

## **Fanciful history and dubious hermeneutics: A review of Craig Carter's *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition***

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**Book:** Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. Kindle Edition)

### **Introduction**

How does one interpret the Scriptures? In Craig Carter's view, the correct way to interpret the Scriptures is to read them the "premodern" way. Taking us on a tour through the history of exegesis, as retold by Carter, we are told a history of the rise and fall of good exegesis. There was a 'golden age' of premodern exegesis based upon 'Christian Platonism,' which at the advent of the Enlightenment caused the downfall of this glorious age of exegesis into the broken shards of unbelieving scholarship. The way back is to recover the 'Great Tradition' based upon 'Christian Platonism,' and in so doing we learn how to interpret Scripture alright. In Carter's words, "academic theory needs to be reformed according to church practice when it comes to biblical interpretation."<sup>1</sup>

In positing this return to the "Great Tradition," Carter states his influencers to be the Roman Catholic *ressourcement* tradition, as mediated by the "evangelical *ressourcement*" movement of D.H. Williams and Hans Boersma, and the "radical orthodoxy" movement of John Millbank.<sup>2</sup> Credit is also given to *ressourcement* Thomism in the work of Roman Catholics "Gilles Emery, Thomas Joseph White, and Matthew Levering."<sup>3</sup> Given his influencers, it is not surprising that the 'Great Tradition' consists of more than just history or Scripture. Rather, as Carter states, this 'Great Tradition' that he is trying to retrieve is "a three-legged stool made up of spiritual exegesis, Nicene dogma, and Christian Platonist metaphysics."<sup>4</sup> It is therefore not a coincidence that, in a book on exegesis of Scripture, a discussion of metaphysics takes center stage in chapter three of Carter's book.

### **A most fanciful history**

Even though the book is focused on an exegesis of Scripture, it indirectly portrays Carter's view of the history of the church, insofar as great exegesis correlates with the

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, "Preface"

<sup>2</sup> Carter, 18-9

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

church being in a good place in her history. A good summary of the history of the church by Carter can be stated as follows:

A long time ago, the Christian faith conquered the Roman Empire. With the rise of Emperor Constantine I and his heirs (with the exception of Julian the Apostate), Christianity became the favored, and eventually, the only tolerated religion. In the 2nd century, the Alexandrian school had figured out the natural affinity of the Christian faith with Platonism.<sup>5</sup> Now, with the legalization of Christianity in the 4th century, Christian theologians had more time to consider philosophical issues,<sup>6</sup> and they discovered that Platonism showed the natural revelation of God in nature.<sup>7</sup> The subsequent centuries saw the widespread adoption, adaptation, and synthesis of Christian Platonism with the Christian faith, resulting in the formation of the 'Great Tradition,' manifesting a glorious time of Christian civilization.<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, all this would fade away. Late medieval nominalism had assaulted the metaphysical foundations of the Great Tradition, but thankfully they were not successful in destroying it.<sup>9</sup> However, the successor movement of the Enlightenment came onto the scene. Beginning in the 18th century, the Enlightenment was a time of a great abandonment of the Great Tradition and of Christian Platonism, resulting in the devastating collapse of the Christian faith, most clearly seen in the rise of theological liberalism.<sup>10</sup> The churches have been a veritable desert of feeble pietistic platitudes from the advent of the Enlightenment until the early 21st century.<sup>11</sup> Now, at long last, *post tenebrax lux!* Thanks to the actions of scholars like Craig Carter, we have sought theological retrieval and have recovered the Great Tradition which we have lost. Now, we can finally Make the Church Great Again!

The problem is that this history, positing the formation of a Golden Age followed by a disastrous decline, fits a fairy tale more than true history. In Carter's reframing of history, the "good guys" are the church fathers, the medieval schoolmen, and the Reformers, the "bad guys" are the "Enlightenment" thinkers, the Tree of Life is "Christian Platonism" and the Fall, the abandonment of "Christian Platonism." Such a grand history is overly simplified and quite simply false. Carter's history glosses over

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<sup>5</sup> It is a clear fact that the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Alexandrian school with its key persons like Origen and Clement were Platonists. They were probably the first Platonists to attempt a synthesis of Christianity and Platonism.

<sup>6</sup> It is no coincidence that the first ecumenical council (Nicaea I) could only be convened after peace came to the Church. Prior to the toleration of the Christian faith in the Edict of Milan, the very unsettled nature of the Christian religion within the Roman Empire means that the focus of the church was more on survival than on theologizing.

