

MARTIN LUTHER

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Editorial: Celebrating the Reformation by Remembering the Legacy of Martin Luther

STEPHEN J. WELLUM

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The 500th anniversary of the Reformation took place in 2017. On October 31, 1517, a relatively unknown professor, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses at the University of Wittenberg to begin a theological discussion about the practice of indulgences. However, what resulted from this seemingly insignificant action was a spark that lit the flame of the Reformation. Over the next century the Reformation resulted in profound changes both within the church and in the larger society. As many historians have noted, the Reformation was not a perfect time in history. In fact, some scholars have wrongly attempted to attribute a number of our present ecclesiastical and cultural problems to the Reformation. For example, Michael Legaspi traces the beginning of the “death of Scripture” to the rise of an “academic Bible” to the Reformation (see *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical*

Studies [Oxford, 2010]. Or, Brad Gregory argues that our present secular, pluralistic culture is an unintended consequence of the Reformation (see *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* [Harvard, 2012]), and the list could go on. Such analyses are highly problematic since at their core they fail to do justice to the theology of the Reformation *and* to the Reformers as men who faithfully stood in their time for the recovery of the Gospel in all of its truth, beauty, and glory. On this point see the well-argued case of Kevin Vanhoozer in *Biblical Authority after Babel* (Brazos, 2016).

Although the Reformation resulted in various theological divisions for a variety of reasons, at its heart the magisterial Reformers recaptured the central truths of Scripture, which is reason enough to celebrate it and to learn from it. For example, the Reformers correctly taught the preeminence of the triune God, the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, a proper view of human dignity and depravity, the necessity of God's grace to save, and the exclusive and all-sufficient work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In proclaiming these gospel truths, the Reformation returned to a thoroughly biblical view of the world purged of some of its medieval distortions and recaptured what is vital and essential to the Bible's entire storyline.

The best illustration of the Reformation's recovery of the Gospel and its ongoing significance is its exposition and proclamation of the five *solas*. Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) is the formal principle of the Reformation and the foundation of all theology. God's glory alone (*soli Deo gloria*) is the capstone for all Reformation theology, connecting its various parts to God's one purpose for creating this world and humanity in it. Between these two *solas* the other three emphasize that God has chosen and acted to save us by his grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), and grounded in and through Christ alone (*solus Christus*). What is noteworthy about the *solas* is their mutual dependence; each one only makes sense in relation to the others. Why? Ultimately because all of the *solas* are grounded in the triune Creator-Covenant God, who alone is the center of the universe, the Lord of creation, history, and redemption—who needs nothing from us but we need everything from him—and who rightly deserves and demands all honor, adoration, and willing obedience.

In other words, central to the Reformation *solas* is a proper view of God and correspondingly, a correct view of humans in relation to him. For example,

sola Scriptura reminds us that God alone is trustworthy and that we are completely dependent on him for knowledge. Contrary to secular thought, humans are not the arbiters of truth—only God is. Objective truth is real and we can know it because God is its source and standard and he has taken the initiative to speak to us. *All* that we know truly, even of our world, is due to God's revelation. *Sola Scriptura* is a truth to be joyously embraced and proclaimed because it reminds us that God has wondrously given us a sure Word that is true.

Or, think of *sola gratia* that rightly acknowledges that God does not need us and that apart from *his* initiative to save, we are without hope. In contrast to the teaching of Rome, the Reformers knew that sin did not leave us merely with a marred nature and the capacity to receive and cooperate with grace. Instead our sin has left us spiritually dead in our sins before God. Salvation, then, is not a cooperative effort between God and us. The triune God in sovereign grace must act to save us, which gloriously he has done in and through Christ alone (*solus Christus*), which we receive by faith alone (*sola fide*). In God's plan centered in Christ, our triune God has satisfied his own righteous demand and we are the beneficiaries of it by simply raising the empty hands of faith and receiving all that Christ has won for us.

The *solas*, then, beautifully illustrate the importance of the Reformation and its ongoing legacy despite some of its divisions. In the Reformation's recovery of the Gospel, it correctly captured what is central to the entire Bible and Christian theology, namely our triune God who receives all the praise due to his glorious grace. All Christians in every generation ought to remember and give God thanks for the Reformation, and more importantly, faithfully stand on their shoulders and gladly proclaim the Gospel as represented by the Reformation *solas*. The *solas* are not mere slogans from yesteryear; they are truths to be received and wholeheartedly embraced. They remind us what is central to Scripture and what is vitally important for the church to teach, preach, and joyously live out before the watching world.

In addition to celebrating the legacy of the Reformation, it is also important to reflect on some of the key Reformers whom God raised up to bring about the Reformation. God's work in this world never occurs apart from real people who are first captured by the truth of the Gospel and then faithfully live and

work to see the Church reformed. We often idolize some of these past heroes of the faith, but we must never forget that they were in the words of Francis Schaeffer, “little people” in “little places,” who were used powerfully by God to do mighty things for the sake of the Gospel. In this issue of *SBJT*, our focus is not only on the Reformation but also on its most famous Reformer—Martin Luther. After all, the date marking the start of the Reformation is attributed to him! Yet, as we know, before Luther there were others whom God used to bring reform to the church, as well as those in his lifetime and long after his death. Throughout the ages, God has always raised up faithful people to proclaim the Gospel in all of its depth and breadth, but Luther is certainly a central figure of the Reformation.

In fact, apart from the legacy of Martin Luther, it is hard to imagine the Reformation as the Reformation. For this reason, in this issue of *SBJT*, our primary focus is on the life, theology, and influence of Luther during the 16th century and beyond. In the various essays, we will focus on the theology of Luther, especially on issues that were central to him such as *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. In other articles, we will focus on Luther’s influence on John Calvin and later Baptist theologians who built off his work, especially in terms of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. We will also investigate how Luther’s theology was practically worked out in life with special focus on how he encouraged Christians *to live and die* well in Christ for his glory. Our Forum pieces will continue to focus on Luther’s theology and the influence of his life. We have also included a sermon of John Calvin’s from the Reformation which offers a sample of the kind of preaching the Reformers did as they sought to admonish and encourage the Church to embrace the truth of the Gospel and live it out in their daily lives.

As already noted, the Reformation was not the “Golden Age” in church history which we must restore today. We live in a different time and era. Yet, the Reformation should be viewed as a mighty work of God by which he revived his Church and called people back to Scripture and the truth of the Gospel. What needs to be passed on today are the same central truths of the Gospel that the Reformation clearly taught, expounded, and defended. Martin Luther was a central figure in the Reformation, and it is an honor to remember him so that we can learn from him today by faithfully knowing and proclaiming our glorious triune God of sovereign grace.

Editor Note: Errata for SBJT 21.3 (2017): 43. “It is also interesting that the readers’ pagan readers do not call them Jews, but identify them as Christians (1 Pet 4:16)” *should read* “It is also interesting that in the midst of the readers’ sufferings, their pagan neighbors are not to confuse them as Jews, but they are to be identified as Christians (1 Pet 4:16).”

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Martin Luther Timeline

GARY STEWARD

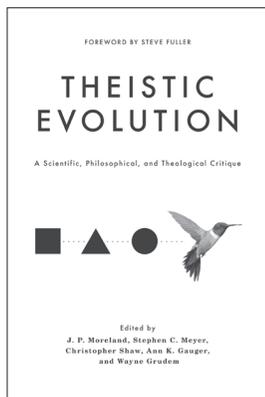
Gary Steward is Assistant Professor of History at Colorado Christian University in Lakewood, Colorado. He earned his PhD in Church History and Historical Theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Princeton Seminary (1812-1929): Its Leaders' Lives and Works* (P&R, 2014) and the co-author (with Sally Michael) of *God's Design* (P&R, 2016). Prior to his teaching position, Dr. Steward served as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

- 1483 Birth of Martin Luther in Eisleben, Germany
- 1501 Luther enters a school run by the Brethren of the Common Life
- 1502 Graduates B.A. at the University of Erfurt
- 1505 Graduates M.A. at the University of Erfurt
- Luther joins the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt
- 1507 Luther says his first mass
- 1509 Receives a Bachelor of Theology degree
- John Calvin born
- 1510 Luther visits Rome
- 1512 Receives a Doctor of Theology degree
- 1513 Luther begins lecturing on the Bible at the University of Wittenberg

