

METONYMY AND SYNECDOCHE in Reformation and Puritan Writings

John Wycliffe, *The Trialogus*:

In the second sacramental clause concerning the wine, that wine in the cup is meant. And therefore, by the connection from a sufficient resemblance between this clause about the wine, and the former one in which the bread is consecrated, it appears plainly that this same bread must be referred to, because no catholic would deny that the *contents* of the cup are meant, by METONYMY.¹ For Christ, in Mark 14.24, speaks thus — “This is my blood of the new testament.” There is no catholic in existence who believes that the metal cup is sacramentally the blood of Christ; but he understands that the term is referring to the wine contained in it. Further, to lay bare the wily turnings of this sophistry, the Holy Spirit ordained that it should be written in the masculine gender, *Hic est sanguis meus* (this is my blood). This is why, among the many significations of those scriptural passages which we are certain of, this is one of the most certain: that in this proposition of the sacrament, the bread or wine is meant.

John Calvin, *On Prayer*:

When Paul declares that every creature of God "is sanctified by the word of God and prayers" (1 Tim. 4:5), he intimates that without the word and prayers none of them are holy and pure, *word* being used METONYMICALLY for *faith*. Hence David, on experiencing the loving-kindness of the Lord, elegantly declares, "He has put a new song in my mouth" (Ps. 40:3); intimating, that our silence is malignant when we leave his blessings unpraised, seeing every blessing he bestows is a new ground of thanksgiving. Thus Isaiah, proclaiming the singular mercies of God, says, "Sing to the Lord a new song" (Is. 42:10). In the same sense David says in another passage, "O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth your praise" (Ps. 51:15). In like manner, Hezekiah and Jonah declare that they will regard it as the end of their deliverance "to celebrate the goodness of God with songs in his temple" (Is. 38:20; Jonah 2:10).

Henry Bullinger, *The Apostles Creed*:

In the twelfth chapter of the gospel of St. Matthew, we read that the Lord said, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Yet notwithstanding, in the sixteenth and twentieth chapters, expounding himself as having spoken that by SYNECDOCHE,² he says, "I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the scribes and elders, and be killed, and be raised up again the third day."³

Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*:

Hence, where the Scripture so often says, "All men are liars," we must, upon the authority of "Free-will," on the contrary say – the Scripture rather, lies; because, man is not a liar as to his *best part*, that is, his reason and will, but as to his *flesh* only, that is, his blood and his grosser part: so that that *whole*, according to which he is called man, that is, his reason and his will, is sound and holy. Again, there is that of the Baptist, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3.36). We must understand "upon him" thus: – that is, the wrath of God abides upon the 'grosser affections' of the man: but upon that power of "Free-will," that is, upon his will and his reason, abide grace and everlasting life.

¹ *Metonymy*: substituting an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself (as in 'they counted heads').

² *Synecdoche*: substituting a more inclusive term for a less inclusive one or vice versa ("counting heads").

³ Mat 16.21, and 20.18-19.

Hence, according to this, in order that “Free-will” might stand, whatever is in the Scriptures said against the ungodly, you are, by the figure SYNECDOCHE, to twist round to apply to that brutal part of man, that the truly rational and human part might remain safe. I have therefore, to render thanks to the assertors of “Free-will;” because, I may sin with all confidence; knowing that, my reason and will, or my “Free-will,” cannot be damned, because it cannot be destroyed by my sinning, but for ever remains sound, righteous, and holy. And thus, happy in my will and reason, I shall rejoice that my filthy and brutal flesh is distinctly separated from me, and damned; so far shall I be from wishing Christ to become its Redeemer! – You see, here, to what the doctrine of “Free-will” brings us – it denies all things, divine and human, temporal and eternal; and with all these enormities, makes a laughing-stock of itself!

John Owen, *The Death of Death*:

...“the whole world” does sometimes signify the worser part of the world; and why may it not, by a like SYNECDOCHE, signify the better part of that? Rev. 12:9, “The Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world, is cast out;” that is, the wicked and reprobate in the whole world, while all others rejoice in his overthrow, verse 10. 1Jn. 5:19, “The whole world lies in wickedness,” where “the whole world” is opposed to those who are “of God” in the beginning of the verse. You have the contrary sense in Col. 1:6.⁴ This then being said to clarify the meaning of the expression that is insisted on here, will make it evident that there is nothing at all in the words themselves that would force anyone to conceive that all and every man in the world are denoted by them. Rather they denote believers, all that did or would believe throughout the whole world, in contrast to believers of the Jewish nation.

John Owen, *On the Holy Spirit*:

The material object of our faith is the things revealed in the Scripture, declared to us in propositions of truth; for things must be proposed to us, or else we cannot believe them. That God is one in three persons, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and similar propositions of truth, are the material object of our faith, or the *things* we believe. And the reason *why* we believe them is because they are proposed in the Scripture. The apostle expresses the whole of what we intend, in 1Cor 15:3-4, “I delivered to you first of all, that which I also received, how Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, are the things proposed to us to be believed; and so they are the object of our faith. But the reason why we believe them, is because they are declared in the Scriptures.⁵ Sometimes this expression, “believing the Scriptures,” denotes by a METONYMY,⁶ both the formal and material objects of our faith. We believe the Scriptures themselves, as such, *and* the things contained in them. Thus Joh 2:22: “They believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus said;” or the things delivered in the Scripture and further declared by Christ, which they did not understand before. And they believed what was declared in the Scriptures, *because* it was declared in them. Under various considerations, both are intended in the same expression, “They believed the Scripture.”

⁴ Col 1:5-6 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which has come to you, as *it has* in all the world; and brings forth fruit, as *it does* also in you, since the day you heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth:

⁵ See Acts 8:28-38.

⁶ Substituting the name of an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself: when we believe the Scriptures, we believe God.