

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 70:3/4

July/October 2006

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Iustitia Imputata Christi: **Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification?**

R. Scott Clark

When Martin Luther traveled to Schmalkald to present his articles to the princes in December of 1537, one of those with him was Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) who had been with him also at Marburg (1529) and was a trusted, even if controversial, friend.¹ At Schmalkald, Luther was confessing and preaching that “through faith we receive a different, new, clean heart and that, for the sake of Christ our mediator, God will and does regard us as completely righteous and holy. Although sin is not completely gone or dead, God will nevertheless not count it or consider it” (SA III, 13, 1).²

While Luther was saying what he had “consistently taught,” Osiander was suggesting quite another doctrine, namely justification by faith on the basis of the indwelling Christ. By 1548 Osiander became more explicit and by 1550 publicly controversial. After Luther's death and because of an academic position in Königsberg (in eastern Prussia; now Kaliningrad, Russia), he was required to articulate his views publicly. He did so in a 1550 disputation in which he rejected what he considered, in David Steinmetz's words, the “cold doctrine of forensic justification.”³ However cold it might have been, a heated conflict erupted immediately.⁴ His views

¹ P. Tschakert, “Osiander, Andreas I.,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson and Lefferts Augustine Loetscher (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1908–1955. Reprint, 1977), and Gottfried Seebaß, “Osiander, Andreas,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, 4 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 324.

³ David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1981), 94–95. Steinmetz continues by arguing that Luther's doctrine of justification included both personal union with Christ and the forensic aspect. See Andreas Osiander, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebaß, 10 vols. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1975–1997), 9.422–446.

⁴ See Martin Chemnitz, “Judgment on Certain Controversies Concerning Certain Articles of the Augsburg Confession Which Have Recently Arisen and Caused Controversy,” in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James

were denounced on all sides as contrary to the Protestant understanding of Scripture.

Since that time, despite the many internal disagreements on other questions, there has been among confessional Protestants a remarkably unified doctrine of forensic justification, that is, the notion that justification is a definitive divine declaration that a person, though intrinsically sinful, is in fact legally righteous in "*in foro divino*."⁵ Nevertheless, in the modern period there has been a vigorous assertion to the effect that, despite the fact that he was rejected by Protestant confessionalists in the sixteenth century, Osiander's doctrine of justification was more faithful to the Scriptures than that of the Protestant confessional tradition, which is seen as originating from Philipp Melancthon.

This essay is in four parts. In the first section, I survey the ways Luther has been interpreted in the modern period. In the second, Luther's doctrine of justification is set in its medieval context. The third section sketches the development of Luther's doctrine of justification. The last section offers a detailed survey of Luther's doctrine of justification as it came to expression in 1535–1536.

A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 208–212. See also Calvin's reaction, *Institutio* 3.11 in P. Barth and W. Niesel ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926–1954), 4.185.19–22, 4.187.9–14, 4.194.11–13, 4.192.33–193.2.

⁵ The *Confessio Augustana*, Part 1, Art. 4 says that believers are "*iustificantur propter Christum per fidem . . .*" [Phillip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 3.10.] The *Second Helvetic Confession*, Art. 15.3–4 (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.266–67) affirms that the ground of justification is "*the iustitiam Christi*" that God imputes to us. God justifies sinners "*propter Christum*" and they receive that grace "*per fidem*" and "*sola fide in Christum . . .*" *Belgic Confession* Art. 23 says that sinners are justified "*propter Iesum Christum*" and that by faith we "*soli Iesu Christi crucifixi obedientiae innixi . . .*" [H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis Reformatis Publicatarum* (Leipzig: Julius Klinkhardt, 1840), 374.] *Heidelberg Catechism* question 60 says that before God we are "*iustus*" "*sola fide in Iesum Christum*" whereby "*mihī perfecta satisfactio, iustitia et sanctitas Christi, imputetur ac donetur*" so that it is as though "*eam obedientiam, quam pro me Christus praestitisset*" (Niemeyer, *Collectio*, 442). Finally, the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* 3.2 says that God "*donat atque imputat nobis iustitiam obedientia Christi*." In 3.3 "*solam fidem esse illud medium et instrumentum*" by which the sinner lays hold of Christ and his righteousness (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.116).

I. The Issue and Methodological Problems

Whether and to what degree Philipp Melanchthon was faithful to Luther's theology is a question beyond the scope of this study. It is necessary to note, however, that it has been a controversial question since the mid-1530s and is at the heart of Lutheran denominational disagreements. Melanchthon has long been a convenient whipping boy for those who have wished to separate Luther from Protestant orthodoxy. According to Peter C. Hodgson, the great pietist Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714)

ascribes to Melanchthon an even greater share in the deplorable turn of events that in so short a time were taken by the Reformation. He brought more darkness and error into theology than light and strength, Arnold maintains, since he prepared and opened the way for corrupted reason to suppress the simplicity of Christian doctrine and to pervert the truth by pompous, quarrelsome speculation.⁶

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, at least, it has become a *datum* for many that the confessional Protestant doctrine of justification was not only theologically misguided, but was also Melanchthon's – not Luther's – child.

Virtually any topic in Luther studies is important because Luther is massively important. To some degree, all Protestants derive their identity from Luther. This makes studying him particularly difficult. Whoever controls the "Luther story" has gained a powerful advantage in claiming to represent authentic Protestant teaching. For this reason there have been many Luthers: for pietists, Luther became the man of the *Turmerlebnis*; for modernists, the anti-authoritarian hero; and for some contemporary interpreters of Luther, he has become the theologian of theotic union with Christ.

The study of Luther's doctrine of justification also faces the challenge of the rejection of the forensic understanding of justification. Since the nineteenth century, the relational (or participationist) approach to understanding justification has quite eclipsed the forensic.⁷ Whereas in the

⁶ Peter C. Hodgson, ed., *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History, A Library of Protestant Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 119.

⁷ E.g., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004). Generally the turn to participationist

earlier period, the real was the rational (or empirical) and *vice versa*, in our age the real is the relational and the relational is the real. The theological influence of this hermeneutical move is evident in a number of recent works. In the present culture, to say that justification is primarily forensic is the rhetorical equivalent of saying that one teaches an implausible, cold, impersonal, and even arbitrary doctrine of justification.⁸

categories is evident in Radical Orthodoxy. For a theological response, see Michael S. Horton, "Participation and Covenant," in James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), and Justin S. Holcomb, "Being Bound to God," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*. For evidence of the influence of participationist categories in Luther studies see: Paul Louis Metzger, "Luther and the Finnish School. Mystical Union with Christ: An Alternative to Blood Transfusions and Legal Fictions," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 201-213; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; reprint, 1991-1993): 1.2; Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness, Justice and Justification," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 740-745; Rowan Williams, "Justification," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 843-849; and Alan Torrance, "Justification," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh S. Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 362-364. The influence of the movement to redefine justification in relational and participationist categories is evident also in Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), where Paul's central dogma is said to be union with Christ, and in Michael F. Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 253-275.

⁸ This approach also appears in Calvin studies. Craig B. Carpenter argues that Calvin's reply to session six of Trent turned to union with Christ rather than to imputation; "A Question of Union with Christ: Calvin and Trent on Justification," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 363-386. Carl Mosser claims that, because of ignorance of patristic theology and the undue influence of Adolph von Harnack, scholars have overlooked Calvin's doctrine of *theosis* through union with Christ; see "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002): 36-57. Following on, Julie Canlis writes that Calvin's reaction to Osiander has blinded interpreters to his own interest in deification through union with Christ; see "Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2004): 169-184. For a response see Jonathan Slater, "Salvation as Participation in the Humanity of the Mediator in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: A Reply to Carl Mosser," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 39-58. See also Thomas Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to the Recent Calvin Interpretations," *Journal of*

Students of Luther's doctrine of justification also face the daunting task of attempting to account for a doctrine that was at the center of one of the most significant theological revolutions in the last two millennia and which is a moving target. Luther's doctrine of justification was one thing in 1513 and became another by 1536. This development, and the failure (or refusal) to observe it carefully, has also contributed to confusion.

In contrast to much, but not all, Luther scholarship since the nineteenth century, I contend that, read against his medieval background, the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness was essential to Luther's Protestant doctrine of justification. Put negatively, the modern attempt to revise the confessionalist account of Luther's doctrine of justification, whereby Luther is said to have taught justification on the basis of a theotic and not legal union with Christ, has the effect of making Luther repudiate his own Reformation doctrine of justification in favor of an intrinsic ground of justification before God, namely Christ's presence by virtue of union. If the revisionist account of Luther is historical, then Osiander was correct to claim that he was the true heir of Luther's doctrine of justification.⁹

II. The Quest for the Luther of History

Over the past century the confessional Protestant account of Luther's doctrine of justification has been called into question as a misrepresentation. The implication is that if we would be faithful to the Luther of history over against the Luther of faith, we should repudiate the accretions layered upon Luther's gospel by Protestant orthodoxy and return to the genuine Luther.

According to the confessional Protestant story, where the medieval theologians and the Council of Trent following them taught a realistic doctrine of progressive justification through sanctification, Luther's great theological breakthrough was a forensic, definitive, non-realistic (i.e., non-infusionist) doctrine of justification. He taught that Christ's righteousness is *extra nos*. The righteousness, on the basis of which sinners are declared righteous before God is alien to them and proper to Christ: it is nothing but

the Evangelical Theological Society 50 (2007): 311-328.

⁹ Lowell C. Green made this point in "The Question of Theosis in the Perspective of Lutheran Christology," in *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just Jr., Daniel L. Gard, and Thomas L. Olson (Ft Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 174.

his obedience for his people imputed to sinners and received through faith that trusts in Christ and his finished work.¹⁰

Scholars within and without Protestant confessionalism, both Reformed and Lutheran (R. Seeberg, B. B. Warfield, and the more recent scholarship of T. H. L. Parker, Berndt Hamm, François Wendel, W. Stanford Reid, David Steinmetz, and Brian Gerrish) have held that the confessional Protestant doctrine of justification had its roots in Martin Luther.¹¹ The orthodox Lutheran identification with Luther is no surprise, but some might be surprised to learn the degree to which the Reformed orthodox identified with Luther on this point. It was J. H. Alsted, a seventeenth-

¹⁰ Luther's 1536 Third Disputation *De iustificatione*, thesis 27 says, "Iam certum est, Christum seu iustitiam Christi, cum sit extra nos et aliena nobis, non posse nostris operibus comprehendere." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1993), 39.I:181-182 (hereafter, WA); Martin Luther, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 34:153 (hereafter LW). Robert Kolb, however, has argued that the Lutheran orthodox emphasis on Christ's obedience to the law marked a subtle shift away from Luther's doctrine of the atonement. See Robert Kolb, "Not without the Satisfaction of God's Righteousness: The Atonement and the Generation Gap between Luther and His Students," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte: Sonderband: Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa, Interpretation und Debatten*, ed. Hans R. Guggisberg and Gottfried G. Krodel (Gütersloh: Verlaghaus, 1993), 136-156.