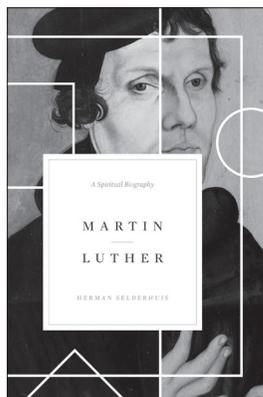
- 1516 Erasmus publishes the *Greek New Testament*
- 1517 Luther publishes *A Disputation against Scholastic Theology*
Luther posts his *95 Theses*, protesting indulgences and papal abuses
- 1518 Luther argues against Scholastic theology at the Heidelberg Disputation
Luther debates cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg
Philip Melanchthon arrives in Wittenberg
- 1519 Charles V named Holy Roman Emperor
Luther debates John Eck at the Leipzig Disputation
Ulrich Zwingli begins his ministry in Zurich
- 1520 *Exsurge Domine* issued by Pope Leo X, excommunicating Luther
Luther publishes *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*
- 1521 The Diet of Worms
Leo X names Henry VIII Defender of the Faith for his anti-Luther writings
- 1522 Luther publishes the German New Testament
- 1524 The Peasants' Revolt begins
William Tyndale visits Luther's Germany
- 1525 Luther marries Katherine von Bora

- Luther publishes *On the Bondage of the Will* in response to Erasmus
- 1526 The First Diet of Speyer sanctions Lutheranism in parts of Germany
- Luther's son Hans born, the first of six children
- 1529 The Second Diet of Speyer cancels the previous toleration granted to Lutherans, who protest and begin to be called Protestants
- The Marburg Colloquy between Luther, Zwingli, and other reformers
- Luther publishes his *Small Catechism*
- 1530 The Augsburg Confession compiled by Melanchthon
- 1531 The Schmalkaldic League of German princes established
- 1534 Luther publishes the complete German Bible
- 1546 Luther dies in Eisleben

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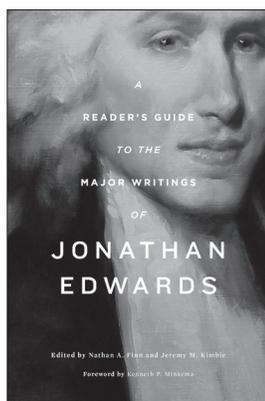


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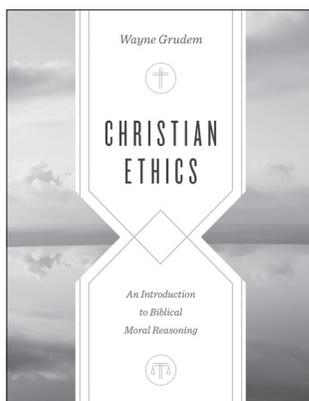


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The “Heidelberg Theses” of 1518: A Milestone in Luther’s Theological Maturation

ROBERT KOLB

Robert Kolb is Professor of Systematic Theology emeritus at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. Among his many published works are the translation of *The Book of Concord* (co-edited with Timothy J. Wengert), and *The Oxford Handbook to Martin Luther’s Theology* (co-edited with Irene Dingel and Lubomir Batka, Oxford University Press, 2014). Dr. Kolb has also written *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Baker Academic, 2016), *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Baker Academic, 2012), and *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

LUTHER’S PATH TO REFORM

Martin Luther’s perception of what it means to be Christian and how the discipline of theology should be practiced underwent an “evangelical” maturation process that had begun already as he received his doctorate “in Biblia” in 1512 and began his lectures on the Psalms in 1513. The beginnings of this process may be dated from as early as 1509. Because at that point he was a young theologian near the beginning of his study of theology, this means that his mature theology does not constitute a break with his own considered views but rather is the culmination of the learning process that all theologians experience from the time at which they begin to digest, amalgamate, and formulate their teachers’ insights into their own system of thinking. Luther’s process of theological maturation was, as Alister McGrath has pointed out, “a

continuous process, rather than a series of isolated and fragmented episodes.” McGrath further notes “that one aspect of this development—namely, his discovery of the ‘righteousness of God’—is of fundamental importance within this overall process.”¹

The process came to completion a decade later, in the years between 1519 and 1522.² His presentation of his theological orientation and method to his Augustinian brothers at their provincial meeting in Heidelberg in April 1518 marked an important milestone in the journey from the worldview of his childhood and youth, as it had been developed and deepened in different ways by his university education in the scholastic way of thinking and by his formation in the monastic-mystical piety that included the meditative devotional piety of Johann Tauler and his followers, for example, the anonymous of the *Deutsche Theologie*, which Luther edited for publication in 1516.³

Students of Luther spent over half of the past century searching for the critical moment, an “evangelical breakthrough” or a “tower experience” which marked Luther’s decisive turn from his past to his new theology.⁴ While most scholars are conscious of the gradual development of their own ideas, the Romantic perception of such “magic moments” in history and personal biographies, coupled with the fact that leading figures of the Confessional Revival of the nineteenth century (among them Wilhelm Löhe and Louis Harms), had recorded their own conversion experiences, led these researchers of the Wittenberg Reformation to see that point at which Luther’s new worldview emerged. Closer scrutiny of his writings reveals a typical evolution of his way of thinking that reflects fresh discoveries in his reading of the biblical text, a good deal of meditation and reconsideration of ideas he had previously taken for granted, and no little experimentation in the best way to fit the pieces of the thought he encountered in the writings of the prophets and apostles together.

This process of redefinition of the nature and practice of theology as a university discipline accompanied Luther’s redefinition of what it means to be a Christian. From parents, priests, and preceptors in Mansfeld and later from his instructors in the schools of Magdeburg, Eisenach, and Erfurt, he had understood being Christian as a matter of the human’s seeking God through his or her own efforts, perhaps aided by grace in some more or less decisive way, but with responsibility for the relationship that formed the connection to the divine resting ultimately on human performance.

The preferred, essential activities that gained access to God's aid and favor were, for the young Martin, of a sacred nature, religious acts prescribed by the church, though ethical good works were also presumed to be important. This structure for the understanding of how religion should function had seeped into the exercise of the faith from the traditional religions of the Germanic tribes. In the early Middle Ages, princes converted their populations by edict, without the support of adequate personnel to preach and teach the biblical message thoroughly to the common people. Traditional perceptions of how the divine powers were to be channeled into daily life formed the skeleton upon which Bible stories and Christian vocabulary were placed.⁵

Luther came to the biblical text in the cloister and then in the university with this general perception of his faith. As his Ockhamist-inclined instructors and his monastic formation shaped his maturing mind, they supplied reinforcement for much of his childhood faith. Nonetheless, both the university and the cloister provided other elements of the late medieval approach to the faith that combined with his study of Scripture, aided by new methods developed by the biblical humanists,⁶ to alter his perception of what it means to be a Christian (it is not coincidental that at Luther's time, his own order, the Augustinian Hermits, had an intensified interest in Augustine and Paul as well as in the methods and perspectives of the biblical humanists' attention to the ancient sources and the original languages of the biblical text⁷). Luther found that God initiates the relationship and that it depends on his favor alone. He found that trust in the promise of new life through Christ's death and resurrection laid the groundwork for his own good deeds. The maturing Luther learned as well that this life that proceeds from trusting Christ's work and that his promise produces not only praise and prayer directed toward God but also love and service directed toward other creatures, particularly fellow human beings.⁸

Parallel to this development in his definition of what it means to be a Christian, the seriousness with which Luther took his calling to serve God as a "Doctor in Biblia" guided him to rethink what it means to be a theologian, a teacher of the Holy Scripture, for the sake of the church and the spiritual well-being of Christ's people. The theses which his Romans lectures (1515-1516) inspired his student, Bartholomäus Bernhardt, to compose on the freedom of the will, offered the Wittenberg theological faculty an experiment in reexamining the content of his instructors' thinking, focused as

Bernhardi's theses were upon what role the human being plays in establishing the relationship between self and God.⁹ These theses set Luther's colleagues and students to thinking in September 1516. Almost exactly one year later, Luther composed theses on the method of scholastic theology for his student Franz Günther to defend.¹⁰ Less than two months after that disputation took place, the young professor took a detour from the program he had proposed in these two sets of theses. He composed ninety-five theses on the practice of indulgences to elicit debate on practical issues of pastoral care rather than to explore the nature of the theological enterprise at the university. With the theses presented in Heidelberg to his brothers in the Order of Augustinian Hermits, he returned to his examination of the nature and practice of theology. These theses built on what he had been proposing in 1516 and 1517 with the propositions on the freedom of the will and scholastic theology.

These "Heidelberg theses" made much less of a direct impact in the sixteenth century than had the Ninety-five Theses on Indulgences and much less than would Luther's further development of the ideas he advanced in Heidelberg in April 1518 in his six programmatic treatises of 1520-1522. All six—*On Good Works*,¹¹ *Open Letter to the German Nobility*,¹² *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*,¹³ *On the Freedom of the Christian*,¹⁴ *Against Latomus*,¹⁵ and *On Monastic Vows*¹⁶—proceeded with the deconstruction of fundamental elements of medieval piety and of scholastic method for the practice of theology even while retaining other elements of both, altering them to a greater or lesser degree.