<sup>7</sup> Carter made it clear that he treats the Church Fathers as "Christian Platonists."

<sup>8</sup> Carter, in his discussion of the Ancient Christian Commentary series, places the church "fathers, the medieval schoolmen, and the Reformers" on the same side of the "good exegetes."

<sup>9</sup> Carter, 86-7. That they were "not successful" can be inferred from the fact that Carter treats the Reformers, who came chronologically after the nominalists, as heroes.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-9

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

real differences between Platonism and Aristotelianism, as well as other philosophies in the early church. Justin Martyr for example was probably a Stoic. The Reformers had an adversarial relation with the “medieval schoolmen” and many toyed with the system known as Ramism in an attempt to get around Aristotle. As for the Enlightenment, there is not even one single “Enlightenment” as the “Enlightenment” takes on different forms in the various societies it emerges in – being atheistic in France while taking on a disestablishmentarian yet Christian nature in the United States for example. Flowing from this, there is no one “Enlightenment” view and the idea that all philosophies under the banner of the “Enlightenment” are a rejection of “Christian Platonism” (whatever that is) is grossly simplistic and false.

Now, not all smoke is without fire, and there is some truth to what Carter is alleging, but only if one is specific about what the issues are. If instead one starts with a “God-centered view of the world” instead of Christian Platonism, and focus on the explicitly anti-theistic views of the theological liberals during the Enlightenment, then Carter’s case would be placed on more solid ground. It is to be noted that the two specific examples given as pointers of the decay of the Enlightenment: “(1) the rise of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation from Baruch Spinoza onward and (2) in the revisionist or liberal theology that flowed from the impetus provided by Friedrich Schleiermacher,” are two very specific Enlightenment movements, but they are nowhere exhaustive neither are they exemplary of all Enlightenment movements. If Carter were to restrict his case to the anti-theistic views of theological liberalism and its corresponding philosophical rationalism, then it would be right to conclude that the whole theological liberal project is to be abandoned as an unfruitful and unfaithful handling of the Scriptures and the Christian faith.

Before we look at the issue of philosophy, it must be noted how Carter’s distorted history also (1) trivializes the Reformation, and (2) distorts the history of science.

### (1) Trivializing the Reformation

Another Christian Platonist, John Calvin, makes a very similar point in the opening lines of his Institutes of the Christian Religion:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern. In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he “lives and moves” (Acts 17: 28). For, quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God.

Here we see the linking of the true knowledge of ourselves with the true knowledge of God; advance in one brings advance in the other, while mistakes

in one cause mistakes in the other. Calvin sees our being as subsisting in God, and contemplation of ourselves occasions thoughts of God; for the entire Great Tradition, this explains why no human being can ever be neutral with regard to God, oceans of Enlightenment sophistry notwithstanding.<sup>12</sup>

In this passage, we see Carter citing the Reformer John Calvin to promote his vision of "Christian Platonism." In the first part of the *Institutes*, Calvin argued that to know ourselves and to know God are two intricately connected things.<sup>13</sup> Carter latches onto one part of Calvin's sentence, to claim that John Calvin teaches that "our being [subsists] in God, and contemplation of ourselves occasions thoughts of God." In context, Calvin was making the statement that we know from God's gifts that our being subsists because of the one God. We note here that "subsistence in the one God" does not necessarily mean "our being subsists in the one God." The former merely states that our being depends on God for its subsistence, without stating how this dependence relation works. Carter however reads Calvin as a Platonist, and therefore excludes any other type of dependence relationship man has with God.

Carter's manner of interpreting historical sources here is to interpret the "good sources" as Platonists, rather than let the historical sources interpret themselves. That is most certainly not the way to actually interpret historical sources. Whether Calvin is a Platonist or not is irrelevant for the topic at hand, because even if it were granted that Calvin was a "Platonist" in some aspects, it does not mean he is a "Platonist" in certain other aspects. Secondly, one must focus on the context and what Calvin was trying to convey in 1.1 of his *Institutes*. The text builds towards a thesis, certain conclusions, and that is the "authorial intent" of the passage. Even if Calvin were a Platonist on the issue of the "subsistence" of the soul, this is most certainly not what he was driving at in 1.1 of his *Institutes*, which is focused on the knowledge of God and driving home our dependence upon Him for our very being, not on the Platonic view of being

Carter's hermeneutics on historical sources in the case of John Calvin is flawed.<sup>14</sup> Carter's manner of reading texts is disturbing, but probably perfectly in line with the ressourcement's way of interpreting historical sources, as texts addressing ecclesiastical concerns instead of historically-situated documents.