¹¹ R. Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, tr. Charles E. Hay, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society), 2:392-393, 402-405; B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 489-490; T. H. L. Parker, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 25 (1952): 101-107; Berndt Hamm "What Was the Reformation Doctrine of Justification?" in C. Scott Dixon, ed., *The German Reformation: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 56-90; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, tr. Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1963), 255-263; W. Stanford Reid, "Justification by Faith According to John Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 290-307; David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117-118; B. A. Gerrish, "John Calvin on Martin Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck*, ed. J. Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 69. See also Joseph Wawrykow "John Calvin and Condign Merit," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 83 (1992): 74, 75, who argues that Calvin and Luther fundamentally agreed on forensic justification. These views are in contrast to that of Adolph von Harnack, who argued that Melancthon and other "epigones" of Luther "abandoned the 'sola fides' doctrine" in favor of "synergism." See Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols, tr. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 7:256.

century Reformed orthodox theologian, who said that the doctrine of justification is the *articulus cadentis et stantis ecclesiae*.¹²

In his early account of Luther's doctrine of justification, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1898) described Luther's view as a personal experience of forgiveness.¹³ He read Luther as a proto-modern. According to David W. Lotz, Ritschl argued that, in response to Roman criticisms and Melancthon's influence, Luther's doctrine of justification converged with Melancthon's more forensic doctrine.¹⁴ As James Stayer has noted, Ritschl argued that after the second century, "speculative metaphysics had encroached upon Christianity. . . ." ¹⁵ According to Gerhard O. Forde, Ritschl found an ambiguity inherent in the Protestant doctrine of justification. Luther never settled the relations between justification and rebirth. The orthodox solution to the problem committed orthodoxy necessarily to abstract metaphysics.¹⁶ Ritschl attempted to solve this problem "by describing Christ's work solely in terms of its actual historical significance in the community rather than in terms of some objective past transaction; in this way the act of justification will always occur simultaneously with the subjective experience of rebirth."¹⁷ Forde contended that Ritschl conflated Luther with Kant and reversed his order of law and gospel.¹⁸

According to Ritschl, Philipp Melancthon is the true founder of the Lutheran church and a symptom of the decline of Protestant orthodoxy. In his *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung* (1870-1874),¹⁹ Ritschl argued that with his adoption of the law-gospel distinction and in works such as *De servo arbitrio* (1525; which Luther regarded with his *Large Catechism* as

¹² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 2:193, n. 3, attributes the origin of this exact phrase to J. H. Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica* (Hanover, 1618), 711.

¹³ David W. Lotz, *Ritschl and Luther: A Fresh Perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's Theology in Light of His Luther Study* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1974), 32.

¹⁴ Lotz, *Ritschl*, 32-33.

¹⁵ James M. Stayer, ed., *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 4.

¹⁶ Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 103-105.

¹⁷ Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 105.

¹⁸ Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 112-114.

¹⁹ Albrecht Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, tr. John S. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), 167-169.

his most valuable work) kerygma became dogma: Luther fell victim to the corrupting forces of orthodoxy.²⁰

Adolph von Harnack (1851–1930) chronicled Luther's reformation as a rise and decline of charismatic religion into "doctrine, ceremony and organization."²¹ For Harnack, the German spirit and Protestantism were almost (or should be) indistinguishable.²² Using the kerygma-to-dogma analysis, he argued that Melancthon and other *epigones* of Luther "abandoned the 'sola fides' doctrine" in favor of synergism.²³ Harnack's Luther was the restorer of ancient, biblical, Pauline dogma *par excellence*.²⁴ Luther's simple, powerful, and existential religion was corrupted by the *epigones* into systematic theology.²⁵ Justification was not a single doctrine but rather "the fundamental form of the Christian's state."²⁶

What is new is not that in a scrupulous and scholastic way Luther separated the justificatio and sanctification, and regarded the former as a forensic act (*actus forensis*), taking place once for all; that is the wisdom of the *Epigones*, who were always great in distinctions²⁷

Harnack granted that the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness is part of what was new about Luther's doctrine of justification, but it is much more than that. Justification is "being righteous and becoming righteous."²⁸ In this conclusion, he anticipated aspects of the so-called Luther Renaissance.²⁹

In a speech delivered in 1906, Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) argued, quite rightly in my opinion, that there was a clear distinction between, as Brian Gerrish summarizes it, *Alt* and *Neuprotestantismus*.³⁰ The pre-modern

²⁰ Stayer, *Luther*, 5–6.

²¹ Stayer, *Luther*, 8.

²² Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:171.

²³ Harnack, *History*, 7:256. Lowell C. Green has challenged the notion that Melancthon was a synergist. See Lowell C. Green, "The Three Causes of Conversion in Philipp Melancthon, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, and the 'Formula of Concord,'" *Lutherjahrbuch* 47 (1980): 89–114.

²⁴ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:175–179.

²⁵ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:195–196.

²⁶ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:207.

²⁷ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:207.

²⁸ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:208.

²⁹ Stayer, *Luther*, 11.

³⁰ S. A. Riddoch, "The Ernst Troeltsch-Karl Holl Controversy and the Writing of

world was a church civilization, determined by objective, divinely revealed norms. In the modern world, by contrast, authority is determined by the inherent power of an idea to produce conviction through demonstrating its rationality.³¹ Luther, he argued in contrast to Ritschl, belonged to the old, pre-modern, pre-critical world.³² He was asking essentially pre-modern questions, about heaven, hell, and salvation.³³ "Atonement, therefore, becomes the central doctrine of Protestantism. . . ." ³⁴ What Troeltsch recognized, in effect, was that Protestantism was premised on a kind of Creator-creature distinction not shared by most medieval theologians, in that it rejected the notion of an ontological *reditus ad Deum*, but that, in many ways, the Reformation was a re-shaping of medieval ideas.³⁵

Karl Holl (1886-1926), one of the principal sources of the so-called Luther Renaissance, was present for, and horrified by, Troeltsch's argument. He reacted to what he perceived to be Troeltsch's marginalization of Luther.³⁶ He criticized Troeltsch's Luther scholarship as too reliant on secondary material, biased, unhistorical, and colored by his political commitments.³⁷ The so-called Luther Renaissance was marked by

Reformation History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queens University, 1996), 2. *Altprotestantismus* refers to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orthodoxy.

³¹ Troeltsch, *Protestantism*, 23-24. Stayer has argued quite persuasively that, in fact, there was no Luther Renaissance. He argues that Holl's supposed re-discovery of the "Luther History" by finding in Luther what was neither familiar to confessionalism or *Kulturprotestantismus* is really more German cultural mythology than history.

³² See his introduction to Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 9.

³³ Riddoch, "Troeltsch-Holl," 2-3.

³⁴ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, tr. Olive Wyon, 2 vols. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931), 2:476.

³⁵ Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, 2:477-484. It might be argued that the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) not only denounced Joachim of Fiore (cap. 2) but asserted a doctrine of analogy. Joachim was condemned, however, for his errors on the Trinity not for teaching an ontic continuum between God and humans. The Council held: ". . . quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda." See H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*. 30th ed. (Friburgi: Herder, 1955), 202. It is not clear that this affirmation of analogy is materially identical to the Reformation distinction between the Creator and the creature.

³⁶ Stayer, *Luther*, xii-xiv, 3-4. Stayer argues provocatively that Holl and the Barthians who succeeded him were actually, like Nietzsche, anti-modern modernists.

³⁷ Carolyn Donine Ocheltree, "The Medieval and Renaissance Luther: A Study of Ernst Troeltsch's and Karl Holl's Interpretation of Luther" (M.A. thesis, University of

a new sophistication in Luther study, the recovery of source materials such as Luther's lectures on Romans, the use of the relatively new Weimar edition of *Luther's Works*, the interpretation of Luther against the broader backdrop of the history of Western theology, and a careful reading of Luther in his original context.

These methods were not in themselves objectionable. As Thomas Brady, James Stayer, and others have noted, however, Holl's study of Luther, was not naïve. It occurred in multiple contexts. First, he had a polemical interest in Luther. He had a passionate hatred for Roman Catholicism and was responding to virulently provocative criticism of Luther by Roman scholars such as Heinrich Denifle (1844-1905), who argued that Luther's doctrine of justification necessarily produced immorality.³⁸ These criticisms were not new but they had a new plausibility and posed a greater threat because Denifle had trumped Lutheran scholars by re-discovering Luther's lectures on Romans. These criticisms may have spurred Holl toward distancing Luther from Lutheran orthodoxy.

In response, Holl engaged in a sort of quest for the historical Luther, parallel to the quest for the historical Jesus.³⁹ He rejected Luther's own recollection about his breakthrough as the confused or self-interested recollection of an old man.⁴⁰ This move allowed Holl to blur the distinction between Luther's earlier sub-Protestant views from his later more developed views.⁴¹ Thus, according to Holl, as with Ritschl and von Harnack, Luther made no sharp distinction between being made righteous and being declared righteous.⁴² That distinction belonged to orthodoxy. He identified Luther's Augustinian turn, in the course of the *Dictata super psalterium* (1513-1514), with Protestantism. The wedge driven between

California Los Angeles, 1982), 41.

³⁸ Heinrich Denifle, *Luther and Lutherdom*, tr. Raymond Volz (Somerset, OH: Torch Press, 1917), 384-389.

³⁹ T. A. Brady, s.v., "Luther Renaissance," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*.

⁴⁰ Stayer, *Luther*, 33. Holl's interpretation of the preface has been under challenge for several decades. See Otto W. Heick, "Just Shall Live by Faith," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 579-590.

⁴¹ This approach has been influential not only among Ritschlians, but also among modern Evangelicals. G. W. Bromiley, "The Doctrine of Justification in Luther," *Evangelical Quarterly* 24 (1952): 91-100.

⁴² Stayer, *Luther*, 33-38.

Luther and Melancthon by Ritschl, Harnack, and Holl has become a *datum*.⁴³

Second, Holl had a powerful cultural interest in Luther. For Holl, as for Ritschl and Harnack, German culture was closely identified with Luther. Troeltsch had argued that Calvinism was better suited to the modern world than Lutheranism. In turn, Holl saw the First World War as a conflict between Lutheranism and Calvinism.⁴⁴ In his 1917 address, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, he waxed eloquent on Lutheran Christianity and German identity. Brady argues that, having rejected German liberalism and the identity of Luther with Wilhelmine culture after the war, Holl found in Luther the basis for post-liberal theology, a way to marginalize both pietism and orthodoxy and a reason to continue to identify Luther with German Christianity.⁴⁵ To suggest that Luther was no longer relevant was, in effect, to suggest that Germany was no longer relevant. Indeed, according to Brady, the chief aim of the so-called Luther Renaissance was to “demonstrate the relevance of Martin Luther’s theology to the Modern world.”⁴⁶

Alister McGrath has added his voice to those who see forensic justification as foreign to Luther. “Luther himself did not teach a doctrine of forensic justification in the strict sense. The concept of a forensic justification necessitates a deliberate and systematic distinction between justification and regeneration, a distinction which is not found in Luther’s earlier works.”⁴⁷ He argues that it was Melancthon who turned to the forensic doctrine, inspired in part by Erasmus’ *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), in which Erasmus had replaced the Vulgate’s *reputatam* with *imputatam*.⁴⁸

⁴³ So fixed has the Luther v. Melancthon interpretation become that Carl Braaten (following a 1947 essay by Richard Caemmerer) has even written of a “Melancthonian Blight” (i.e., synergism) on the Lutheran Church. See Carl E. Braaten, “The Melancthonian Blight,” *Dialog* 25 (1986): 82–83. See also the response by Mark Ellingsen, “Ecumenical Implications of the ‘Melancthonian Blight,’” *Dialog* 25 (1986): 299–301.

⁴⁴ Stayer, *Luther*, 25–27.

⁴⁵ Brady, “Luther Renaissance.”

⁴⁶ Brady, “Luther Renaissance.”

⁴⁷ Alister E. McGrath, “Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 225.