Indeed, the Heidelberg theses were occasionally made available to the reading public. In 1520 the Parisian printer Pierre Vidoué issued a collection of "conclusions" offered for debate by Luther, his colleagues Andreas Karlstadt and Philip Melancthon, "and others" in which the Heidelberg Theses were contained. In 1530 the Wittenberg printer Joseph Klug issued a collection of Luther's theses offered for debate over the years, and he likewise included the Heidelberg Theses. They also appeared in the first volume of the Wittenberg edition of Luther's Latin works in 1545.¹⁷ This document gained little or no mention in subsequent writings on Luther¹⁸ until the topic of its "*theologia crucis*" surfaced in the larger consciousness of Luther researchers with the appearance Walther von Löwenich's work on that theme in 1929.¹⁹

Nonetheless, the continued critique of scholastic method and the anthropology of his Ockhamist instructors, with the vital role that the free will

played in it, did persist in Luther's thinking. The key concepts formulated in these theses from Heidelberg took on great significance as the framework for the execution of other hermeneutical principles that took shape between 1518 and 1522. These axioms for biblical interpretation included his distinction of law and gospel; his distinction of the twofold righteousness or the two aspects of humanity, passive and active; and his distinction of the two spheres or realms of human relationship, the relationship to God and the relationship to his creation, particularly other human creatures. Therefore, the Heidelberg Theses mark a critical stage in the development of Luther's mature thinking and reveal an essential element in the construction of his worldview and his hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture.

THE OCCASION OF THE HEIDELBERG THESES

Luther's mentor, Johann von Staupitz, the General-Vicar of the Saxon congregation of the Reform branch of the Augustinian Hermits in the German lands, had been conducting his own plan for reform within the Order and through the Order within the wider German-speaking church. Luther was but one of several Augustinian brothers whom von Staupitz had promoted through doctoral studies and other means, preparing a corps of leaders to implement the General-Vicar's vision of improvements in church life through the spread of his own grace-oriented theology.²⁰ But in contrast to Staupitz's reform, Luther suddenly represented a genuine jeopardizing of the chief pillar of order and truth in the opinion of the church's leadership.

When ecclesiastical officials reacted strongly to the threat which they perceived in the challenge of the Ninety-five Theses to papal authority, pressure mounted not only on Luther himself but also on the responsible officials of his Order. That pressure took concrete form within the context of the rivalry of universities and of the monastic orders. A direct challenge came from the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, the bastion of learning for the neighboring electorate of Brandenburg and its ruling house, the Hohenzollerns. In the person of Elector Joachim I, Brandenburg was striving to outmaneuver electoral Saxony. Frankfurt professor, Konrad Wimpina, prepared theses for his friend, the indulgence preacher Johannes Tetzl, to present to the assembly of the Saxon province of the Dominicans, rival mendicants to the Augustinian Hermits, defending the indulgence practice

that Tetzel had been following. It was clear to all that Tetzel's particular approach to selling indulgences had provoked Luther's critical theses. The Saxon Dominicans reacted to Tetzel's presentation of Wimpina's theses by resolving to press heresy charges against Luther in Rome, thereby promoting both Wimpina's university and their own organization.²¹

Von Staupitz arranged for Luther to defend himself and thus aid the Augustinians in deciding how to react to this threat by informing his brothers of his own vision of reform. In Heidelberg in April 1518 Luther neither addressed Wimpina's attack on him nor the issue of indulgences and the crisis of pastoral care besetting the church, of which the indulgence issue was a symptom. Instead, Luther resumed the formulation of his proposal for decisive change in the practice of the discipline of theology. He explored some implications of his critique of scholastic method that had begun in Wittenberg with Bernhardi's theses on the freedom of the will nineteen months earlier and those on scholastic theology seven months earlier. The forty theses which his student and Augustinian brother Leonhard Beyer, who had accompanied him from Wittenberg to Heidelberg, presented and which Luther himself defended, laid out central ideas and implications proceeding from them that Luther had proposed in the theses on scholastic theology in September 1517. Luther had indeed caught the frustration of many of the guild of theologians, particularly among the younger who were still studying. Among those who heard him in Heidelberg and who became his followers as a result were the future reformers Johannes Brenz, Martin Bucer, Theobald Billikan, and perhaps Erhard Schnepf.²²

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Jos Vercruysee observes that "one judges [the Heidelberg Theses] falsely if one views them only as an outstanding example of academic argument. They are rather a piece of engaged, confessing theology, a sermon on law, sin, cross, and grace, God and the human creature. This paraenetic aspect occurs more often as [Luther] changes his style to admonition and encouragement. The theses are not only a description of the process of justification but also an admonition to seek grace in the crucified Christ."²³ Gerhard Forde has called the Heidelberg theses "a kind of outline for Luther's subsequent theological program."²⁴ The theses treated twenty-eight theological assertions and twelve

which Luther labeled "philosophical." They spoke both of the "theology of the cross" and of being a "theologian of the cross."

The first of the theological theses asserts the goodness of the law, which Luther viewed as God's plan for human living, and the impossibility of keeping it. Forde compares Luther's assessment of the sinner's ability to fulfill God's commands to addiction (although he admits the analogy is not perfect): "The law 'Thou shalt not quit!' is for the alcoholic quite right and true. It is [to use Luther's words in his first theses, describing God's law] a 'most salutary doctrine of life.' However, it does not realize its aim but only makes matters worse. It deceives the alcoholic by arousing pride and so becomes a defense mechanism against the truth, the actuality of addiction."²⁵ The final theological thesis expresses Luther's understanding of the only solution to the sinner's condition, the re-creative word of forgiveness, which is described as God's creation of the object of his love. Thus, the goal of these theses was not only to offer the church a new core for the appropriation and application of the biblical message. The theses also aimed at cultivating the attitude and orientation of those who were teaching and preaching God's Word for the people.

Luther's use of Christ's cross and the Word that conveys it took on at least five aspects in Luther's maturing thought. Luther used the epistemology and resulting structure for Christian thinking that Paul presents in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 to unfold his foundation for thinking of God, the human creature, Christ's work of salvation, the believer's and the church's continuing experience of Satanic attack, and the nature of the obligations to others imposed by God's calling to responsibilities of service in the world. In each of these areas, in different ways, the divine *modus operandi*, which, in Paul's words, appears foolish and impotent according to sinful human standards, is in fact the wisdom and power of God. Luther referred to this characteristic of God's actions as his operating under the appearance of opposities [*sub contrario*].

In the Heidelberg Theses, Luther presented three of these basic themes—God, the human creature, and Christian suffering—and labeled them his "theology of the cross." His treatment of Christ's cross as instrument of salvation from sin and of the burden-bearing of Christians in the service to neighbor to which God calls them were developed elsewhere. First, Luther described a foundational truth about God that he had discovered in his study of Scripture. The Creator is so much larger than the human imagination that the creature can never dare to presume to be able to describe God

in his fullness. The Creator is in part God Hidden (*absconditus*). Alister McGrath correctly notes that “Luther uses term less frequently than might be imagined, and frequently employs variants (for example, *Deus nudus*) to express substantially the same ideas.”²⁶ God is hidden by virtue of his being the infinite Creator and our finitude as his creatures; Luther later refers to the god which human imaginations create as some approximation of the true God as truly hidden (*absconditus*) by human misconceptions. Human creatures should never expect to understand God fully, and they avoid speculation about what is exercise of lordship over his creation means apart from his revelation if they know what is good for them.

But Luther also posits that in his saving actions, operating “under the appearance of opposites” [*sub contrario*], God hides himself by exhibiting his power in what human reason has come to regard as weakness and his wisdom in what human philosophy labels foolishness. Aristotle had never thought to look for the Ultimate in a crib, on a cross, in a crypt. The God Hidden, therefore, Luther noticed, has revealed what he wants his people to know of him and his actions in their behalf by becoming a human being himself, Jesus of Nazareth, and by speaking to his human creatures through the prophets and apostles in Holy Scripture. God Revealed commands the focus, full attention, devotion, and trust of his human creatures. Luther had no doctrine of God that could be discussed by his human creatures apart from God in relationship to them. This distinction between God Hidden and God Revealed comes to its full flowering seven years later in *De servo arbitrio*, there also as part of an argument in behalf of the almighty power and also the limitless goodness of God.²⁷

In thesis 21 Luther noted that the theologian of glory, who seeks personal glory through mastery of the world in rational explanation and who seeks to defend God’s glory by explaining why he is not responsible for evil, must call what is evil good and the goodness of Christ’s cross evil. The reformer’s distinction of God Hidden and God Revealed takes the burden of mastery through explanation from the theologian of the cross, who bears suffering with the sufferers and points to Christ’s cross as the ultimate answer to all evil, but does not try to assess credit or blame when bad things happen to anyone. Thus, Luther concludes, the theologian of the cross can “call the thing what it actually is” and not try to get God off the hook nor assuage suffering through explanation; the theologian of the cross does not attempt

rational mastery of questions raised by the attacks of evil.