This way of falsely reading history shows Carter's trivialization of the Reformation, making it seem as if the Reformation was in large part in continuity with the medieval period. Of course, we do not deny that the Reformation had influences from medieval thought, because there is simply no way that anyone can make a total break from

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1

<sup>14</sup> This is the first time I have read anyone try to claim that Calvin is teaching a Christian Neo-Platonic ontology in this passage.

one's upbringing, but the issue is not about influences but about what makes the Reformation distinct, which Carter loses sight of. Carter, in his misrepresentation of John Calvin's writings, shows that his view of continuity means erasing what John Calvin actually taught, in service to his false narration of history that the Reformation was largely a continuation of the medieval schoolmen.

## (2) Distorts the history of science

Since the awe-inspiring rise of modern technological science based on the so-called hard sciences, including physics, chemistry, and biology, many other academic disciplines have aspired to be regarded as objective sciences. One way they have sought to do so is by imitating the methods of the empirical sciences in what Andrew Louth (following George Steiner) referred to as "the fallacy of imitative form." So historians have tried to model their methods as far as possible on those of physics, which has led to historians adopting a modern, neopagan set of metaphysical beliefs (Epicurean naturalism), whose prestige depends on its association with modern technological science, even though that association is merely accidental. Modern science did not grow out of Epicureanism. It grew out of a medieval Christian worldview in which the doctrine of creation made it plausible to think two things about the world: (1) that events in nature are not random, purposeless, or temporary but rather reliable, purposeful, and permanent; and (2) that the human mind is capable of grasping the laws of nature that govern events in the world because the same Logos by which the universe was created is part of our minds insofar as we have been created in the image of God. Epicurean metaphysics undercuts both of these assumptions. The identification of philosophical naturalism with the success of technological science is therefore unwarranted and the result of Enlightenment propaganda rather than clear thinking.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, in the early stages of modern science, the goal of technological control of nature was seen as being hindered by the existence of teleology in nature. Teleology is a bedrock assumption of Christian Platonism. But if things have inbuilt natures, and if they flourish only when those natures are fulfilled, then there are definite limits to how far we should go in manipulating nature (including human nature). The problem was that such limits were seen by early modern science and philosophy as undesirable constraints to be shaken off by the triumphant and sovereign will of the autonomous individual. So teleology was out, and so was the Christian Platonism of the Great Tradition of Christian

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 218

orthodoxy. Scientists sawed off the branch on which science was perched, although the full implications of this move did not become visible right away.<sup>16</sup>

Alongside Carter's simplistic history of Christendom is his reframing of the rise of modern science. According to Carter, modern science has its origin in Christian Platonism (the "medieval Christian worldview"). However, in "the early stages of modern science," Christian Platonism was rejected and science was placed onto a "neopagan" route, where the branch of modern science was "sawed off" from its foundation. Modern science has therefore lost its way, and must be re-oriented towards "Christian Platonism" in order to be truly science.

This history of the natural sciences however is an exercise of fiction. The whole idea that scientists came around and malevolently cut off science from its true Platonic roots because they wish to be fully autonomous, with a will triumphant over nature, is ludicrous. There was indeed a shift away from teleology, and thus a rejection of the medieval view of science, but that is where the actual history of science diverges from Carter's imaginative retelling of its history.

Now, Carter is right to state that modern science has its roots in medieval natural philosophy.<sup>17</sup> However, modern science has its roots not in Platonism but in Aristotelianism, and the focus of science was discovery, not any specific fidelity to any one philosophy. We note that what allowed modern science to progress: the regularity of nature, and the fact that nature is not divine and thus open to investigation, are specifically Christian premises, not Platonic or Aristotelian premises. Carter is therefore in error to state that the foundation of modern science is Christian Platonism, for the medieval worldview is broader than "Christian Platonism."

In the history of science, what is known as the "Scientific Revolution" coincides with a shift from the deductive method of science to the inductive method of science as pioneered by Francis Bacon. This shift basically sounded the death knell for any Platonic or Aristotelian view of science, because the issue of "final causes" or teleology cannot be discerned with the inductive method. Thus, "Platonism" or "Aristotelianism" was "sawed off," not because of some malevolent actors at work but purely because of a shift in how science is done.