⁴⁸ See Alister E. McGrath, “Justification—‘Making Just’ or ‘Declaring Just’? A Neglected Aspect of the Ecumenical Discussion on Justification,” *The Churchman* 96

In a 1994 essay, Stephen Strehle argued that the concept of forensic justification came not from Luther but from Melanchthon's adaptation of Nominalism, beginning in his 1532 commentary on Romans. He turned to the Franciscan-Nominalist and voluntarist understanding of acceptance as an expression of the divine will.⁴⁹ According to Strehle, Melanchthon was caught between Anselm and Ockham.⁵⁰ As a result, Melanchthon reduced Luther's (and Calvin's) doctrine of justification by union with Christ to a one-dimensional, forensic system.⁵¹

The so-called New Finnish School says that Luther did not teach a forensic doctrine of justification, but rather justification by *theosis*, participation in the divine being.⁵² Tuomo Mannermaa argues that, for Luther, there was no real distinction between justification and

(1982): 44-52. In response, it seems that the semantic range of *imputare* is difficult to distinguish from that of *reputare* in Luther's 1525 *De servo*, e.g., WA 18:771, 36 or 18:772, 14. Compare these with the 1536 *Disputatio de iustificatione*, theses 18, 24, 33 (WA 39.I). Lowell Green, however, has argued since 1955 for a distinct difference of meaning in the terms in Luther's usage. See Lowell C. Green, "The Influence of Erasmus Upon Melanchthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification," *Church History* 43 (1974): 185-187, 195-197.

⁴⁹ Stephen Strehle, "Imputatio iustitiae: Its Origin in Melanchthon, Its Opposition in Osiander," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 50 (1994): 203-205. This essay was republished in Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Gospel: Encounter between the Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Heiko Oberman, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 60 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 66-79.

⁵⁰ Strehle, *Imputatio*, 207.

⁵¹ Strehle, *Imputatio*, 218.

⁵² See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Publishers, repr. 2005); Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 1-20; Tuomo Mannermaa, "The Doctrine of Justification and Christology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000): 206-239; Sannelli Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics," in *Union with Christ*, 152-153. For a response to the Finnish School see Green, "The Question of Theosis," 163-180; Helmar Junghans, "Luther und die Welt der Reformation," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 58 (1991): 125-129; Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231-244; R. Scott Clark, "The Benefits of Christ: Double Justification in Protestant Theology before the Westminster Assembly," in *The Faith Once Delivered: Celebrating the Legacy of Reformed Systematic Theology and the Westminster Assembly (Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne Spear)*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaaggio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 107-134.

sanctification.⁵³ He contends that the “idea of participation and/or *theosis* is fundamental for one’s understanding of various *loci* in Luther’s theology.”⁵⁴ In *Christ Present By Faith*, he sets Luther against Lutheran confessionalism, arguing that, for Luther, “justifying faith does not merely signify a reception of the forgiveness imputed to a human being for the sake of the merit of Christ, which is the aspect emphasized by the *Formula of Concord*.”⁵⁵ Justification means “participation in God’s essence in Christ.”⁵⁶ The happy exchange is not forensic, but personal and even ontic. Christ takes upon himself “the sinful person of a human being and bestows his own righteous person upon him or her.”⁵⁷ Justification is a kind of communication of attributes between the sinner and Christ.⁵⁸ He argues that Luther did not reject the medieval doctrine of justification by *fides formata caritate* because it was realistic, but because the medievals replaced Christ with love.⁵⁹ Further, Luther did not oppose *theosis per se*; he opposed any view of *theosis* that has us moving “toward transcendence” rather than receiving the fullness of Christ’s deity in faith.⁶⁰

Though critical of Mannermaa and affirming the Lutheran confessions, Kurt Marquart (1934–2006) notes Luther’s 1526 comment: “God pours out his dear Son over us and pours Himself into us and draws us into Himself, so that He becomes completely humanified (*vermenschet*) and we become completely deified (*gantz und gar vergottet*, ‘Godded-through’) and everything is altogether one thing, God, Christ, and you.”⁶¹ He appeals to a 1525 sermon in which Luther said that, by union with Christ, we have

. . . everything that He is and can do, be fully in us and mightily work, that we be completely deified [*vergottet*], not that we have a particle or only some pieces of God, but all fullness. Much has been written about

⁵³ Mannermaa, “Justification and Theosis,” in *Union With Christ*, 38.

⁵⁴ Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther So Fascinating?,” 13.

⁵⁵ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 16–17.

⁵⁶ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 17.

⁵⁷ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 17.

⁵⁸ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 17. He says that Luther thinks of the presence of Christ through faith “realistically” (21).

⁵⁹ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 24–28.

⁶⁰ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 29.

⁶¹ Kurt E. Marquart, “Luther and Theosis,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000): 182–205. See WA 20:229–230.

how man should be deified; there they made ladders, on which one should climb into heaven, and much of that sort of thing.⁶²

He concludes by lamenting that Lutheranism has lost this aspect of Luther's theology under the influence of alien philosophical influences.⁶³

Most recently, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has taken the New Finnish school as his starting point for unapologetically reinterpreting Luther's doctrine of justification along theotic lines.⁶⁴ Mark Seifrid has followed this approach arguing that the doctrine of justification on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed is Melancthon's and not Luther's.⁶⁵

Not everyone, however, adopted the various revisionist analyses.⁶⁶ Paul Althaus (1888–1966), who succeeded Holl as president of the *Luther Gesellschaft*, continued to represent a more or less confessionalist reading of Luther, arguing that for Luther justification (considered narrowly) is the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness to the sinner.⁶⁷ He recognized that Luther was willing to speak of justification

⁶² WA 17.1:438 See Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," 197. The older English translation had, "much has been written about the way we are to become godlike." See Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, tr. and ed. J. N. Lenker. 7 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 4:2, 280.

⁶³ Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," 197. "When one ponders the lively, full-blooded realism of Luther's theology, one can only wonder how such a legacy could have been so tragically squandered in world 'Lutheranism' over the centuries."

⁶⁴ Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 37–66. Given the very strong criticisms (see below) of the New Finnish School by historians, it is surprising to see the author simply assuming the correctness of their thesis.

⁶⁵ Mark Seifrid, "Paul, Luther, and Justification in Galatians 2:15–21," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 215–230; idem, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Leicester and Downers Grove: Apollos and Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 175; idem, "Luther, Melancthon and Paul on the Question of Imputation: Recommendations on a Current Debate," *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark A. Husband and Daniel J. Trier (Downers Grove and Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 137–176.

⁶⁶ Contra Seifrid's claim that "[v]irtually everything I have to say here will be regarded as commonplace not only by reformation scholars, but by European theologians in general"; see "Luther, Melancthon and Paul," 138.

⁶⁷ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 227. See also Mickey Mattox, "Althaus, Paul (1888–1966)," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids and Carlisle, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Paternoster, 2000). See Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel/Paul Althaus/Emmanuel Hirsch* (New Haven and

more broadly, in a way that included moral renewal, but that justification is not proper or before God. He criticized Holl for allowing the latter aspect to overshadow the former so that Holl abandoned Luther's "on account of Christ" in the sense of the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness.⁶⁸

Robert D. Preus (1924–1995) argued that far from corrupting Luther's doctrine of justification, among the much maligned spokesman of seventeenth century Lutheran Orthodoxy no "other article of faith is developed by Lutheran theology with such conscious dependence upon Luther as the article of justification."⁶⁹ Whereas one can read Chemnitz, Gerhard, and Quenstedt for pages on the sacraments with no reference to Luther, when they come to justification they often simply paraphrased Luther.⁷⁰ Gerhard Forde (1927–2005) criticized Holl's account of Luther as still trapped within the Ritschlian paradigm (gospel before law).⁷¹ He argued that Holl made Luther's a "religion of conscience," thus confusing Luther for Kant.⁷² For Bengt Hägglund, the differences between Melancthon and Luther have been over-estimated and overplayed.⁷³ Recognizing divergence over free-will, the Lord's Supper, and church politics,⁷⁴ he nevertheless calls attention to Melancthon's unwavering commitment to *sola gratia* and to Luther's own high estimate of Melancthon. Helmer Junghans has criticized the attempt to find a doctrine of *theosis* in Luther on the grounds that it ignores the fundamental and determinative nature and function of Luther's distinction between the *theologia crucis* and the *theologia gloriae*.⁷⁵

Lowell C. Green has also criticized Mannermaa's construal of Luther for failing to observe the distinction between the earlier and later Luther, and for quoting Luther selectively. From an historian's point of view, Green criticizes Mannermaa's heavy-handed and systematic-theological

London: Yale University Press, 1985), 79–119.

⁶⁸ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 241.

⁶⁹ Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy," *The Springfielder* 29 (1965): 24.

⁷⁰ Preus, "Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy," 24–25.

⁷¹ Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 129.

⁷² Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 130.

⁷³ Bengt Hägglund, "Melancthon Versus Luther: The Contemporary Struggle," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44 (1980): 123.

⁷⁴ Hägglund, "Melancthon Versus Luther," 124–132.

⁷⁵ Helmar Junghans, "Luther und die Welt der Reformation," 125–129.

appropriation of Luther regardless of the Reformer's context and historical development.⁷⁶ Green notes that in Schmalkald Article I, on justification, Luther spoke not a word about *theosis* or theotic union and much about Christ's substitutionary atonement.⁷⁷ When Luther wrote of the "Joyful Exchange" (*der fröhliche Wechsel*), he never implied an ontological but only a legal transaction.⁷⁸ According to Green, relations between Melanchthon and Luther were "much more complex than is commonly recognized . . ."⁷⁹ Melanchthon was not "willing to sacrifice evangelical truth upon the altar of metaphysical philosophy."⁸⁰ He rejects completely the notion that Melanchthon "merely took Luther's teachings and pressed them into scholastic formulations."⁸¹

Bernd Moeller and others have criticized Holl for failing to locate Luther in his social context. Further, too many modern appropriations of both Troeltsch and Holl have failed to understand them against their own background of the World War I Germany.⁸² Carl Trueman has made some of the most pointed and useful criticisms of the Finnish school. He accuses them of disregarding the methods of modern-Luther historiography and of being inattentive to the hermeneutics and development in Luther's writings. According to Trueman, if the question is whether "in fact" the Finnish School "represents a fair and proper interpretation of what Luther himself actually believed" the answer must be no.⁸³

Heiko Oberman put the question of the relation of justification to union in Luther as clearly as anyone. In 1966 he wrote of an argument between those who interpret Luther to teach "imputatio-justification over against" those who interpret Luther to teach "unio-justification."⁸⁴ This is exactly the question.

⁷⁶ Green, "The Question of Theosis," 168-175.

⁷⁷ Green, "The Question of Theosis," 169.

⁷⁸ WA, 7:25, 34; LW 31:352.

⁷⁹ Lowell C. Green, "Melanchthon's Relation to Scholasticism," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 285.

⁸⁰ Green, "Melanchthon's Relations to Scholasticism," 285.

⁸¹ Green, "Melanchthon's Relations to Scholasticism" 285.

⁸² Riddoch, "The Ernst Troeltsch-Karl Holl Controversy and the Writing of Reformation History," 13-15.

⁸³ Trueman, "Finnish Line," 233, 242-243.

⁸⁴ Heiko A. Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic

III. The Medieval Background

It is impossible to understand the development of Luther's Protestant doctrine of justification without some grasp of the views he came to reject. For our purposes, it is essential that one understand that there was a broad consensus in medieval theology that one is ordinarily justified because and to the degree that one is intrinsically sanctified, whether as a necessity because of the divine nature (as in realism) or as a consequence of an apparently arbitrary divine will (as in voluntarism), whether from a strongly predestinarian standpoint (e.g., Bradwardine) or a Pelagianizing approach (e.g., Ockham). Justification was a process begun at baptism and ordinarily concluded only at the judgment. This process was described in different ways with differing degrees of emphasis on the nature and role of human cooperation, but, in virtually every pre-Reformation scheme, God is said to have taken the initiative (*gratia praeveniens*) to infuse within the sinner divine grace. By all accounts, the sinner was obligated to cooperate with that grace toward final justification. In the medieval schemes, grace begins as alien to the sinner but, for righteousness to result, it cannot remain alien but it must become proper. Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160) represents the consensus through the twelfth century: the ground of justification was proper, intrinsic righteousness, which is the product of created grace and cooperation with that grace.⁸⁵

In his analysis of Osiander's theology, Robert Kolb has noted the influence of neo-Platonism as an underlying ontological assumption in his doctrine of justification.⁸⁶ This dependence, however, did not begin with Osiander. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224–1274) was also deeply influenced by neo-Platonism, which is evident in his doctrine of participation in the divine essence. Grace, he taught, is "God's action in us leading us to union with him."⁸⁷

Doctrines of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 19.