Second, the Heidelberg Theses affirm that the human creature exists fully embraced by the relationship with the Creator. Luther had no definition of being human apart from his centering human life on "fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all else,"²⁸ a trust from which God wants all human actions to proceed. Dependence and reliance on God, grounded on trust in the promise of forgiveness and new life in Christ, replaced the exercise of human control over one's own life and the surrounding world through reason in Aristotle's system, in which there was no personal god in whom to trust. Trust as the center and constituting power of human personhood and personality compelled a rethinking of the Christian's view of God's law and of the human will and its ability to turn itself to God. Although Luther regarded reason as a good gift of God,²⁹ he limited it to a servant's role in theology and sharply criticized its use when it presumed to place God's revelation in Scripture under its judgment. This placed the human creature in a situation of total dependence on God. In discussing the theses in Heidelberg, Luther commented, "it is impossible to hope in God unless one has despaired of all creatures and knows that nothing can profit without God."³⁰

Third, this *theologia crucis* set forth how God has rescued humankind from its sinfulness through the atoning death of Christ on the cross. His death spelled the death of the sinful identities of those who trust in Christ, as preface to the resurrection (cf. Paul's conclusion to this epistle in 1 Cor 15), which sets believers on the path of new life in Christ's footsteps. Christ assumed the burden of human sin and buried believers' sins in his tomb (Rom 6: 3-4, Col 2: 11-13), as Paul had affirmed in Romans 4:25.³¹ Luther took sin very seriously, and he took God's wrath against sin just as seriously. Forde observes that for Luther the cross is "the attack of God on the old sinner and *the sinner's* theology."³² God is acting in the cross to put an end to the sinner's identity as sinner, through burial with Christ, and to raise up a person restored to righteousness through Christ's resurrection. Forde uses again the analogy of addiction to assert that sinners cannot help themselves but are totally dependent on God's saving action in Christ, according to the Wittenberg reformer.

Fourth, God's *modus operandi* as exhibited in the cross determines and helps believers to understand much of their experience as Christians. Like their Lord, they suffer the attacks of Satan and his minions in a variety of forms, and that explains why those whom God has chosen do encounter the hostility

and persecution of the world around them. This was not an attempt to make suffering in itself something good even though it recognizes that God works under the appearance of opposites to accomplish his will in a sinful world through suffering. Nor is it a sentimental glorifying of suffering itself or the sufferer. Forde comments, “in a theology of the cross it is soon apparent that we cannot ignore the fact that suffering comes about because we are at odds with God and are trying to rush headlong into some sort of cozy identification with him. God and his Christ, Luther will be concerned to point out, are the *operators* in this matter, not the ones operated upon,” as Luther asserted in thesis 27 in Heidelberg. Some suffering, Luther believed, comes from Satan, and sometimes God employs our suffering to call us to repentance or to aid others. But suffering is not in God’s Edenic plan for his human creatures.

Luther occasionally also spoke, fifth, of the Christian’s calling to serve others as the cause of the weight of a cross that comes with bearing the suffering and needs of others. In a world invaded by evils of various kinds, others suffer, and believers join them in their suffering to give comfort and aid as they are able because God has called them to love the neighbor in concrete ways.³³ Though the least-used application of the cross in Luther’s writings, it fits into his understanding of God’s overcoming evil through that which reason regards as evil itself. Luther sees such suffering as God’s putting the negative to work for his people.

LUTHER’S CRITIQUE OF SCHOLASTIC METHOD

Luther had begun his public deconstruction of scholastic theology in the disputation composed for Franz Günther nearly eight months earlier, at the beginning of September 1517. His ever-deepening command of biblical perceptions and concepts had gained a concept of God as Creator, whose almighty power his Ockhamist-inclined instructors had posited as a fundamental axiom. If it was true that God is almighty and has created law and the design for human life, then Luther was compelled to recognize that Aristotle’s view of what it means to be human was faulty. A personal God who converses with his human creatures through his Word in Scripture, in preaching, and in the promise delivered in the sacraments, played no role in Aristotle’s understanding of reality. Luther had used Aristotle day in and day out in his studies and in his earliest lectures in Erfurt and Wittenberg.

He never abandoned his use of much of the ancient philosopher's logic and other elements of his analysis of what exists. But already in 1509-1510 his doubts about essential elements of Aristotle's worldview were growing.

By 1518 Luther had long since gone beyond Aristotle's way of describing the foundations of reality in terms of substance and accidents, that is, the core of a thing that determines its genus, and the specific incidentals that constitute a particular specimen of that genus. Before he had completed his doctoral studies, he had perceived that the personhood of God, his nature as a conversation partner with his creatures, laid the bedrock of reality in relationships between Creator and creature and among the creatures he had fashioned, particularly those created in his own image.³⁴ Therefore, Luther came to the realization that Aristotle was worse than useless in describing the basic reality of a world created by this personal God who had revealed himself as Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, Edgar Carlson's observation, based on the consensus of early twentieth-century Scandinavian Luther scholars, that Luther's critique of reason and of Aristotle arises from his soteriological concerns³⁵ is correct, but those soteriological concerns took form in the context of his elaboration of his even more fundamental understanding of the person of God as a speaker and a Creator, who established and sustained his relationship with his human creatures even at the price of the death of his second person, enfleshed as Jesus of Nazareth.

As Brian Gerrish before him,³⁶ Alister McGrath has traced the development of Luther's selective antipathy toward Aristotle. As he moved to a relational understanding of the foundations of reality, the implicit assigning of primacy to God that lay therein led Luther to distinguish sharply between theology and philosophy in a general way: they treat quite different subjects. Luther's focusing specifically on the person of God may well have arisen from his reading of the Augustinian theologian Hugolino of Orvieto (ca. 1300-1373), a disciple of the general of his Order, Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300-1358). Both particularly accented the predestination of the faithful and the necessity of grace for the performance of a God-pleasing work. By 1515 Luther acknowledged the inevitability of the inability of the creature's powers of mind to grasp the fullness of God and his *modus operandi*; likewise, he recognized the dependence of the human will on its Creator as Scripture presents him. He continued to praise reason as God's gift for managing secular affairs, but because the larger framework of life stems from the Creator's acts

of fashioning and sustaining human existence, reason's ability to address the whole of life fell short. Aristotle's way of thinking broke down at the point it went beyond the presupposition that God had created the order of his world and its human creatures.³⁷

Luther never abandoned his use of Aristotle's concepts of substance and accidents, but Aristotle could only distract from the search for truth about God and about the humanity he had formed in his own image. Just as he continued to use Aristotle, so Luther's negative comments about "*philosophia*," particularly metaphysics, did not extend to every part of the legacy of the ancient philosophers. Often "*ratio*"—reason—also designated this Aristotelian philosophy that could not account for human origins in the creative Word of God and so was rejected. Nevertheless, Luther also counted reason as one of God's good gifts, to be used even in theology as a servant to God's revelation of himself.³⁸

Because Aristotle had no personal God to hold his world in order, he stressed human reliance on eternal law as the key to ultimate truths about how the world functions and how human life is to take shape. Thus, Aristotle necessarily directed human thinking about the good life to dependence on human performance that conformed to the eternal law.³⁹ As Luther grew in his appreciation not only of God's ultimate power but also of his ultimate goodness and came to define his essence as love and mercy that bestows his favor on his human creatures, Aristotle no longer could serve as a vehicle for the interpretation of the message of the prophets and the apostles. Luther resolved to attempt to let them speak directly. Naturally, he could not do so without bringing some presuppositions to his reading, and those were largely shaped (both positively and negatively) by Ockhamist-inclined instructors. Luther resolved, however, in the midst of his evangelical maturation to discipline his reading of Scripture by letting other parts of Scripture judge his own presuppositions and guide his reading of the text.⁴⁰

Luther began his propositions concerning theology by defining his theology as paradoxical. The term "paradox" does not appear in the theological dictionary of Johannes Altenstaig, published in 1517, which provides a view of late medieval theological usage.⁴¹ Luther may well have gleaned the term from the mystical strands of monastic devotion. This term reinforced Luther's depriving reason of its monopoly on the human being's perception of the truth and placed that perception at the mercy of God. Luther's paradoxical arguments also irritated Erasmus, who sought a more orderly approach to human

knowledge.⁴² Luther anchored his thinking, he claimed, in the "most specially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ," Saint Paul, and Saint Augustine, "Saint Paul's most faithful interpreter."⁴³ This shrewdly framed introduction not only appealed to the Augustinian brothers with its reliance on the namesake of their Order, in whom the members of the Order had taken increasing interest in the course of the fifteenth century, but also with its appeal to the Apostle Paul, in whom Augustinian Eremites had at the same time become ever more interested, dedicating no little formal study to his epistles.