If science is the discovery of the workings of the world, then deductivism is limited to things which we can deduce from prior knowledge. Inductivism however expanded the range of things available for investigation, and allows for scientific experimentation to be done alongside much hypothesizing of scientific theories.<sup>18</sup> Teleology was dropped

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 219

<sup>17</sup> James Hamman, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011)

<sup>18</sup> That is why the shift in science has been towards empiricism. See Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 41

because teleology cannot be discovered inductively. Furthermore, since deductivism is done from a larger metaphysical system, the question is asked why any particular system should be adopted to make sense of the natural world.

Carter's last attack on modern science is to call it "neopagan" and based on "Epicurean naturalism." Given that no scientist, in their role as a scientist, is explicitly calling for a return to the pagan gods, and given that few if any scientist is trying to resurrect "Epicureanism" as a true philosophy, this attack by Carter is mere guilt by association. First, any similarity to Epicureanism is found in the radical "New Atheists" and "Scientific materialist" camps, not "modern science," which in itself takes no position on metaphysical entities. Therefore, besides the radical materialists, it is false to claim that "modern science" is "Epicurean naturalism." Speaking of which, Epicureanism is not the only materialistic philosophy around, so it is false to claim that scientific materialists are necessarily "Epicurean" just because both scientific materialism and Epicureanism are materialistic in nature.

Carter's history of the modern sciences therefore is revisionist in nature. It is false that modern science stems from Christian Platonism. It is false that modern science explicitly cut itself from its own roots, although he would be correct if he applied that to naturalistic modern science. It is false that modern science, even scientific materialism, is "Epicurean naturalism." And lastly, Carter is false to assert that there is a malevolent rejection of "Christian Platonism" in the history of science, which causes its "fall." In short, Carter shows ignorance of the actual history and development of science, in service of his grand golden age narrative.

### **On Philosophy and “Christian Platonism”**

Carter spent the entirety of chapter 3, and many other parts of his book, to argue for the necessity of a recovery of “Christian Platonism.” By “Christian Platonism,” Carter is speaking not of any particular philosophy called “Platonism” but a construct called “Ur-Platonism,” which is supposedly the common understanding behind the ancient philosophies of the medieval period. This “Ur-Platonism” is made up of five points: antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinominalism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism.<sup>19</sup> Antimaterialism is the view that “entities exist that are neither bodies nor properties of bodies yet exist independently of bodies.”<sup>20</sup> Antimechanism is “the view that the only sort of explanations available in principle to a materialist are inadequate for explaining the natural order.”<sup>21</sup> Antinominalism is “the view that it is false that the only things that exist are individuals, each uniquely situated in space and time.”<sup>22</sup> Antirelativism is a

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<sup>19</sup> Carter, 79

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 80

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

rejection that “man is the measure of all things.”<sup>23</sup> Antiskepticism is the view that “knowledge is possible.”<sup>24</sup> Carter raises the stakes by boldly asserting that to reject this “Ur-Platonism” or “Christian Platonism” is “to oppose philosophy itself and, in so doing, to set oneself in opposition to reason, the moral law, and natural science.”<sup>25</sup>

We have seen how Carter misrepresents John Calvin and the history of science. Carter also over-simplifies history. On the issue of philosophy, Carter’s view of Ur-Platonism might conceivably get around the charge of over-simplification, except that this idea of Ur-Platonism as a philosophical system does not truly work. We note that “Ur-Platonism” is basically a rejection of certain aspects of modern philosophy. It is not a philosophy, but a group, a *category* of philosophies. It is “antimaterial.” It is “antimechanical.” It is “antinominalist.” Ironically therefore, “Ur-Platonism” is itself a modern construct, and thus a creature of modernity. Neither medieval Platonists nor medieval Aristotelians would accept this construct of “Ur-Platonism” as their own philosophy, which papers over their differences and attempts either a synthesis or a trivialization of the differences between them.