⁸⁵ Peter Lombard, *Magistri Petri Lombardi Parisiensis Episcopi Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, Editio tertia. ed. 2 vols, *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum*, 4–5 (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971–1981), 2.d. 27 cs. 7–10 and 4 d. 47 c. 3, d. 49. c. 1.

⁸⁶ Robert Kolb, "Confessional Lutheran Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73. See also Green, "The Question of Theosis," 174.

⁸⁷ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 262.

. . . Nothing can act beyond its species, since the cause must always be more powerful than its effect. Now the gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify (*deificet*), bestowing a partaking (*participatio*) of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.⁸⁸

For Thomas, justification is sanctification and that is participation in the divine nature.⁸⁹ Though the evidence that Luther was directly aware of Thomas's theology is disputed, those who attribute to Luther a doctrine of justification by theotic union are guilty of Thomafying or more accurately, Platonizing him.⁹⁰

Gabriel Biel (c. 1420–1495) upheld the doctrine of justification by proper righteousness. We are justified by grace and free will. With virtually the entire pre-Reformation Western church, merit was said to presuppose the free cooperation with grace. Grace is nothing other than infused charity.⁹¹ Though the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent (1547) met after Luther's death and formulated their language in reaction to Luther, it is nevertheless a pointedly accurate summary of the prevailing medieval doctrine of justification.⁹² Those who argue that Luther taught justification

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby, 61 vols. (London and New York: Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, 1964–1980), 1a2ae 112.1 (resp to obj).

⁸⁹ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 262.

⁹⁰ On what Luther might have learned about Thomas from Biel, see John L. Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁹¹ Gabriel Biel, *Sermones de festivitibus Christi* (Hagenau, 1510), Sermo II, in ordine 14, tr. and published in Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation. The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 170. See also Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, 52–55.

⁹² According to chapter three, it is only those to whom "the merit of His passion is communicated." In chapter four, justification is "translation" to a "state of grace" effected through the "laver of regeneration." In chapter five, the "beginning of justification" is said "to be derived from the prevenient grace of God." Sinners are "disposed through His quickening and assisting grace." They must cooperate with existing, assisting grace. Justification follows preparation. It is "not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just . . .

by theotic union with Christ must show that Luther turned away from one intrinsic ground of justification (prevenient grace and cooperation with grace) to another intrinsic ground, namely Christ inherent in the believer. I do not think that the revisionists have made that case.

IV. Luther's Gradual Development

One is sometimes left with the impression that Luther only mentioned his turn to his Reformation view of justification in the 1545 preface to his Latin writings, but such is not the case. The same basic account occurred more than once in Luther's writings. For example, in his 1541 lecture on Genesis 27, he described his frustration with the Roman system of progressive justification.⁹³ He recounted his struggle over and discovery of the true meaning of Romans 1:17. The key to his new understanding was his use of forensic categories. The righteousness by which we are justified is extrinsic and received through faith.⁹⁴

Scholars have too often focused on what Heiko Oberman called the "romantic and unrealistic" notion of a "one-time breakthrough."⁹⁵ For example, Holl failed to recognize the development in Luther's theology in the period 1513–1521. As a consequence, he used as a baseline to determine Luther's doctrine of justification things Luther said in that period but that he later rejected. It is more historical to say that gradually, from 1513 to

.. " We are "not only reputed, but are truly called, and are, just, receiving justice within us . . . according to each one's proper disposition and co-operation." In justification, the "charity of God is poured forth, by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein: whence, man, through Jesus Christ, in whom he is ingrafted, receives, in the said justification, together with the remission of sins, all these (gifts) infused at once, faith, hope, and charity." What is significant about this passage is the clarity with which it expressed the medieval conviction that justification is the product of union with Christ, which, in turn, produces inherent, intrinsic righteousness, with which the sinner must cooperate in order to be finally justified. Faith is assent to the dogma of the church, and also a trust in Christ and his merits, but it exists only to the degree it is "formed by love." Since justification is a process, "no one can know with a certainty of faith . . . that he has obtained the grace of God." See Trent, Session 6, chapters 4–7, 9.

⁹³ LW 5:157–158; WA 43:537.

⁹⁴ Scholars have cast doubt of Luther's later recollection of this same episode, but it is completely credible to say that at age 58 Luther could still remember clearly the nature and period of his new understanding of justification.

⁹⁵ Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World*, ed. Donald Weinstein (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 47–48.

1521, Luther came to reject the doctrine of progressive justification in favor of the forensic doctrine of definitive justification. Denifle, Stayer, and Green are correct in saying that there was an early and later Luther.⁹⁶ Holl's approach to Luther's 1545 preface to his Latin works was clumsy. There is no good reason to doubt the reformer's own account: "I did not learn my theology all at once, but had to search deeper for it, where my temptations took me."⁹⁷

In 1966, Heiko Oberman offered what he justly described as a sober interpretation of the so-called *Turnerlebnis*.⁹⁸ Oberman argued that Luther was not describing a sudden, unprepared vision.⁹⁹ What Luther discovered, in medieval terms, is that "*the heart of the gospel is that the iustitia Christi and the iustitia Dei coincide and are granted simultaneously.*"¹⁰⁰

Green has noted that "scholars have not been careful enough in the past in using the terms *faith* and *grace* in the early Luther."¹⁰¹ As we observed in Holl, as a consequence of this blurry reading of Luther, scholars have overlooked "the process by which he . . . gradually came to" his "mature convictions."¹⁰² Graham Tomlin has also criticized Holl's approach in favor of a progressive understanding of Luther's theological development to his Reformation views.¹⁰³ Recently, Timothy George has suggested quite

⁹⁶ Stayer, *Luther*, 122.

⁹⁷ WATR 1:146, 12-14 as translated in Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms 1521* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1951), 38.

⁹⁸ Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 1-26.

⁹⁹ Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 19. Oberman's point is well taken, that Luther's language "*extra nos esse est ex nostris viribus non esse. Est quidem iustitia possessio nostra, quia nobis donata est ex misericordia, tamen est aliena a nobis, quia non meruimus eam*" (WA, 39.1:109) is directed against the "*fides formata caritate*" (22). It is more difficult, however, to see how "the central concept '*extra nos*' does not stand on the side of an imputatio-justification over against a unio-justification" (21). Oberman concluded that this expression was meant to "show that justification is not based on a claim of man, on a *debitum iustitiae*" (21). As Oberman has shown, Luther understood the implications of the medieval scheme of progressive justification whether construed in Pelagianizing or predestinarian ways. The intent of Luther's language was manifestly to reject justification on the basis of any intrinsic ground, whether by infusion or union, in favor of an extrinsic ground. *Extra nos* means *extra nos*.

¹⁰¹ Green, "The Influence of Erasmus," 187.

¹⁰² Green, "The Influence of Erasmus," 187.

¹⁰³ Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther, and Pascal* (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs. Carlisle, UK:

helpfully that Luther moved toward his mature Protestant views in two stages, first toward Augustinianism ca. 1513–1514 and in 1518–1519 to “a clear and different understanding of justification.”¹⁰⁴ It seems clear now that an appeal to a *Turmerlebnis* cannot determine how Luther’s writing from 1513 to 1521 should be interpreted.¹⁰⁵

In the academic year 1513–1514, his first series of lectures took him through the Psalms. Under the influence of Augustine’s lectures on the Psalms and perhaps through Staupitz’s influence, Luther moved away from Biel’s semi-Pelagianism toward a more thoroughly Augustinian position on original sin and predestination.¹⁰⁶ This was perhaps Luther’s first move toward what became his later mature soteriology. Some have pointed to his exposition of Psalm 71 and his “*mira et nova diffinitio*” (or redefinition) of justice as another crucial step away from the realistic doctrine of justification.¹⁰⁷ Though he was moving in an Augustinian direction, he was still a Nominalist *pactum* theologian.¹⁰⁸ For the early Luther, unless one meets the condition of the *pactum*, “God cannot do it,” that is, justify. In this context, grace still meant a medicinal substance dispensed for sinners by the church and faith was shorthand for the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

In the winter of 1515–1516, he began lecturing on Romans, interpreting *fides* in Romans 1:17 as a synecdoche for the theological virtues.¹⁰⁹ Green concludes that before “1518, Luther’s doctrine of faith was definitely pre-Reformational. It was still dominated by the medieval construction of the

Paternoster, 1999), 154–165. His conclusion (p. 155), however, that Luther’s “new theology” was in place by 1515 is only marginally better than Holl’s.

¹⁰⁴ Timothy George, “Martin Luther,” in *Reading Romans through the Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 113.

¹⁰⁵ Green, “The Influence of Erasmus,” 193. See also Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ See David C. Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in Its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 10, 20–21. Idem, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁷ Alister E. McGrath, “‘*Mira Et Nova Diffinitio Iustitiae*’: Luther and Scholastic Doctrines of Justification,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983): 43.

¹⁰⁸ LW 10:236–237.

¹⁰⁹ Lowell C. Green, “Faith, Righteousness, and Justification: New Light on Their Development under Luther and Melancthon,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 4 (1973): 70–71.

three theological virtues of *fides, caritas et spes*.”¹¹⁰ At the same time, it seems clear that even in the first course of lectures through Romans, he had abandoned an intrinsic ground of justification. The emphasis in his comments on the first nine verses of Romans 4 was clearly on the extrinsic ground of justification. Justice is reputed to the believer, not because of intrinsic, Spirit-wrought sanctity, but because of faith.¹¹¹ Abraham’s circumcision signified the righteousness of faith.¹¹² This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the *scholia* on Romans 4:7, where he distinguished explicitly between self-justification, which is always intrinsic and justification before God, which is always extrinsic.

The saints are always sinners intrinsically [*intrinsic*], and therefore always justified extrinsically [*extrinsic*]. But the hypocrites are always righteous intrinsically, and thus always sinners extrinsically. I say “intrinsically” to show how in ourselves, in our own eyes, in our own estimation; and the term “extrinsically” to show how we are before God and in his reckoning [*reputatione*]. Therefore we are righteous extrinsically when we are righteous solely by the reckoning [*reputatione*] of God and not of ourselves or of our own works. For his reckoning [*reputatio*] is not ours by reason of anything that is in us or in our own power. Therefore our righteousness is neither in us or in our power.¹¹³

It would be a mistake to read into these comments Luther’s entire mature view, but they do set a trajectory toward what became his mature turn to a strictly forensic doctrine of justification. In the first Romans lectures (especially in the *scholia* in Romans 1:17), faith was a synonym for sanctity, and justification was said to be pronounced in view of intrinsic righteousness setting up a strong tension with his later lectures and *scholia* on chapter 4. That tension, however, was moving toward resolution by 1518.

¹¹⁰ Green, “Faith, Righteousness, and Justification,” 67.

¹¹¹ LW 25:36.

¹¹² LW 25:37.