Although it was not apparent at the beginning of the theses, Luther was explicitly placing Paul and Augustine in opposition to Aristotle and the domination of his discipline by Aristotelian presuppositions. Content and method merge in these theses, but Luther placed methodical considerations concerning the use of Aristotle at the end of his propositions. The final twelve are labeled "*ex philosophia*" in contrast to the first twenty-eight "*ex theologia*." His theological theses address the anthropological issues that lay at the heart of his rejection of the ancient philosopher, and in the philosophical theses he addressed other issues. He began with the assertion that whoever wishes to "philosophize" with Aristotle must previously have been made foolish with Christ, a direct reference to 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. In the discussion of this thesis Luther set rational knowledge against "trust, life, glory, power, and wisdom" in Christ. God comes to reveal himself out of his hiddenness in Christ. Trust in him follows God's command in Jeremiah 9:22-23; Luther presumed that his hearers would associate his brief citation—that the wise person does not glory in his own wisdom but in knowing God—with the words of adjacent passages, which ascribed true power and riches to the power and riches, alongside the wisdom, of God.⁴⁴ Luther repeated this sentiment in the second philosophical thesis, assuring that hearers would get the point. In the "Theses on Scholastic Theology" he had made the same argument. "The whole of Aristotle, in brief, has the same relationship to theology as darkness has to light," he had stated in thesis 52 (50). The following three theses elaborated, with a side remark that Latin theologians probably did not understand Aristotle anyway (theses 53/51). Luther found Porphyry's comments in his commentary on Aristotle regarding universals faulty and asserted that the more useful definitions of Aristotle seem "to presume what they are supposed to be proving" (thesis 55/53). At his best, Aristotle was doing little more than asserting his own opinion, Luther claimed.

Thesis 31 of the Heidelberg propositions placed the conclusions of Aristotle that the world is eternal and that the human soul is mortal before Luther's hearers, asserting thereby that Aristotle did not understand basic presuppositions of the biblical revelation of God's creation of the universe and his fashioning human creatures for an everlasting relationship with himself. The following three theses rejected Aristotle's focus on the material universe, that is, they led hearers to the conclusion that "if Aristotle had recognized the absolute power of God, it would have been impossible for the material to exist in and of itself" (thesis 34). Luther had learned from his Ockhamist instructors that God is omnipotent. The remaining "philosophical" theses spelled out details of this proposition with reference to Plato, Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras.

Within this framework, Luther offered his alternative to a theology beholden to and crippled by trying to fit the biblical worldview into an essentially foreign and hostile interpretation of reality, as, in his view, the scholastic theologians had attempted to do. Luther's theological theses presented an analysis of the human experience of reality that took the presence of the Creator into account and perceived that he is almighty. Therefore, these theses begin by assessing the impotence of the human will in relationship to the eternal law, so vital for order in Aristotle's system, which the Augustinian brother from Wittenberg labeled "God's law," setting forth God's possession and mastery of control in the world. The "theology of glory" that Luther's alternative method for practicing the interpretation of reality on the basis of the proper interpretation of Scripture sought its "glory" through its own ability to conform to God's law and its ability to master reality through its own rational analysis. It failed to recognize God's true glory in the foolishness and impotence of the cross. That "glorious" approach to theology presumed that the human mind could plumb the depths of the law through rational exercise of its capabilities and that the human will is able to act on the perceptions of this reasoning to carry out the law. Aristotle's rationality had no place for an Ultimate that worked under the appearance of opposites, for such a God cannot be corralled by human reason but can only be trusted. Luther found the approach to God and his law through reason not only flawed and faulty but also a false path to relating to God. That was true because the exercise of rationality not only failed to perceive God's *modus operandi* and his very person correctly; it also depended on a will that, Luther contended, was

actually unable to grasp hold of the Creator as he had revealed himself in Christ and therefore was bound to make false choices in regard to God.

Therefore, Luther praised God's law as a "most salutary teaching for life," but it was not in the first place, and certainly has not been since the human fall into sin, an instrument for aiding human beings to attain righteousness. Instead, it offers a diversion for sinners because it creates the illusion that external compliance with what God has commanded could demonstrate true righteousness in God's sight (theses 1-2), thus placing the responsibility for reconciliation with God in human hands. Within months of his visit to Heidelberg Luther would publish the first of his elaborations of the ideas proposed before his brothers there, his *On Three Kinds of Righteousness*, which matured into his *On Two Kinds of Righteousness*, which appeared in 1519. These brief treatises decisively altered the traditional paradigm for defining humanity and describing the relationship between God and his human creatures. The vast majority of Christian teachers had defined righteousness ultimately in terms of human performance. Even Augustine believed that God's unconditional grace saves by granting the human sinners the equivalent of perfect obedience to the law, through the aid that the Holy Spirit gives to conform to it in faith or through the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness: God regards the sinner as one who has the equivalence of that perfect obedience to the law.⁴⁵

Luther's introduction of a simple but paradigm-altering definition of human righteousness as twofold, was foreshadowed in the first several of the Heidelberg Theses. In late 1518 Luther's *On Three Kinds of Righteousness* counted three forms of sinfulness that are parallel to the three kinds of human righteousness. Criminal acts are the opposite of external conformity to divine law apart from faith in Christ. The righteousness that God bestows through his regard for human beings who trust in Christ renders them in God's mind, where reality rests, as truly righteous, is the opposite of original sin, which Luther defined as doubt of God's Word and denial of his Lordship passed on to all descendants by Adam and Eve. The failure of believers to produce the fruits of faith is then the opposite of the exercise of obedience to God's design for human living in the law, empowered by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of trust in Christ.⁴⁶

In 1519, *On the Two Kinds of Righteousness* did not discuss outward conformity to the Ten Commandments but did elaborate on the *iustitia aliena* [righteousness given from outside the person] and the *iustitia propria*

[righteousness exercised by the person].⁴⁷ Luther later labeled the righteousness or identity of human beings as God's children in his sight, an unconditional gift of new life for sinners, "passive righteousness" and the righteousness or identity in relationships with other creatures, especially human, as "active righteousness." In 1531 he called this distinction of the two aspects of the righteousness of believers "our theology."⁴⁸ In April 1518 he was laying the groundwork for this essential element of his anthropology and his entire theology when he informed his fellow Augustinians, in theses 1 and 2, that the law does not aid human beings in attaining the foundation of their righteousness through the works that conform to God's commands. Only despair over one's own ability can lead to receiving the grace God gives because of the work of Christ (thesis 18). Thus, righteousness before God on the human side consists of faith in Christ (thesis 25). Luther was beginning at that time to define faith as "*fiducia*," trust, as he would spell it out in developing his concept of "promise"⁴⁹ and as he would lay it before the public in his *On the Freedom of the Christian* in 1520.⁵⁰

Thesis 15 recognizes that not only is sin responsible for the inability of the human being, on the strength of reason and will, to win God's favor; even in Eden, Adam and Eve did good "not in an active but in a subjective manner." That meant that the first human creatures were not doing good on their own power and resolve, but because that was the nature that God had given them as he poured out his favor and love upon them simply because he wanted to—this is the nature of God's identity or righteousness. Luther's expression of this idea was still to ripen, but the seeds had been planted. He further was exploring this distinction of the twofold righteousness when he wrote in thesis 27 that properly speaking, "what Christ does is his actively performing something whereas what we do that is pleasing to God is performed only by the grace of Christ, the one is actively doing what he is doing. The growing sense of this distinction of two aspects to human righteousness also led to a redefinition of other terms, including merit. Human merit had no place in a theology which professed a gracious God whose almighty power is in complete control of his world.