What should we think of “Ur-Platonism” as a philosophy, or rather “anti-philosophy”? Stating that it is “antimaterialistic” merely rejects materialistic philosophies. To be sure, many people today are materialistic, yet there are also many idealists around. In fact, it can be argued that a significant strand of Enlightenment thought is “antimaterialistic,” with philosophers like Hegel and Berkeley taking center stage. This is true also for the issue of “antimechanism.” As for the other three points, it is false that all modern philosophies reject universals (“antinominalism”), not all philosophies claim that man is the measure of all things (e.g. objectivist epistemologies), and many modern philosophies claim knowledge is possible. What can be said therefore is that, while one can claim that there is a *historical category* of “Ur-Platonism” that encompasses all medieval thought, it is another thing altogether to claim that “Ur-Platonism” is a *philosophical* project that can be contrasted with “the Enlightenment.” The former is a historical perception; the latter is a polemical philosophical claim that has not been substantiated and cannot ever be substantiated, given the breadth of philosophies in modern times.<sup>26</sup>

Carter claims that the five points of “Ur-Platonism” is to be set over and against modern thought. Yet it is possible to show modern philosophies that agrees with all five points of “Ur-Platonism,” like Mormonism or ‘Christian Science.’ This shows us that “Ur-Platonism” has no utility in actual philosophical discourse, whatever its utility in history

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 82

<sup>26</sup> Carter wrote: “If we want to understand modernity, we need to see it as an astonishing reversion to the pre-Christian naturalism of the ancient world that Christian Platonism had, by great effort, managed to overcome in the process of shaping and developing Western culture. Modernity is the irrational rejection of Christianity as the true religion and also the point-by-point rejection of Christian Platonism as the metaphysical framework for Western culture” (*Ibid.*, 85). This is a shockingly ignorant understanding of modernity and the Enlightenment, to put it simply.



might be. It is a mirage, a chimera, a tool used for polemical ends to bludgeon Carter's opponents.<sup>27</sup>

We should therefore discount Carter's polemics as it pertains to the supposed need for "Christian Platonism," which turned out to be Carter's way of illegitimately bringing in Platonism into theology without actually having to prove that Platonism is necessary for interpreting Scripture. It is of course true that metaphysics is important for one's view of life and might even affect one's interpretation of texts. The question before us however is not whether metaphysics is important, but whether adopting any one particular metaphysics is necessary for interpreting Scripture. That Carter has not proven, and given how Scripture was perspicuous and given to be read by all even in the mission field outside Western civilization, it is false that any one particular metaphysics, let alone any form of Platonism, is necessary for scriptural interpretation. Thus, contrary to Carter who argues by way of analogy to academics that "it is not possible to advance deeply into the study of any subject without first adopting certain basic assumptions that form the basis of that subject and not rethinking them in every moment,"<sup>28</sup> biblical interpretation is not an academic subject. It can be analyzed academically, but in itself Scripture reading is not academic but an activity made for the common man.

### Dubious hermeneutics

Having rejected "Christian Platonism," we can discard all interpretation principles and interpretation that require "Christian Platonism" in order to make sense.

In his attempt to "recover" the 'Great Tradition,' Carter seeks to rehabilitate the Quadriga, the medieval method of reading Scripture in four senses: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. The latter three correspond to the command to faith (*fides*), love (*caritas*), and hope (*spes*). Carter's main focus is on the allegorical sense, which is of course the most objectionable part of the Quadriga for many

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<sup>27</sup> There was some discussion concerning Carter's promotion of "Christian Platonism" on the *London Lyceum*. See Paul M. Gould, "On Classical Christian Platonism: A Philosopher's Reply to Carter," *The London Lyceum*, August 1 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/on-classical-christian-platonism-a-philosophers-reply-to-carter/>; Willemien Otten, "Christian Platonism: Some Comments on Its Past and the Need for Its Future," *The London Lyceum*, August 3 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/christian-platonism-some-comments-on-its-past-and-the-need-for-its-future/>; R.T. Mullins, "Craig Carter's Christian Platonism," *The London Lyceum*, August 5 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/craig-carters-christian-platonism/>; Grant Sutherland, "Is Arius a Christian Platonist?," *The London Lyceum*, August 8 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/is-arius-a-christian-platonist/>; Hunter Hindsman, "Plato is not the point: A Critical Defense of Craig Carter's Proposal," *The London Lyceum*, August 10 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/plato-is-not-the-point-a-critical-defense-of-craig-carters-proposal/>; Jordan Steffaniak, "Whose Plato? Whose Platonism? Summarizing the Christian Platonism Symposium," *The London Lyceum*, September 2 2022, accessed <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/which-plato-whose-platonism-summarizing-the-christian-platonism-symposium/>. All accessed May 5, 2023. I agree fully with Mullins' points, and with the points made of the problems with "Ur-Platonism."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

evangelicals. To perhaps allay the fear of evangelicals, Carter states that the literal sense is the most important.<sup>29</sup> He then argues that the allegorical sense is merely no different from what we know of as typology in Scripture.<sup>30</sup> In fact, a fuller sense of “allegory” as seen in “prosopological exegesis” is the best sense where “we actually hear Christ speak.”<sup>31</sup>