¹¹³ Revised from LW 25:257. “*Sancti Intrinsic sunt peccatores semper, ideo extrinsic iustificantur semper. Hypocritae autem intrinsic sunt iusti semper, ideo extrinsic sunt peccatores semper. Intrinsic dico, i.e., quomodo in nobis, in nostris oculis, in nostra estimatione sumus, Extrinsic autem, quomodo apud Deum et in reputatione eius sumus. Igitur extrinsic sumus iusti, quando non ex nobis nec ex operibus, Sed ex sola Dei reputatione iusti sumus. Reputatio enim eius non in nobis nec in potestate nostra est. Ergo nec iustitia nostra in nobis est nec in potestate nostra*” (WA 56:268–269).

In his *Sermo de triplici iustitia* (1518), Luther described actual sin as the fruit of original sin and as *propria peccata*.¹¹⁴ In this transitional sermon, both sin and righteousness were said to be “natal, essential, original, alien.”¹¹⁵ However much this language might have verged into some idea of proper righteousness, Luther certainly was not teaching justification by theotic union. He quoted Romans 5 to show that the ground of justification is Christ’s *obedientia* by which we are constituted righteous.¹¹⁶

The conceptual fuzziness of that sermon was clarified in his *Sermo de duplici iustitia* (1518–1519), where he distinguished clearly between a first, extrinsic, justice and a second, consequent, intrinsic justice.¹¹⁷ The first justice comes “without our works through grace alone.”¹¹⁸ It is received *per fidem*.¹¹⁹ “This primary justice is the ground, the cause, and the origin of all our proper or actual justice.”¹²⁰

In contrast to the lectures on Romans only a few years earlier, now Luther’s definition of faith was substantially revised. After the *Leipzig Disputation* (27 June–16 July 1519) and by the time he published his second course of lectures on Galatians (1519), he was working with a different notion of faith.¹²¹ In his lecture on Galatians 2:15, 16 he distinguished between his definition of faith and the medieval definition of faith as *habitus*.¹²² Where faith was fundamentally an infused virtue, now it is that thing through which “the heart and the name of the Lord cling together.”¹²³ It is those who “trust in the name of the Lord” whose “sins

¹¹⁴ WA 2:45.

¹¹⁵ WA 2:45. “. . . natalis, essentialis, originalis, aliena . . .”

¹¹⁶ WA 2:44.

¹¹⁷ WA 2:145–152; LW 31:295–306. I have defended this interpretation in more detail in R. Scott Clark, “The Benefits of Christ,” 107–134.

¹¹⁸ WA 2:146. “*Haec igitur iustitia aliena et sine actibus nostris per solam gratiam infusa nobis . . .*”

¹¹⁹ WA 2:146, “*arbitramur hominem iustificari per fidem.*”

¹²⁰ WA 2:146, “*Et haec iusticia est prima, fundamentum, causa, origo omnis iusticiae propriae seu actualis . . .*” This interpretation agrees substantially with that offered by Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 47–54. Luther used these same categories in *De servo arbitrio* (1525). “*Observa quaeso et hic partitionem Pauli duplicem Abrahae iustitiam recitantis*” (WA 18:771).

¹²¹ See Green, “Faith, Righteousness, and Justification,” 81–83.

¹²² LW 27:219; WA 2:489.

¹²³ LW 27:220. “*quod cor et nomen domini sint unum simul et sibi cohaerentia*” (WA 2:490).

are forgiven, and righteousness is imputed to them."¹²⁴ This is a signal development. When addressing justification directly he taught in forensic, not theotic, categories. On Galatians 2:21 he said:

It follows now that the man who is righteous through faith does not through himself give to anyone what is his; he does this through another, namely, Jesus Christ, who alone is so righteous as to render to all what should be rendered them. As a matter of fact, they owe everything to Him. But he who believes in Christ and by the spirit of faith has become one with Him not only renders satisfaction now to all but also brings it about that they owe everything to him, since he has all things in common with Christ. His sins are no longer his; they are Christ's. . . . Again, Christ's righteousness now belongs not only to Christ; it belongs to His Christian.¹²⁵

This passage illustrates that, for Luther, faith brings the believer into union with Christ and through that union Christ communicates not just the benefit of justification but himself. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that Luther did not have the Christian justified on the basis of anything else but Christ's imputed righteousness. He made a logical distinction between these aspects of union with Christ while not divorcing them.

The development and clarification of Luther's doctrine of justification continued in the early 1520s. As in the 1518–1519 sermons, in *On Christian Freedom* (1520), Luther juxtaposed our sin which is proper to us with Christ's alien merits.¹²⁶ By 1522, "law" and "gospel" as distinct hermeneutical categories were firmly established in Luther's thought.¹²⁷ In his preface to Romans (1522; revised 1546), Luther worked within forensic,

¹²⁴ LW 27:221. "*Sic fit, ut credentibus in nomine domini donentur omnia peccata et iusticia eis imputetur . . .*" (WA 2:490).

¹²⁵ LW 27:241. "*Iam sequitur, quod iustus per fidem nulli dat quod suum est per seipsum, sed per alium, scilicet Iesum Christum, qui solus ita iustus est, ut omnibus reddat quot reddendum est, immo omnia ei debent Qui autem in Christum credit et spiritu fidei unus cum eo factus est, iam non solum satisfacit omnibus, sed id quoque efficit, ut omnia sibi debeat, habens cum Christo omnia communia. Peccata sua iam non sua, sed Christi sunt. . . . Rursum, iusticia Christi iam non tantum Christi, sed sui Christiani est*" (WA 2:504).

¹²⁶ WA 7:51 "*qui pro te passus et resuscitatus est, ut in eum credens alius homo hac fide fieres, donatis omnibus peccatis tuis et iustificato te alienis meritis, nempe Christi solius.*" See also WA 7:55.

¹²⁷ Martin Luther, "Preface to the New Testament," LW 35:357–362.

not ontological or theotic categories.¹²⁸ The law demands righteous obedience. "So it happens that faith alone makes a person righteous and fulfils the law. For out of the merit of Christ it brings forth the Spirit."¹²⁹ "Through faith a person becomes free from sin"¹³⁰ The gospel is "nothing but preaching about Christ . . . who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all men who believe in him."¹³¹ Interpreting chapter 7 by an analogy with marriage, the intimate union between Christ and the believer was premised on a legal justification. Nowhere does one find evidence that Luther saw a theotic union in Romans. There is no reason to assume that the relational aspect of his doctrine of justification took logical precedence over the legal.

Though Luther regarded *De servo arbitrio* (1525) as one of his most important works, it does not appear often in expositions of his doctrine of justification. Luther, however, regarded his doctrine of divine sovereignty and his forensic doctrine of justification as corollaries in his repudiation of Erasmus's moralism. Because by nature the will is in bondage, justification by works is impossible. The righteousness of faith is the antithesis to justification by works.¹³² Luther's response to the claim of any intrinsic ground of justification was to point to imputation:

Notice how Paul dwells on the word "reckoned," how he stresses, repeats, and insists on it. . . . He repeats the word "reckon," nearly ten times in this chapter. In short, Paul sets the one who works and the one who does not work alongside each other, leaving no room for anyone between them; he asserts that righteousness is not reckoned to the former, but that it is reckoned to the latter provided he has faith.¹³³

His conception of faith was in strict opposition to the exercise of the free will. He argued: ". . . if there is nothing by which we are justified but faith,

¹²⁸ The text translated in *LW* 35 is based on the 1546 preface, but, on this point, is materially identical to the 1522 preface. See George, "Martin Luther," 116 and esp. n. 28.

¹²⁹ *LW* 35:368; *WADB* 7:6.

¹³⁰ *LW* 35:368; *WADB* 7:6.

¹³¹ *LW* 35:360; *WADB* 6:6.

¹³² *LW* 33:270; "Altera est fidei iustitia quae constat non operibus ullis, sed favente et reputante Deo per gratiam" (*WA* 18:772).

¹³³ *LW* 33"271; "Ac vide, quomodo Paulus nitatur verbo reputandi, ut urgeat, repetat et inculcet Pene decies eo capitulo repetit verbum reputandi. Breviter, Paulus componit operantem et non operantem nec relinquit medium inter hos duos; operanti reputari iustitiam negat, Non operanti vero asserit reputari iustitiam, modo credit" (*WA* 18:772).

it is evident that those who are without faith are not yet justified."¹³⁴ In the context of this discussion, the free exercise of the will is that intrinsic virtue, that he contrasted with the extrinsic righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner and received through faith alone. One finds nothing in *De servo* regarding justification by theotic union.

V. Luther's Doctrine of Justification 1535–1536

It seems clear that it is a mistake to use Luther's transitional statements on justification from 1513 to 1521 as definitive of all other statements. Teachers should hope that their students will understand that what they said recently is more representative of their thinking than what they said prior. It is common sense that we should treat Luther the same way. It remains to be demonstrated, however, that Luther did teach essentially the view that became the confessional Protestant view of justification. Thus this essay turns to three of Luther's clearest mature expositions of justification, namely his 1535 lectures on Galatians and two disputations held in 1536 on justification.

From some secondary literature, one might gain the impression that Luther only spoke occasionally about imputation of an alien righteousness to sinners and indeed such a view might be defensible, if one focuses solely on Luther's earlier writings. If, however, one reads Luther's mature work (post 1521), when his Protestant convictions were more settled, then quite another picture emerges. He had a truly vibrant doctrine of union with Christ through faith, but in his lectures on Galatians he made the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness, not theotic union with Christ, the ground of justification.

In his summary of the argument in Galatians, he distinguished between *iustitia activa* and *iustitia passiva*. The former is that accomplished by Christ and the latter describes what we receive by faith in Christ.¹³⁵ Humans are

¹³⁴ LW 33:275; "Si enim nihil est, quo iustificemur, nisi fides, evidens est, eos qui sine fide sunt, nondum iustificatos esse" (WA 18:775).

¹³⁵ "Quare nullum remedium habet afflicta conscientia contra desperationem et mortem aeternam, nisi apprehendat promissionem gratiae oblatae in Christo, hoc est hanc fidei, passivam seu christianam iustitiam, quae cum fiducia dicat: Ego non quaero iustitiam activam, deberem quidem habere et facere eam, et posito, quod eam haberem et facerem, tamen in eam non possum gratiae, remissionem peccatorum misericordiae, spiritus sancti et Christi quam ipse dat, quam recipimus et patimur" (WA 40.1:42–43).

capable only of civic righteousness. Eternal, divine righteousness comes to sinners only through imputation.¹³⁶

This is our theology, by which we teach precisely to distinguish between these two righteousnesses, the active and the passive, lest morality and faith, works and grace, politics and religion be confused. For both are necessary, but must be kept within their limits.¹³⁷

For Luther, this distinction is essential to the gospel; it is the thing that distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions.

For if the article of justification is lost, the whole Christian teaching is lost. And those in the world who do not hold it are Jews or Turks or Papists or Sectarians, because between these two righteousnesses, the active righteousness of the Law and the passive righteousness of Christ: there is no middle ground.¹³⁸

His distinction between active and passive righteousness was a direct corollary to his distinction between law and gospel. The law demands active righteousness or condign merit. It is this that Christ accomplished *pro nobis*. Passive righteousness comes to us, and that is gospel. It comes to us by imputation of Christ's active, alien righteousness and is received through faith. The ground of justification is a not personal, spiritual union with Christ or Spirit-wrought sanctity with which we cooperate. The ground of justification is Christ's active obedience credited to us.

Just as Luther's view of the ground of justification matured, so did his definition of faith in the act of justification. It is evident in his first series of lectures in Galatians that, by 1519, Luther was no longer defining faith in medieval terms. In the 1535 lectures on Galatians, faith was no mere virtue, no synecdoche for sanctity; rather it was the instrument through which the righteousness that is proper to Christ and alien to us is made our own. Commenting on Galatians 2:16 he said:

¹³⁶ "... nisi per gratuitam imputationem . . ." (WA 40.I:43).