THE PRACTICE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The practice of the theology of the cross—teaching as a theologian of the cross—centered on delivering the message that "The law brings God's wrath;

it kills, renders one guilty, condemns whatever is not in Christ" (thesis 23). That should not lead to despair but rather "to humility and to seeking Christ's grace" (thesis 17). Alister McGrath emphasizes that God addresses the sinfulness of human beings by humiliating them,⁵¹ and in fact, Luther asserts that he uses the law not only to humiliate them but also to kill sinners, abolishing their sinful identity. He does not only desire to change their attitude from confidence in their own works to abandoning confidence in those works. He also eliminates their very existence as sinners in his sight, where all reality exists. Only by fleeing to the cross and relying on Christ in faith can believers come properly to terms with the law. If they do not, they will abuse the best of God's gifts (theses 23-26). This view of Christ and of the law altered the understanding of sin: no longer can sins be quantified as "mortal" or "venial" since all proceed from the fatal failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all else.

Luther concentrates on the boundness of human choice in theses 13-18, concluding in thesis 14, with the help of Ockhamist terminology, that the freely-exercised choice of sinners is only passively able—that is, in dependence on the Holy Spirit—to do good, whereas it actively turns to evil.⁵² Thus, the presumption of thinking that one can please God by—in the phrase of Ockham and Biel—doing one's best, or what by purely natural powers lies within human capability is simply sin, of the highest order, since it takes away glory from God. These theses offer not a rational argument but an existential address of human experience that can be honestly taken seriously only in the shadow of Christ's cross. It is less a matter for disputation than for preaching and forgiving of sin.

This dependence on what God reveals, Luther argues, does not try to scrutinize "the hidden things of God" and to look behind or beyond his Word. This reliance on what God says in his biblical conversation and as Jesus Christ permits honesty about the worst of human problems because it has abandoned its need for rational control and explanation of the mystery of evil in human life.

Luther concluded his "theological" theses with the proposition that God does not seek out or come upon the loveable as the objects of his love but rather, in a creative act, he makes those who were unlovable lovable. That is, for Martin Luther, the nature of the person he was encountering in Jesus Christ. He is a creator who makes sinners into children of God because his

nature is to love and show mercy to his beloved human creatures. Forde comments, “God’s love in Christ is a creative act that brings believers into being.” When all our human possibilities have been exhausted and we have been reduced to nothing, one who creates out of nothing does his ‘proper work’” [Luther’s expression for his demonstration of his love and mercy, in contrast to his “foreign or alien” work, the work of bringing sinners to repentance through the killing power of the law’s judgment on their sinfulness].⁵³

The several elements that came together under the heading of “cross” in 1518 to form what Luther regarded as the heart of the content of Scripture and as the key to proper theological method continued to develop as he spelled them out in works of the following years. McGrath views the lectures on the Psalms which Luther delivered in 1519 and 1520 as the arena for developing further his understanding of righteousness but above all “their leading feature is their exposition of the *theologia crucis* ...”. McGrath notes as well that his concept of passive righteousness was embedded in a larger “programmatically reinterpreted” of several concepts, within the framework of the theology of the cross.⁵⁴ These ideas flowed into the programmatic writings of 1520-1522, into the *De servo arbitrio*, and into his preaching and teaching to the end of his life. In lecturing on Psalm 126:5 in 1533, he referred to his theology as the “theology of the cross,” and his editor, Veit Dietrich, rendered Luther’s expression: “For theology is properly called the profession of the holy cross.”⁵⁵ “*Professio*” may refer to the Christian’s walk of life or to the confession of the faith. If the former definition was Dietrich’s intent, this formulation of the theology of the cross referred to the believer’s “*sub contrario*” experience of suffering in the eschatological battle; if the phrase here refers to the latter, it lifts up faith’s dependence on God’s Word.⁵⁶

Scholars have employed other concepts to label Luther’s theology: his is a theology of God’s Word, of the justification of the sinner, of the presence of God, among many others. The basic concerns that were emerging in his constructing of his core interpretation of Scripture in 1518 may be viewed and used from several points of view and concern. His own conviction that his is a “theology of the cross” and his desire to practice being a theologian of the cross nonetheless serves as a helpful guide for appropriating his way of thought. The Heidelberg Theses formed a key stage in the development of this theology and a springboard to its use.

- 1 Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 176.
- 2 Reinhard Schwarz, *Martin Luther: Lehrer der christlichen Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2015), 1-3.
- 3 *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883- 1993 [henceforth WA]), 1: 152-153, 375-379. On the various strands of Luther's formation, see Theodor Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian: His Positive and Negative Use of Nominalism and Realism," in: *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomir Batka; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31-48, Volker Leppin, "Luther's Roots in Monastic-Mystical Piety," *ibid.*, 49-61, and Erik Herrmann, "Luther's Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation and His Use of the Church Fathers," *ibid.*, 71-90.
- 4 *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther* (ed. Bernhard Lohse; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther. Neue Erkenntnisse* (ed. Bernhard Lohse; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1988). On the question in the "Luther Renaissance" launched by Karl Holl in the 1920s, see James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour. German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).
- 5 Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard, The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 1-30.
- 6 Lewis W. Spitz, Jr., *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 237-266; Leif Grane, *Noster Martinus. Luther in the German Reform Movement 1518-1521* (Mainz: Zabern, 1994); Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).
- 7 Cf. Eric Leeland Saak, *High Way to Heaven. The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation 1292-1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), David Gutiérrez, *Die Augustiner im Spätmittelalter 1357-1517* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1981), Adalbero Kunzelmann, *Geschichte der Deutschen Augustiner-Eremiten, Fünfter Teil. Die sächsisch-thüringische Provinz und die sächsische Reformkongregation bis zum Untergang der beiden* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1974), esp. 397-523, Hedwig Vonschott, *Geistiges Leben im Augustinerorden am Ende des Mittelalters und zu Beginn der Neuzeit* (Berlin 1915, rpt. Vaduz: Kraus, 1965), esp. 97-174, and Rudolph Arbesmann, *Der Augustiner-Eremitenorden und der Beginn der humanistischen Bewegung* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1965).
- 8 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 1-6.
- 9 WA 1: 142-151.
- 10 WA 1: 221-228; cf. Leif Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (Gyldendal, 1962).
- 11 WA 6:202-76; *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia/Fortress, 1958-1986 [henceforth LW]), 44:21-114.
- 12 WA 6:404-69; LW 44:123-217.
- 13 WA 6:497-573; LW 36:11-126.
- 14 WA 7:3-38, 42-73; LW 31:333-77.
- 15 WA 8: 43-128, LW 32: 137-260.
- 16 WA 8:573-669; LW 44:251-400.
- 17 Helmar Junghans, Introduction to "Disputatio Heidelberge habita," in *Martin Luther. Studien Ausgabe*, Bd. 1 (ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 187.
- 18 In the research for my *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) no significant mention or use of the Heidelberg Theses as a document surfaced. That the topic of the theology of the cross did play a role in various forms in the writings of some of Luther's students, however, is clear, see Robert Kolb, "Did Luther's Students Hide the Hidden God? Deus Absconditus among Luther's First Followers," in *churrasco. A Theological Feast in Honor of Vitor Westhelle* (ed. Mary Philip, John Arthur Nunes, and Charles M. Collier; Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 1-16.
- 19 Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976); German original 1929.
- 20 I owe this insight to Robert Christman, On Staupitz, cf. David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980).
- 21 David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 22-27.
- 22 Junghans, Introduction, 186-187.
- 23 Jos E. Vercauysse, "Gesetz und Liebe. Die Struktur der ‚Heidelberger Disputation‘ Luthers (1518)," *Luther-jahrbuch* 48 (1981): 42 (8-43). Vercauysse offers an extensive bibliography of literature to 1981. For further

