnomer when we remember that there were a number of significant and different Reformations (in the plural): the well-known German Lutheran, French Calvinist, and Swiss Zwinglian reformations, but also the earlier reformations instigated by such people as the Czech Jan Hus, various Anabaptist reformations, and the (sometimes difficult to place) Baptists themselves, among a number of others.

The 2017 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Providence, Rhode Island, from 15–17 November, also focused upon the Reformation as an organizing principle, allowing various sections and study groups to design programs appropriate to the theme. The New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis section chose to focus its session of invited papers on the theme of "Greek Exegesis and *Semper Reformanda*." The

session was designed to bring the enduring focus of the study section, Greek exegesis, into dialogue with one of the major defining phrases of the Reformation, *Semper Reformanda* (which itself is problematized within the essays themselves).

As a result of this focus, three speakers were invited to address the topic of the session. Each of the speakers—whose papers are published here in the order in which they were delivered at the conference—was given free rein to define and exposit the theme.

The first paper is by Martin Culy, currently of Cypress Hills Ministries in British Columbia, and formerly of Briercrest Seminary in Saskatchewan. Culy is an experienced and linguistically sophisticated exegete who has an abiding heart for the church and its teachers. He regularly engages in seminars where he helps pastors to develop their exegetical abilities. In an attempt to get at the meaning of *Semper Reformanda*, Culy raises the question of whether and how we believe in another of the Reformation shibboleths, that of *Sola Scriptura*. He applies the notion of Scripture alone to the areas of English translations, theology, and preaching. He points out what it says of the strength of our Reformation beliefs if we place English translations and their traditions, our preformulated theological positions, and our preaching ahead of our coming to terms with the meaning of the Scriptures.

In the second paper, Stanley Porter, of McMaster Divinity College, examines in more detail the notion of *Semper Reformanda* itself. He first points out that the phrase is better understood as indicating “always being reformed” rather than the usual rendering of “always reforming.” He then teases out the implications of this revised understanding for the exegesis of Scripture. In effect, Porter exegetes the saying itself, and addresses the questions of what always being reformed means, who does it, and what is being reformed. He further shows that many, though thankfully not all, of the standard treatments of exegesis used by New Testament scholars fail to take seriously the importance of the meaning of this phrase, and lays down several criteria to guide exegetes as they move forward.

The final paper, by Vern Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary, finds a trinitarian basis for formulating an approach to exegesis. He goes further, however, and draws upon the linguistic theory of tagmemics, first developed by the linguist and former teacher in the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Kenneth Pike, as an appropriate way forward, because of its multifaceted approach that in some ways mirrors what he calls the “coinherence” found within the Trinity itself. This model of trinitarian interaction provides for Poythress a model of how understanding and along with it interpretation can be formulated and demonstrated, even down to the very smallest parts of language itself. Poythress uses John 17:3 as a platform for his exposition.

Others will have celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation by other means. Most of these other celebrations will have focused upon the usual conceptions of the Reformation, with a heavy emphasis upon its theological or historical dimensions. These three papers, however, offer a slightly different perspective upon this set of events that transformed the western church. History and theology no doubt enter into the equation, but in these papers, exposition and the articulation of the phrase *Semper Reformanda* are used as a means of informing and developing our understanding of exegesis itself. The central notion is that exegesis is not a product or secondary result of Reformation thinking, but that understanding it within an appropriate Reformation context is fundamental to Reformation thinking itself and should stand at the heart of our continuing efforts to live out and realize the continuing effects of the Reformation.