¹³⁷ Modified from LW 26:7. "*Haec est nostra theologia qua docemus accurate distinguere has duas iustitias, activam et passivam, ne confundatur mores et fides, opera et gratia, politica et religio. Est autem utraque necessaria, sed quaelibet intra suos fines contineri debet*" (WA 40.I:45).

¹³⁸ Revised from LW 26:8; "*Siquidem ammisso articulo iustificationis amissa est simul tota doctrina Christiana. Et quotquot sunt in mundo qui eam non tenent, sunt vel Iudaei, vel Turcae, vel Papistae, vel Sectarii, quia inter has duas iustitias, activam legis et passivam Christi, non est medium*" (WA 40.I:48).

Here it is to be noted that these three things are joined together: faith, Christ, and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has Him present, enclosing Him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous. This is the means and the merit by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins and righteousness. "Because you believe in Me," God says, "and your faith takes hold of Christ, whom I have freely given to you as your Justifier and Savior, therefore be righteous." Thus God accepts you or accounts you righteous only on account of Christ, in whom you believe.¹³⁹

As he continued, *acceptatio* or *reputatio* is extremely necessary because we are not purely righteous, that is, we are not intrinsically righteous.¹⁴⁰ Sin still adheres to our flesh in this life.¹⁴¹ Our sins, however, are hidden from God on account of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner. They are "hidden in the sight of God, because Christ the mediator stands between; because we take hold of him by faith . . ." ¹⁴²

Like Melanchthon and Protestant orthodoxy, Luther made the forensic doctrine of justification specifically, rather than union with Christ more broadly, the basis of Christian comfort before the terrible law and justice of God.

This doctrine brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors. It is not in vain, therefore, that so often and so diligently we inculcate the forgiveness of sins and of the imputation of righteousness for the sake of Christ, as well as that a Christian ought to

¹³⁹ LW 26:132; "Est et hic notandum, quod ista tria, Fides, Christus, Acceptio vel Reputatio, coniuncta sunt. Fides enim apprehendit Christum et habet eum praesentem includitque eum ut annulus gemmam, Et qui fuerit inventus cum tali fide apprehensi Christi in corde, illum reputat Deus iustum. Haec ratio est et meritum, quo pervenimus ad remissionem peccatorum et iustitiam. Quia credis, inquit Deus, in me et fides tua apprehendit Christum quem tibi donavi, ut esset Iustificator et Salvator tuus, ideo sis iustus. Itaque Deus acceptat seu reputat te iustum, solum propter Christum in quem credis etc." (WA 40.I:233).

¹⁴⁰ WA 40.I:233.

¹⁴¹ WA 40.I:233.

¹⁴² LW 26:133; ". . . sed absconditum est peccatum, non vult sehen, obstat Christus quem apprehendi fide propter illum apprehensum . . ." (WA 40.I:234). This interpretation dissents from that offered in Mark S. Seifrid, "Paul, Luther, and Justification in Gal 2:15-21," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 223-227 where he construes Luther's definition of faith purely in terms of "union," and overlooks its relations to Luther's forensic definition of justification.

have nothing to do with the law and the sin, especially in a time of temptation.¹⁴³

Oratio led to *meditatio* (the *Turnerlebnis*) on the righteousness of God in Christ and *iustitia aliena imputata* was our ground in *tentatio*.

The later Galatians lectures are an essential part of the background to the series of disputations on justification that occurred in 1536. There are other elements to the background. Among these is the nature of these disputations themselves. Common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, disputations developed as an academic procedure in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a way of coming to a clearer understanding of the truth.¹⁴⁴ A disputation is a dialectic between two people, a master and a respondent. According to Bernd Moller, "It was assumed that, with the help of a dialectical process of understanding, through artful questions and answers to these questions, through the confrontation of assertion and repudiation, through orderly use of authorities and other arguments, and finally by harmonizing contradictions . . ." it was possible to "find the truth again."¹⁴⁵ Luther valued them because it was through them, according to Moeller, that he made his most important breakthroughs in 1518 (Heidelberg) and 1519 (Leipzig). Disputations were a regular part of academic life, which occurred publicly at fixed points on the academic calendar, as part of graduation exercises, and in private between pupils and masters. Special disputations were also held frequently, as in 1536, to resolve a controversial question.

Behind these disputations, both Luther and Melanchthon had a long-running argument with Agricola on the relation of the Christian to the law. Agricola argued the antinomian thesis that the Christian is no longer morally obligated to the law, but only to the gospel. Luther and

¹⁴³ Revised from LW 26:133-134. "*Ista doctrina affert firmam consolationem conscientii in veris pavoribus. Ideoque non frustra tam saepe et tanta diligentia inculcamus remissionem peccatorum et imputationem iustitiae propter Christum; Item, quod Christiano nihil prorsus negotii debeat esse, praesertim in tentatione, cum lege et peccato . . .*" (WA 40.I:235).

¹⁴⁴ P. Michaud-Quantin and J. A. Weisheipl, s.v., "Dialectics" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003). For an account of how this practice evolved from the seventeenth century, see Ignacio Angelelli, "The Techniques of Disputation in the History of Logic," *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 800-815.

¹⁴⁵ Bernd Moeller, s.v., "Disputations," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*.

Melanchthon rejected this position vigorously. They also faced the challenge of Andreas Osiander's doctrine of justification by union with Christ. This, of course, is the great irony of the modern debate. The dominant story is that it was Melanchthon and Calvin who, in reaction to Osiander (and they did reject vehemently Osiander's position) turned to a solely forensic doctrine of justification. The impression is left that Osiander was correct, that he really was the more faithful representative of Luther's doctrine of justification.¹⁴⁶ As interesting as this hypothesis is, it suffers from a serious weakness: it is utterly contrary to fact. Luther was quite aware of Osiander's view and rejected it.¹⁴⁷ For Luther, to turn to justification by *unio-theosis* was to go back to the medieval doctrine of justification by divinization.

Though the chronology is difficult, and fortunately for this study not very important, it appears that the first disputation occurred on 10 October 1536.¹⁴⁸ Luther understood clearly the question at hand, how or whether works can be said to be necessary for justification. In a disputation from this period he said:

. . . Works are necessary to salvation, but they do not cause salvation, because faith alone gives life. On account of the hypocrites we must say that good works are necessary to salvation. It is necessary to work. Nevertheless, it does not follow that works save on that account, unless we understand necessity very clearly as the necessity that there must be an inward and outward salvation or righteousness. Works save outwardly, that is, they show evidence that we are righteous and that there is faith in a man that saves inwardly, as Paul says, "Man believes with his heart and soul is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" [Rom. 10:10]. Outward salvation shows faith to the present, just as fruit shows a tree to be good.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Strehle suggests just this in "*Imputatio Iustitiae*." The New Finnish School also implies this.

¹⁴⁷ Timothy J. Wengert, "Review of *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*," *Theology Today* 56 (1999): 432-434.

¹⁴⁸ LW 34:148.

¹⁴⁹ LW 34:165. "*Opera sunt necessaria ad salutem, sed non causant salutem, quia fides sola dat vitam. Propter hypocritas dicendum est, quod bona opera sint etiam necessaria ad salutem. Oportet operari. Tamen non sequitur, quod opera ideo salvant, nisi valde necesse intelligamus, quod oporteat esse internam et externam salutem sive iustitiam. Opera salvant externe, hoc est, testantur nos esse iustos, et fidem esse in homine, quae interne salvat, ut Paulus inquit: Corde*

For Luther, works are necessary, but not as a ground or instrument of justification. They are necessary only as the fruit of justification. This is the second justification about which he had preached in 1518.

Thus, he began the disputation, in theses 1–4, by distinguishing between justification *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*.¹⁵⁰ Works justify us before other people, but one is justified before God by faith (*fide*), even if one finds only ignominy with humans. In the several theses (5–19) following he elaborated on the paradox of civic righteousness.

In thesis 20, however, he turned to *iustitia coram Deo*. Righteousness before God is not about temporal recognition, but looks “*ad futuri Regni gloriam . . .*”¹⁵¹ The saints are righteous because God decrees (*decernit*) them to be righteous.¹⁵² Because the decree is eschatological, and its full actualization is not evident, “we think” (*sentimus*) a man is “not yet” (*nondum*) righteous, but (at best) only on his way toward righteousness.¹⁵³ As the theses begin to move to conclusion, the doctrine becomes more pointed. Despite appearances, “Wherefore, whoever is justified is still also a sinner and nevertheless he is reputed as if fully and perfectly just, forgiven and pitied by God.”¹⁵⁴ Because Christ is our high priest, interceding for us with God, he sanctifies “our beginning of righteousness.”¹⁵⁵ This is taken to be a reference back to our actual, intrinsic righteousness. Christ’s righteousness imputed acts like an umbrella (*umbraculum*) against the heat of God’s wrath toward our inchoate actual righteousness.¹⁵⁶ In thesis 27 he became even more explicit about the exact nature of this umbrella of righteousness before God. “Now it is certain that Christ or the righteousness of Christ, since it is outside of us and alien to us, is not able to be comprehended by our works.”¹⁵⁷ The contrast with the preceding categories is quite clear. What is perfect and

creditor ad iustitiam, ore fit confessio ad salutem. Externa salvatio ut fructus ostendit arborem bonam, ostendit fidem adesse” (WA 39.1:196).

¹⁵⁰ WA 39.1:82.

¹⁵¹ WA 39.1:83.

¹⁵² WA 39.1:83.

¹⁵³ WA 39.1:83. “. . . in ipso motu seu cursu ad iustitiam.”

¹⁵⁴ WA 39.1:83. “*Ideo et peccator est adhuc, quisquis iustificatur, et tamen velut plene et perfecte iustus reputatur, ignoscente et miserente Deo.*”

¹⁵⁵ WA 39.1:83. “*nostrum initium iustitiae . . .*”

¹⁵⁶ WA 39.1:83.

¹⁵⁷ WA 39.1:83. “*Iam certum est, Christum seu iustitiam Christi, cum sit extra nos et aliena nobis, non posse nostris operibus comprehendi.*”

able to protect the sinner from God's righteous wrath is Christ's righteousness. What is imperfect is first our civic righteousness before men and second the beginning of intrinsic righteousness in this life. These two kinds of righteousness are faulty because they are proper to us and this world. The righteousness that stands before God is eschatological and proper to Christ; it is his active righteousness, but it is alien to us. It is outside us and alien. It is this *extra* and *aliena* quality that distinguishes it from the two other kinds of righteousness. It is this that is reputed and not the others.¹⁵⁸

Though he taught clearly that the righteousness by which we are justified *coram Deo* is extrinsic and reputed, his actual interest in this disputation was in the nature of the means by which it is comprehended. Our works (i.e., our cooperation with grace) are insufficient, "but faith, which is from our hearing Christ through the Holy Spirit, is infused by which Christ is comprehended."¹⁵⁹ Ironically, having redefined faith away from the notion of an infused virtue, he was able to return to the metaphor of infusion to describe faith as an instrument. Faith has no virtue of itself (i.e., being formed by love), but its only power is that it lays hold of Christ. The source of faith is not Spirit-wrought sanctity or even union with Christ, but "*ex auditu Christi*." In the preached gospel, the sinner hears the voice of Christ. The word comes from outside and faith itself comes from outside; it reciprocally reaches outside of the sinner, even after infusion, in order to justify the sinner.