- bibliography, see Vitor Westhelle, "Luther's *Theologia crucis*," in *Oxford Handbook*, 155-167; and Robert Kolb, "Deus revelatus—Homo revelatus. Luthers theologia crucis für das 21. Jahrhundert," in: Robert Kolb and Christian Neddens, *Gottes Wort vom Kreuz, Lutherische Theologie als kritische Theologie* (Oberursel: Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, 2001), 13-34.
- ²⁴ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 21.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ²⁶ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 164.
- ²⁷ Klaus Schwarzwäller, *Theologia crucis, Luthers Lehre von Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio, 1525* (Munich: Kaiser, 1970), 201-212, Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 32-38, Steven Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God," in *Oxford Handbook*, 187-200.
- ²⁸ Luther's explanation of the first commandment in his Small Catechism, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelische-Lutherischen Kirche* (ed. Irene Dingel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 862/863, *The Book of Concord* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 351.
- ²⁹ Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Reason, a Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).
- ³⁰ WA 1: 359, lines 20-22, LW 31: 48.
- ³¹ Robert Kolb, "Resurrection and Justification: Luther's Use of Romans 4:25" *Lutherjahrbuch* 78 (2011): 39-60.
- ³² Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 4.
- ³³ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (trans. Carl C. Rasmussen; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 50-63.
- ³⁴ Stefano Leoni, "Der Augustinkomplex. Luthers zwei reformatorische Bekehrungen," in *Reformatorische Theologie und Autoritäten: Studien zur Genese des Schriftprinzips beim jungen Luther* (ed. Volker Leppin, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2015), 193 (184-192).
- ³⁵ Edgar M. Carlson, *The Reinterpretation of Luther* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1948), 127.
- ³⁶ See note 28 above.
- ³⁷ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 138-141.
- ³⁸ Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian."
- ³⁹ Notger Slenczka, "Luther's Anthropology," in *Oxford Handbook*, 212-232.
- ⁴⁰ Kolb, *Luther and the Enduring Word*, 75-131.
- ⁴¹ Johannes Altenstaig, *Vocabularius Theologie complectens vocabulorum descriptiones/ diffinitiones et significatus ad theologiam vitium ...* (Hagenau: Joannes Rynman, 1517), fol. CLXXVIb: following "Paradisus celestis" comes "Paraferna." Altenstaig may not have included every theological term in use in his 554-page folio-sized work, but certainly those used prominently are to be found.
- ⁴² In a letter to Ulrich Zwingli, August 31, 1523, in Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterdami denuo recognitum et acutum*, 12 vols. (ed. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen; Oxford: Clarendon, 1903-1955), 5:327. I am grateful to Robert Christman for this reference.
- ⁴³ WA 1: 353, lines 8-14, LW 31: 39.
- ⁴⁴ *Martin Luther. Studien Ausgabe* 1: 212-213.
- ⁴⁵ WA 2: 43-47.
- ⁴⁶ WA 2: 43-47.
- ⁴⁷ WA 2:145-152, LW 31: 297-306.
- ⁴⁸ WA 40,1: 45, lines 24-26, LW 26: 7.
- ⁴⁹ Oswald Bayer, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), esp. 161-351.
- ⁵⁰ WA 7: 21, lines 1-4, LW 31: 344.
- ⁵¹ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 151-155.
- ⁵² Cf. *Martin Luther. Studien Ausgabe*, 1:215, n. 634.
- ⁵³ Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 22.
- ⁵⁴ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 145.
- ⁵⁵ WA 40,3,193, lines 19-20.
- ⁵⁶ Robert Kolb, "Luther's Theology of the Cross Fifteen Years after Heidelberg: Luther's Lectures on the Psalms of Ascent," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010): 69-85.

“Subtle Sacramentarian” or Son? John Calvin’s Relationship to Martin Luther

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In October of 1545, Heinrich von Wolfenbüttel (1489–1568), the Romanist Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneberg-Wolfenbüttel, in the process of attempting to recover lands taken from him by the Protestant Schmalkald League (in 1542), was taken captive along with his sons. The Lutheran territories of Hesse and Saxony in were placed in great danger of invasion by Romanist forces.¹ In response, the Reformed pastor-theologian John Calvin (1509–64) was so disturbed by this threat to his Lutheran brothers that he asked for and received permission from the city fathers of Geneva to hold a special prayer service on their behalf.² In one of only two sermons from the years prior to 1549 to be transcribed, he expressed concern that Lord’s name should not be blasphemed (Ps 115:2–3).³ He justified the prayer service for the besieged Lutherans on the basis of the spiritual union between the Genevan church and the German Lutherans. He invoked Ephesians 4:1–6, reminding the assembled “there is only one God, one Redeemer, only one true doctrine, one faith, one baptism.” He invoked 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one member suffers, we must all have compassion.” For Calvin there was

“no question” of a single member. For Calvin, an attack on the Lutherans in Hesse and Saxony was an attack on the Reformed in Geneva. They were, after all, members of the same church, though scattered and separated from each other by distance and language. They owed it to their brothers to intercede with God on their behalf.

This relatively obscure episode four years into Calvin’s second tenure in Geneva illustrates his fraternal feelings toward the Lutherans generally and his filial attitude toward Luther in particular. Calvin’s strong affirmation of Genevan unity with the Lutherans of Hesse and Saxony might surprise both confessional Lutherans and some confessional Reformed Christians today. After all, we live after centuries of what B. A. Gerrish calls “confessional mistrust.”⁴ Adherents of both traditions also suffer from considerable ignorance of each other, for which both sides share responsibility.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Calvin and Luther remains significant for understanding the Reformation and our relations to one another in its wake.⁵ It was a disproportionate relationship because Luther’s influence on Calvin was considerable but Luther and Calvin never met, they never corresponded, and it is likely that Luther had only a passing acquaintance with Calvin’s person and work. Luther mentioned Calvin and extended greetings to him in an October 14, 1539 letter to Martin Bucer (1491–1551),⁶ in which he mentioned that he had read Calvin’s reply to Sadoletto written from Basle, in March (and published in September), on behalf of the Genevan church, in defense of the Reformation.⁷

In the Lutheran reception of Calvin he is connected to Zwingli. For example, in his introduction to volume 38 of *Luther’s Works*, Helmut Lehman wrote, “Calvin some years later modified Zwingli’s eucharistic doctrine, teaching that by the action of the Holy Spirit the soul of the believer is lifted into heaven in the Holy Communion and is thus spiritually nourished by Christ’s body and blood there.”⁸ Lehman’s summary of Calvin’s eucharistic theology is fair enough but his assumption that Calvin’s view was a modification of Zwingli’s assumes a genealogy that never, in Calvin’s mind or experience, existed. Those accounts of Calvin emerging from confessional Lutheran quarters face a significant challenge posed by their confessional standards. In the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* (1577) they confess that Calvin is a “subtle sacramentarian” or a “cunning sacramentarian” as distinct from the Zürichers, who are “crass” or “crude” sacramentarians.⁹

This is a hole from which Calvin will not likely be able to extricate himself whatever the evidence may say.¹⁰ One exception to this approach is Paul Althaus’ note, “[u]nder no circumstances therefore may one interpret the position of the Decalog in Luther’s catechism as meaning that it has a place only before ‘justification.’ And it is equally incorrect to assert that the position of the Decalog in the *Heidelberg Catechism*—after ‘Redemption’ and under ‘Gratitude’—is specifically Reformed rather than Lutheran. It is well known that the order of the chief parts of the *Heidelberg Catechism* occurs in a Lutheran catechism as early as 1547.”¹¹

Among the Reformed, it has been common since the 18th century to attribute to Zwingli the beginnings of the Reformed Church. The Göttingen historian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1694–1755) declared in his *Institutiones historiae ecclesiasticae* (1726), “the founder of the Reformed Church was Ulric Zwingli.”¹² As late as 2008, J. Wayne Baker called Zwingli, “the founder of Reformed Protestantism.”¹³

The earlier accounts, however, were more nuanced. For example, Francis Turretin (1623–87) asked, “Where was our Church before Luther and Zwingli and by what means is it preserved?”¹⁴ In his answer to the question he identified both Zwingli *and* Luther as sources of the Reformed church. In the 1840s, however, Alexander Schweizer (1808–88), argued that there was in Lutheranism and in Reformed theology shared “central dogmas,” (*Central dogmen*) but in particular the Lutheran central dogma was justification and the Reformed was said to be predestination.¹⁵

Not everyone in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, was buying this narrative. B. B. Warfield rejected it forcefully.¹⁶

But it is misleading to find the formative principle of either type of Protestantism in its difference from the other; they have infinitely more in common than in distinction. And certainly nothing could be more misleading than to represent them (as is often done) as owing their differences to their more pure embodiment respectively of the principle of predestination and that of justification by faith. The doctrine of predestination is not the formative principle of Calvinism, the root from which it springs.