Now, there is no doubt that Christians over the ages have read the Scriptures and gems of insight have been found within their interpretations throughout the centuries. The *Ancient Christian Commentary* series therefore is a great resource for the exegete and preacher. The issue is not whether Christian exegetes have found truths using various methods of interpretation, but rather what should the manner of our reading of Scripture be. It is after all possible to arrive at a biblical truth from the wrong scriptures, otherwise known as the right doctrine from the wrong text. One could very well read Scripture, see that Jesus was in the tomb three days and thus argue that Jesus’ burial showed us that God is a Trinity. Therefore, just because someone found some biblical insight does not necessarily mean that their method of interpreting Scripture is commendable.

The idea of typology, seen in discussions about the *sensus plenior* of Scripture or its extended sense, seem to be more than just the “literal sense” of Scripture, and it is on this that Carter pounces to establish his push of the Quadriga. Carter claims that Reformers such as Calvin who reject allegory are not rejecting “allegory” rightly understood, merely rejecting “the sloppy misuse of Scripture by reading ideas into it that are not there,” which he agrees is a “bad thing.”<sup>32</sup>

Before we continue, it must be said that Carter did a good job at exegeting Isaiah 53. But when it comes to hermeneutics, the question continues to be not whether one particular instance of Carter’s exegesis is good, but whether his method is sound. This is where the *ressourcement* in its recovery of the Quadriga impedes rather than help the exegesis of Scripture. There is after all no reason why we cannot understand the plain sense of a text as the meaning of a text as interpreted within all its various contexts. Its literal sense, otherwise known as its grammatical-historical meaning, is its meaning in its immediate context. Its extended sense or *sensus plenior* could be its meaning in its canonical context. In this sense therefore, there is nothing wrong with holding with the Reformers that there is only one plain reading of Scripture, and thus the Reformers were not inconsistent in rejecting the Quadriga while holding on to typology and *sensus plenior*.

If Carter was writing only to persuade us of treating ancient exegetes with respect and valid interlocutors in our study of the Bible, that would surely be no issue here. The problem however is that Carter is attempting to persuade us that the medieval method (and not just the patristic method which was not quite systematized yet into the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 128 footnote 12, 163-4

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-9

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 186, 163-4

Quadrige) of reading Scripture is profitable. That is quite simply contrary to the Reformation, and the dubious medieval hermeneutics of the Quadrige is to be rejected.

## Conclusion

Craig Carter has written a book attempting to convince us of the superiority of “premodern” (medieval) hermeneutics, and the necessity of “Christian Platonism” for right interpretation of Scripture. Along the way, Carter paints us a picture of glory and of ruin, and of current restoration. Carter combines this with an exegesis of Isaiah 53 which points us to our Savior Jesus, thus seemingly showing us the true superiority of “premodern” exegesis.

When we examine his arguments however, we see that Carter’s recounting of history is simplistic and extremely wanting. Carter fails in understanding the break of the Reformation, and fails in understanding the development of modern science, and broad-brushes his bogeyman the “Enlightenment.” Carter also fails to understand the difference between having “Ur-Platonism” as a historical category for certain forms of philosophies, and his attempt to use it as an object of contrary thought in philosophical discourse. Carter fails therefore as a historian and a philosopher.

On the topic of hermeneutics, Carter does much better. Even here however, Carter fails to consider the Reformers’ rejection of the Quadrige, and in fact glosses over them. Carter’s argument for the Quadrige through his promotion of the allegorical sense fails to understand how typology, *sensus plenior*, and even prosopological exegesis can function within the Reformational single sense of Scripture, and therefore that there are these tools available for the exegete does not prove the allegorical sense, or the Quadrige. Carter’s argument on this is a classic case of the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent, where he fails to prove how the various issues of typology, *sensus plenior* and prosopological exegesis necessitate the Quadrige at all.

In conclusion therefore, this book is indeed insightful into the current *ressourcement* and how it is trying to smuggle philosophy and questionable hermeneutics into the interpretive task, under the guise of some real and major concerns in the modern academy. As it has been mentioned many times here, if Carter would restrict his criticisms to specific issues, he would have a valid point or two. However, by painting in broad brushes, Carter takes hold of legitimate concerns, and uses them to push his own philosophy and agenda, to the detriment of the subjects involved.