This is why *sola fides* (as opposed to *fides formata caritate*) justifies without works. For it is impossible to say, "I made Christ or the righteousness of Christ."¹⁶⁰ It is impossible because it is not Christ formed in me whereby I am justified (contra theotic union and the medieval definition).¹⁶¹ It was Christ, as it were, formed for me. Faith is the only adequate instrument to apprehend Christ. By contrast, it is possible for us to "produce the justice of heaven through the Spirit" (sanctity) or the "justice of the earth through

¹⁵⁸ It is difficult to see how Oberman could say that this thesis is not about imputation-justification.

¹⁵⁹ WA 39.I:83. "*Sed fides, quae ex auditu Christi nobis per spiritum sanctum infunditur, ipsa comprehendit Christum.*"

¹⁶⁰ WA 39.I:83. "*Quare et sola fides iustificat sine operibus nostris; Non enim possum dicere: Ego facio Christum, seu iustitiam Christi.*"

¹⁶¹ Green, "Theosis," 171-172

nature" (i.e., civic justice) because these are proper to us.¹⁶² Having been justified by a righteousness *extra nos* and *aliena nobis*, we can do "*opera bona in Christo*."¹⁶³ This language is arguably a reference to union with Christ and it is worth noting that it does not occur in his discussion of justification, but in his discussion of the consequence of justification, namely, sanctification.

In theses 31, 34, and 35, Luther was quite clear about the logical necessity of good works flowing from justification, and equally clear that they belong to a category of righteousness distinct from that which commends the sinner to God. Luther gave his definition of justification in thesis 33 when he said, "to be justified includes the following: namely, our being reputed just, by faith, on account of Christ."¹⁶⁴ The forensic theme in his doctrine of justification in the October disputation was unmistakable. His logic and categorical distinctions were clear. In this disputation, as in the 1535 lectures on Galatians, Luther was indistinguishable from his orthodox, confessional successors in the *Formula of Concord* and in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

The second disputation of 1536 to be considered was held perhaps in the home of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), in November, in response to a controversy that had arisen between Conrad Cordatus (c. 1480–1546) and Caspar Cruciger (1504–1548) over the role of works in justification.¹⁶⁵ In July of 1536, Cordatus heard Cruciger give a lecture in which the latter argued that "in addition to the work of Christ human repentance was also necessary in justification."¹⁶⁶ Cordatus saw this as a threat to the doctrine of justification and he demanded a retraction. Eventually, Cruciger replied by saying that he was not denying the doctrine of justification, but only following Melancthon's lead in trying to account for the role of works in justification. At a graduation disputation between two students, where Cruciger was presiding, he managed to raise the issue directly, which

¹⁶² WA 39.I:83. "*Sicut tamen possum dicere: Ego facio opera sive iustitiae coelestis per spiritum, sive terranae per naturam.*"

¹⁶³ WA 39.I:83.

¹⁶⁴ WA 39.I:83. "*Quod iustificari ista includit, fide scilicet propter Christum reputari nos iustos.*"

¹⁶⁵ On these two figures see Robert Rosin, s.v., "Cordatus, Conrad," and idem, s.v., "Cruciger, Caspar," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546*, tr. J. L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 148. This narrative follows Brecht's account.

provoked a reaction from Luther to the effect that Cruciger had returned to the Roman doctrine of penance.¹⁶⁷ Cruciger appealed to the faculty for toleration while Melanchthon defended his own position. The episode came to a head at a disputation in November at Bugenhagen's house "to clarify the matter."¹⁶⁸ Melanchthon supplied the questions and, for the purposes of this disputation, served as the *magister*. Luther responded in writing, which he delivered during the actual disputation.¹⁶⁹ It is to this disputation that we now turn.¹⁷⁰

In his account of this disputation, Martin Greschat suggests that Melanchthon cast himself in the role of prosecutor in this disputation.¹⁷¹ Nothing in the text of the disputation, however, supports such a reading. There is nothing prosecutorial whatever in the tenor of Melanchthon's questions and nothing defensive in Luther's responses. This disputation reads more like a catechism lesson than anything else.¹⁷²

Melanchthon put the same question to Luther repeatedly, namely, whether there is any way in which works or sanctity contribute to

¹⁶⁷ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 149.

¹⁶⁸ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 150.

¹⁶⁹ WA 39.I:79.

¹⁷⁰ *Disputatio Philippi Melancthonis, cum Doctore Martino Luthero Anno 1536*. The text of the disputation is found in Philipp Melanchthon, *Epistolae, iudicia, consilia, testimonia aliorumque ad eum epistolae quae Corpore Reformatorum desiderantur*, ed. H. E. Bindseil and Robert Stupperich (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975), 344-348. All English translations of this dialogue are mine. The fact that this disputation appears in Melanchthon's works and not Luther's suggests the possibility that the language attributed to Luther in this disputation was modified by Melanchthon. Green, "The Influence of Erasmus," 196-197, suggests that the use of *reputare* reflects Melanchthon's style or influence. He also argues, however, that Luther was quite happy to have Melanchthon rephrase his thoughts. In defense of the authenticity of this disputation, it should be observed that it has strong similarities with the others of the period about which there is less doubt. At all events, even though the style may not be Luther's, the theology is.

¹⁷¹ Martin Greschat, *Melanchthon Neben Luther: Studien zur Gestalt der Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen 1528 und 1537* (Wittenberg: Luther Verlag, 1965), 233. In response to an earlier version of this paper, Michael Horton pointed out that the Socratic Method is pedagogical, not prosecutorial.

¹⁷² The questions are obviously leading. These are the pedagogical and catechetical equivalents to "straight lines" in a comedy routine. If Wengert is correct, that by this point Melanchthon's own views and vocabulary had narrowed to exclusively forensic terms and categories, then Melanchthon must be seen to have acted in a purely formal, dialectical capacity so that these questions cannot be thought to reveal his own views.

justification. At the outset of the disputation, Melanchthon raised the fundamental question of the Reformation: "Do you understand man to be righteous whether by intrinsic renewal as Augustine, or by truly gracious imputation, which is outside of us, and by faith, i.e., by trust, that has arisen from the Word?"¹⁷³ Luther's response was unequivocal: "I think this, and am most persuaded and certain that this is the true opinion of the Gospel and of the Apostles, that only by gracious imputation are we righteous with God."¹⁷⁴

Melanchthon then raised the question whether man is righteous "*sola illa misericordia . . .*" or whether our *iustitia* is grounded partly in "a good conscience in works."¹⁷⁵ The questioning continued to probe Luther's resoluteness on forensic justification. Melanchthon asked whether, since Luther had preached (in 1518) a "double justice" (*duplicem iustitiam*) and conceded in previous disputations the logical and moral necessity of good works as the fruit of justification, and since it is understood that the perfection is not required but that faith supplies what is lacking, Luther will concede that "a man is righteous principally by faith, and less principally by works . . ." In other words, since works are necessary and you have already conceded double justification, is it not true that we are not justified *sola fide*?¹⁷⁶

Luther responded unequivocally. To "become just, to be, and to remain just is *sola misericordia*."¹⁷⁷ What justifies us is perfect righteousness that

¹⁷³ *Disputatio*, 344. "Vos vero utrum sentitis hominem iustum esse illa novitate, ut Augustinus, an vero imputatione gratuita, quae est extra nos, et fide, id est, fiducia, quae oritur ex verbo?"

¹⁷⁴ *Disputatio*, 344; "Sic sentio, et persuasissimus sum ac certus, hanc esse veram sententiam Evangelii et Apostolorum, quod sola imputatione gratuita sumus iusti apud Deum."

¹⁷⁵ *Disputatio*, 344; "bona conscientia in operibus . . ."

¹⁷⁶ *Disputatio*, 344–345; "An homo sola illa misericordia iustus est? Quod non sit sola illa misericordia iustus, videtur, quia necessaria est iustitia nostra, hoc est, bona conscientia in operibus. An non vultis concedere ut dicatur, hominem esse iustum principaliter fide, et minus principaliter operibus, si tamen fides significet fiduciam, et ut illa fiducia maneat certa, intelligatur, quod non requiratur perfectio legis, sed quod fides suppleat ea, quae desunt legi? Vos conceditis duplicem iustitiam, et quidem coram Deo necessariam esse: scilicet fidei, et illam alteram, videlicet bonae conscientiae, in qua hoc quod deest legi, supplet fides. Hoc quid aliud est, quam dicere, quod homo iustificetur non sola fide?"

¹⁷⁷ *Disputatio*, 345. "Hominem sentio fieri, esse, et manere iustum, seu iustam personam simpliciter sola misericordia. Haec est enim iustitia perfecta, quae opponitur irae, morti, peccato etc. et absorbet omnia, et reddit hominem simpliciter sanctum, et innocentem, ac si revera nullum in eo esset peccatum. Quia reputatio gratuita Dei nullum vult ibi esse peccatum, sicut

opposes death and absorbs God's wrath for us. No mere human is capable of such righteousness and it could never be intrinsic to us. Therefore it is by God's gracious reputation that the sinner is righteous. Only after that reputation, is one righteous and said to produce the fruits of righteousness. Even these fruits are only external work and righteousness, which God requires and rewards, but this is not righteousness before God but evidence of justification before others.

Melanchthon pressed Luther by asking whether, in the case of Paul, his rebirth was the ground of his acceptance before God. Luther replied in the negative: faith brings renewal and faith justified him.¹⁷⁸ Melanchthon asked again whether virtues or works could be less principally grounds of justification? Again, Luther answered that one's virtues and works are righteous only because one's person is righteous (which is righteous by imputation only). Melanchthon followed by asking again how Luther can say that works are necessary but not justifying. Luther answered that they are necessary, "but not of legal necessity, or of co-action, but of gracious necessity, or consequence, or of immutability." He continued to explain that they are as necessary and immutable as sunshine is necessary from the sun. The sunshine does not flow "of law, but of nature." No one has to tell the sun to shine. That is its nature. So, too, the Christian, because he is a "*creatura nova*," created "unto good works," produces sanctity.¹⁷⁹ Melanchthon replied by raising the specter of the Roman critic Cardinal Sadolet (1477-1547) who accused the Protestants of being inconsistent in contending for *sola fide* and the logical necessity of good works. Luther replied that "*falsi fratres et hypocritae*" are often confounded just as it was in Elijah's day with the priest of Baal.¹⁸⁰ Melanchthon again asked whether, in view of our renewal, one could say that Paul was renewed in order to be pleasing to God, so that our works (not because they are ours) to the degree (*tantum*) that one could be said to be pleasing (*placeat*) on account of mercy? Luther would not even accept this very subtle attempt to wedge in

Ioan. dicit . . . Post hanc iustitiam homo est, et dicitur iustus opere seu fructibus, quos et ipsos requirit Deus, et remunerat. Hanc ego externam et operum iustitiam voco . . ."

¹⁷⁸ Disputatio, 345-346.

¹⁷⁹ Disputatio, 346; "*Necessaria est, sed non necessitate legali, seu coactionis, sed necessitate gratuita, seu consequentiae, seu immutabilis. Sicut sol necessario lucet, si est sol, et tamen lucet non ex lege, sed ex natura, seu voluntate (ut sic dicam) immutabili, quia sic creatus est, ut luceat, Sic iustus creatura nova, facit opera necessitate immutabili, non lege seu coactione: iusto enim non est lex posita. Deinde creati sumus (ait Paulus) in opera bona . . .*"

¹⁸⁰ Disputatio, 346.

some intrinsic ground of righteousness, accepted not as *propriam obedientiam* but only *propter misericordiam*. No, Luther replied, Paul's obedience only pleases God because Paul believes, and by faith his person is just in perpetuity. He rejected as an evil division the premise of the question, that the *principium, medium et finem* of a just person can be divided. The beginning and end of justification is gracious imputation of alien righteousness.¹⁸¹ If justification were by anything other than faith, its glory would be eclipsed.

Melanchthon appealed to the necessity that Paul should preach the gospel as an example of some other sort of necessity of good works for justification. Luther replied that there can be no partial cause of justification because "faith is always efficacious or it is not faith." If faith is so, then works (i.e., whatever is intrinsic to the justified and perceptible to the world) is like the radiance of the sun.¹⁸² Melanchthon raised the issue of disagreeing with Augustine on the question of intrinsic righteousness, and Luther politely but firmly held his ground.

The concluding discourse of the disputation was Luther's in reply to a very brief question from Melanchthon as to whether the proposition is true: "*Iustitia operum est necessaria ad salutem* [the righteousness of works is necessary for salvation]."¹⁸³ Works, Luther replied, do not work or obtain salvation, but "they are present to the faith obtaining or they are with" it, just as I am necessarily "present or in the presence of my salvation."¹⁸⁴ The person is justified by the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness, therefore he is just. A just person produces works necessarily; therefore they are necessarily present in the person justified. *Pace* Sadoletto, the one who believes has already fulfilled "the first or primary part of the law . . ." Luther called this the *principium iustificationis seu iustitiae*.¹⁸⁵ That is, he elaborated, "I have in principle, also the other works required after faith."¹⁸⁶ Sadoletto was wrong: Faith is not a "work of precept," but a

¹⁸¹ *Disputatio*, 347; "*Imo obedientia placet propter Paulum credentem, alioqui non placeret eius obedientia, et quia persona iusta est, iusta est perpetuo, et tamdiu iusta ex fide, quamdiu fides manet. Mala ergo divisio est, personam dividere in principium, medium, et finem. Opera igitur fulgent radiis fidei, et propter fidem placent, non econtra.*"

¹⁸² *Disputatio*, 347; ". . . quia fides est semper efficax, vel non est fides."

¹⁸³ *Disputatio*, 347.

¹⁸⁴ *Disputatio*, 347; "*Non quod operentur seu impetrent salutem, sed quod fidei impetranti praesentes seu coram sunt, Sicut ego necessario adero ad salutem meam . . .*"

¹⁸⁵ *Disputatio*, 348.

¹⁸⁶ *Disputatio*, 348; "*Ergo qui credit, implevit unam vel primam partem legis, et sic habet*

“work of promise,” that is, “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This gift having been given “makes a person perpetually new, which person yet does new works.” New works do not make the new person, but the new person does the new works.¹⁸⁷ For that reason, one “owes no personal righteousness by works before God”¹⁸⁸ There are different qualities of works and rewards, but “they do not justify a person, for all we are equally just in one Christ, all equally loved and pleasing according to person.”¹⁸⁹

In this disputation, Melanchthon dutifully played the *magister* and Luther the *respondens*. Melanchthon poked and probed throughout the disputation looking for any place Luther might concede the point that intrinsic sanctity might be a part of the ground or instrument of justification, and from the outset Luther repudiated any such notions using the same sorts of metaphors and language found in the earlier disputation. For Luther in 1536, the ground of justification is Christ’s alien righteousness reputed to the sinner, and faith is the medium by which one apprehends Christ and his alien righteousness. In both disputes, he turned to intrinsic categories *only* when considering the sanctity that flows from justification.

VI. Conclusions

The various attempts to revise Luther’s doctrine of justification along wholly relational and theotic contours is ill conceived and largely unhistorical, mostly prosecuted against an empty slate with Luther de-contextualized from his medieval setting.¹⁹⁰ Timothy Wengert is right to remind us that the Finnish interpretation of Luther is not new at all. “In the 1550s, Andreas Osiander insisted that the indwelling of the Son of God

principium iustificationis seu iustitiae. Sed principio habito, requiruntur et alia praecepta opera post fidem.”

¹⁸⁷ *Disputatio, 348; “Nam si fides esset opus praeceptum. . . . At nos dicimus, fidem esse opus promissionis, seu donum Spiritus sancti, quod quidem ad legem faciendam necessarium est, Sed per legem et opera non impetratur. Donatum autem hoc donum, facit personam novam perpetuo, quae persona tamen facit opera nova, non econtra opera nova faciunt personam novam.”*

¹⁸⁸ *Disputatio, 348; “Nulla ergo iustitia personalis debetur operibus coram Deo”*

¹⁸⁹ *Disputatio, 348; “Sed personam non iustificant, omnes enim aequaliter iusti sumus in uno Christo, omnes aequaliter dilecti et placentes secundum personam, tamen, differt stella a stella per claritatem.”*

¹⁹⁰ See Dennis Bielfeldt, “Response to Samuelli Juntenen, ‘Luther and Metaphysics,’” in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1998), 161–166.

makes us substantially righteous. His position found some sympathy among theologians in Wurttemberg, including Johannes Brenz, whose view of justification Luther and Melanchthon had attempted to correct already in 1531."¹⁹¹

Both the so-called Luther Renaissance and the Finnish School share a neglect of the development of Luther's theology from medieval to Reformation. Both interpretations are too anxious to make Luther relevant either to early-twentieth-century German nationalism or early-twenty-first-century ecumenism. The attempt by Ritschl, the Luther Renaissance, and the Finnish school to juxtapose Luther against Melanchthon and against confessionalism ignores the fact that Luther was a writer of symbolic documents himself. It also ignores Luther's own view of Melanchthon. As Wilhelm Pauck has observed, there is no evidence in Luther that he regarded Melanchthon's narrowing vocabulary from 1534 to 1536 as a departure from or narrowing of his own doctrine of justification.¹⁹² The "Luther v. the Lutherans" interpretation, as with the "Calvin v. the Calvinists" school, tells us more about the interpreters than it does about Luther or Lutheran orthodoxy.

There are good reasons to doubt Mannermaa's reconstruction of Luther's doctrine of justification. First, and to his credit, he is explicit about his ecumenical interests.¹⁹³ Second, he shows little historical sensitivity in his interpretation of Luther. This much is evident in Mannermaa's appeal to Luther's first lectures on Romans, where Mannermaa makes no note of the date or transitional nature of these lectures. Third, he freights arbitrarily passages that speak of anything intrinsic even though Luther was not speaking of justification directly.¹⁹⁴ Fourth, Mannermaa loads Luther's joyful exchange with ontic or theotic meaning so that it becomes an "exchange of attributes" wherein Christ "himself takes on the sinful person of man and give to us His own righteous person" so that there is a

¹⁹¹ Timothy J. Wengert, review of *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Theology Today* 56 (1999): 434.

¹⁹² Wilhelm Pauck, *From Luther to Tillich: The Reformers and Their Heirs*, ed. Marion Pauck (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984), 42-43.

¹⁹³ Robert W. Jenson, "Response to Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Why is Luther So Fascinating?'" in *Union with Christ*, 21, is even more explicit about his ecumenical interest in the Finnish revision of Luther.

¹⁹⁴ For example, in "The Doctrine of Justification and Christology," 210, regarding Luther on Rom 7:18 in WA 56:343, 16-21; LW 25:331-332.

communicatio idiomatum not just between the two natures of Christ, but between the sinner and Christ.¹⁹⁵ As fascinating as Mannermaa's point is, Luther said nothing of the kind, not even in the passage Mannermaa quotes. For Luther, the joyful exchange happens by receptive believing, not by theotic union. For Luther, however intimate the union between bride and bridegroom, they are never ontologically confused. The context certainly does not suggest the sort of ontic indwelling that Mannermaa imports into the passage.¹⁹⁶

The attempt by Kärkkäinen to correlate the Finnish view with Luther's *theologia crucis/gloriae* distinction fails to understand the distinction Luther was making. His appeal to the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) as proof of *theosis* is particularly puzzling. It appears that his reading of it stands only if we allow him to read Luther not against his medieval background but against the background of modern European philosophical theology.

Marquart's approach to the question of *theosis* in Luther is more measured than that of the New Finnish school, and he is more sensitive than some to the difficulties of this project. He proposes a twofold test to evaluate whether *theosis* can be said to be an explanation of Luther's doctrine of justification and compatible with Luther's theology of the cross.¹⁹⁷ The first test is that any theotic doctrine of justification must be christocentric. The second test is that it has to have God coming to us. It seems to me, however, that Thomas's program of divinization would pass the test. The only sorts of divinization that Marquart's test filters out would be crassly Pelagian. Marquart's test has the appearance of solving the problem while conceding the very thing Luther sought to prevent.

Earlier I quoted from Kurt Marquart's 1999 essay, in which he quotes a 1525 Sermon on Ephesians 3:13–21 as evidence of a doctrine of *theosis* in Luther. On first reading, Marquart seems to have grounds for his claim. He re-translates the sermon creating the impression that Luther was intending to teach *theosis*. The sermon, however, was about sanctity not divinization.

¹⁹⁵ Mannermaa, "The Doctrine of Justification and Christology," 210.

¹⁹⁶ In a private discussion regarding the relations between Luther's doctrine of justification and ontology, Robert Kolb has suggested that we should speak of Luther's "ontology of the Word of God," so that, Luther's forensic language is not Nominalism, but creative of reality. See Robert Kolb, "Romans 6 and Luther's Understanding of Justification (1535)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998): 50–53.

¹⁹⁷ Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," 196–197.

Further, even if one concedes that those paragraphs were about *theosis*, Luther concludes the sermon by saying, "But no one should think that such a thing can happen fully to any man in this life."¹⁹⁸ Indeed, we are filled with Adam's fullness (*Adams fulle*). According to Luther, even granting Marquart's revisions, we are not going to be divinized in this life. If justification is divinization, then we are not justified. This conclusion creates the irony of having Luther teach that we are not justified in this life.

Marquart's tests notwithstanding, for Luther, the notion that one is just before God on the basis of the indwelling Christ by theotic union is nothing if not *theologia gloriae* and an improbable reading of Luther. The point of the *theologia crucis* is the necessity of the tension between the already of the declaration of the justification and the not yet of the consummated, glorified, vindicated state. Surely Luther was working with these categories when he said in his 1527 lecture on 1 John 3:2:

We shall be like Him but not identical with him [*Similes erimus, non iidem*], as Pythagoras thought. For God is infinite, but we are finite creatures [*Deus est infinitus, nos creaturae finitae*]. Moreover, the creature will never be the Creator [*Nunquam autem creatura evadet creator*]. Yet we shall be like Him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore, we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God [*non qualis in Deo*] but the bliss that is suitable for us.¹⁹⁹

This was the language of analogy not christocentric *theosis*.

I see no compelling reason to treat Luther's doctrine of union and his doctrine of justification as if they were mutually exclusive. Both doctrines were important to Luther's Protestant development, but they were logically distinct and Luther ordered them quite differently than Ritschl, Holl, and the New Finnish school would have us think. We are justified by virtue of our *legal* union with Christ, who accomplished active righteousness *pro nobis*, and, for Luther, the justified life is lived in vital union with Christ and is inconceivable apart from that union. That is not the same thing as saying, however, that sinners are justified by virtue of a

¹⁹⁸ WA 17:1, 438: "Es soll aber kehner dencken, das solchs, hnn diesem leben hrgent ehnen menschen volkomlich widderfare . . ." Cf. Luther, *The Complete Sermons*, 4:2, 280. See WA 17:1, 438. I am grateful to Ryan Glomsrud (Pembroke College, Oxford) for his comments on this section of the paper.

¹⁹⁹ LW 30:268; WA 20:698.

theotic union with Christ. Even if it is discovered definitively that Luther did conceive of some sort of theotic union between Christ and the believer, it is clear that it never entered his doctrine of justification. For Luther, union with Christ is a consequence of the forensic, definitive act of justification.