Despite the criticisms leveled against the Central Dogma methodology by Warfield and later by Richard Muller it has continued to find adherents who,

despite formally disavowing it, nevertheless seek to retain a version of it. In 1987 Charles Partee suggested that “union with Christ” is the organizing principle of Calvin’s theology.¹⁷ Indeed, the turn to union with Christ as an organizing principle in Calvin’s theology has become so pervasive that Thomas L. Wenger has described it as “The New Perspective on Calvin.”¹⁸ In 2012, Richard Muller and J. V. Fesko offered a helpful way forward in the discussion (*pace* Charles Partee *et al.*) by reading Calvin in the context of the broader Reformed tradition.¹⁹

The old juxtaposition of Luther and Calvin still appears among some writers. In 1984, Edward A. Dowey juxtaposed Luther’s view of the law with Calvin’s appreciation of the third use of the law.²⁰ In 2001, Peter Lillback spoke of an “inescapable tension” in Luther’s distinction between law and gospel, which Calvin’s covenant theology was supposed to resolve.²¹

There remains strong support for Warfield’s basic thesis, however. Alexander Ganoczy has argued at length that Luther was major influence on Calvin’s theology and showed several examples where Calvin followed Luther quite closely.²² David Steinmetz wrote, “[a]mong the non-Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century, none was more reluctant to disagree with Martin Luther or more eager to find common ground with than John Calvin.”²³ Marcus Johnson argues that Calvin learned his doctrine of union with Christ from Luther.²⁴ Machiel A. van den Berg has noted Luther’s influence on Nicholas Cop’s rectoral address on All Saints Day, 1533 and Calvin’s likely contribution to that address.²⁵ Like Gerrish’s 1982 essay on Luther and Calvin on the theology of the cross, Herman Selderhuis looks at Calvin’s debt to Luther’s *theologia crucis* in Calvin’s theology of the Psalms.²⁶ R. Ward Holder notes Calvin’s high estimation of Luther.²⁷ The present author has argued for an intentional and substantial agreement by Calvin with Luther on the distinction between law and gospel, noting that despite some terminological differences, Calvin was deeply indebted to Luther on this point.²⁸ Finally and most recently, Robert Kolb (Lutheran) and Carl Trueman (Reformed) thoughtfully survey the similarities and differences between the traditions.²⁹

This essay will argue that, in his own mind, Calvin identified strongly with Luther, was profoundly influenced by him, and dissented from him only reluctantly and then primarily in correspondence. Failure to account properly for Luther’s influence upon Calvin has led some contemporary scholars to misunderstand and mischaracterize Calvin’s theology, piety, and practice.

LUTHER AS CALVIN’S SPIRITUAL FATHER

There are good reasons to doubt the narrative proposed by Mosheim and continued by so many other modern authors. It is most likely that Zwingli was himself led to his Reformation breakthrough by reading Luther but whatever the facts in that case, we may be certain that Calvin was much more deeply influenced by Luther than by Zwingli, whom he held in suspicion for a number of years. In a letter from May 19, 1539 to André Zébédée, Pastor of Orbais,³⁰ Calvin described Zwingli’s view of the Supper as “false and pernicious” (*falsa et pernicioso*). He did say even though others were applauding Zwingli, he “did not hesitate to oppose him” (*impugnare non dubitavi*) and criticized Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) for attempting to soften it so as to make it more palatable.³¹ He was confident that had Luther understood that the Reformed were teaching that in the supper, believers receive “a participation in the body and blood of the Lord” he would be moved to consent or the Reformed must leave him behind.³² Indeed, the only explicit references to Zwingli in the Battles edition of the *Institutes* are in the footnotes supplied by the editor.³³ Calvin spoke of Zwingli infrequently and continued to criticize his view of the Supper late into his ministry.³⁴ In short, the origins of the Reformed wing of the Reformation may hardly be laid cleanly at Zwingli’s feet.

However wrongheaded the Central Dogma method was (and remains), there is a sense in which Schweizer was correct. Calvin (and his Reformed successors) accepted Luther’s Reformation breakthroughs achieved between 1513–21 (and beyond).³⁵ He heartily adopted Luther’s recovery of the Augustinian view of sin and sovereign grace (*sola gratia*), the doctrine of imputation, *sola fide*, the distinction between law and gospel, and Luther’s recovery of Scripture as the sole magisterial authority in the Christian faith and life (*sola Scriptura*). As both Gerrish and Selderhuis have noted, Calvin received Luther’s distinction, announced in the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation, between the *theologia gloriae* and the *theologia crucis*.³⁶ Further, as Steinmetz and others have observed, the same Calvin who criticized others freely, was loathe to criticize Luther’s theology publicly even when they obviously disagreed strongly. When he did criticize his spiritual father, it was most often in private and in reference to what he regarded as Luther’s intemperate rhetoric against the “sacramentarians” (the Reformed in and

associated with Zürich). Calvin was so devoted to Luther he described him as “a distinguished apostle of Christ” and himself as a “Lutheran.”³⁷ In 1538 He wrote to Bucer “nothing is more to be wished than that Luther should embrace us with our confession.”³⁸

Above we considered Luther’s brief remarks about Calvin. The latter’s response to that letter tells us perhaps more about his attitude toward Luther than Luther’s letter does about his attitude toward Calvin.³⁹ Writing to Farel on November 20, 1539 he positively rejoiced in Luther’s assessment of him. “Consider the ingenuity of Luther!”⁴⁰ He boasted that Philip had written that Calvin had gained “great favor with Luther and Pomeranus.”⁴¹ He lamented those who so “easily” (*facile*) sought reasons “pertinaciously” to create division between the two over the eucharist (*de eucharistia*).⁴² Some had sought to “exasperate” Luther over criticisms that Calvin had made of Luther but Luther was reportedly having none of it.⁴³ Calvin told Bucer that Luther had reportedly said, “I hope that in future [Calvin] will think better of us but it is right to bring [a report] of our good disposition toward him.”⁴⁴ Calvin confessed that he was “touched” (*fractus*) by Luther’s moderation.⁴⁵ His identification with Luther and the Lutherans was such that, despite whatever misgivings he might have had, he signed 1540 (revised) Augsburg Confession.⁴⁶

In his 1543 *Supplex exhortatio* Calvin responded to Bucer’s request to defend the Reformation to Charles V. There he identified the two principal causes of the Reformation: “that God should be worshiped properly” (*rite*) and “that men should know whence salvation is to be sought.”⁴⁷ Just above this summary of the Reformation, however, Calvin had already declared to Charles, “God raised up Luther and others in the beginning [of the Reformation].”⁴⁸ It was Luther *et al.* “who carried the torch for us toward re-discovering the way of salvation, who founded our ministry, who instituted our churches.”⁴⁹ When Calvin wrote “founded our ministry” and “instituted our churches” he was in the the second year of his second period of ministry in Geneva. He could hardly have identified the Genevan congregations and the Reformed church more closely with Luther than he did.

Nowhere was Calvin’s identification with Luther clearer than in his Latin letter of January 21, 1545 to Luther in which he expressed great admiration for Luther as not only the “most excellent pastor of the Christian church” but also “my father” (*patri mihi*) “much to be respected” (*plurimum observando*).⁵⁰ He

closed the brief letter with identical expressions, “my ever respected father” (*pater mihi semper observande*). In the body of the letter, he begged Luther for help with the Nicodemites, those who Frenchmen who had been brought from the “darkness of the papacy to the healing of faith” (*tenebris papatus ad fidei sanitatem*) but who nevertheless had changed nothing in their external profession of faith (*nihil tamen de confessione mutare*) and who continue to “pollute” (*polluere*) themselves by attending the “papist sacrileges” (*sacrilegiis papistarum* i.e., the Roman mass). Like Nicodemus, they come to Jesus late at night so as not to risk being found out. They were, Calvin wrote, “to a degree hanging in suspense (*suspensi quodammodo haesitant*) and desiring Luther’s judgment (*iudicium*), which they rightly revere (*merito reverentur*). Thus, Calvin asked Luther to read and to endorse a couple of his smaller treatises in hopes that his authority might persuade some of the Nicodemites to leave Rome altogether and unite themselves to the evangelical churches.⁵¹

When Calvin wrote this letter he was just thirty-four. Luther, however, was sixty-two, in ill health, and had just over a year to live. Further, he was in the midst of yet another fight with Swiss Reformed, whom he had come to hate. It was an inopportune time to receive this overture from Calvin, who had sent the letter by courier to Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560),⁵² Luther’s cagey and pragmatic advisor. Melanchthon pocketed it and Luther never saw it.⁵³

A PROTEGE: CALVIN’S FUNDAMENTAL DEBT TO LUTHER

Long ago Gerrish noted the absence of quotations from Luther in Calvin’s *Institutes*.⁵⁴ Those who have focused on them to the exclusion of his other treatises, commentaries, and sermons and who are not well-read in Luther tend to mistake the absence of references to Luther for a lack of dependence or influence. In fact Calvin did not make explicit reference to other sixteenth-century theologians, e.g., Zwingli, Bucer, Melanchthon, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, Viret, Farel, or Beza. Yet we know that he was influenced by some of these writers and close friends with others. There simply is no relationship between Calvin’s silence about Luther in the *Institutes* and his theological debt to him. So, we must look beneath the surface, to the substance and structure of Calvin’s theology. Traditionally the formal cause of the Reformation has been said to have been the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, i.e.,

that Scripture is *the* sole, magisterial authority for the Christian faith and the Christian life. This was the essence of Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms in April, 1521. Luther's conscience had become captive to the Word of God. We may be certain that this was what he intended since about a month before he appeared before the Emperor at Worms he wrote,

This is my answer to those also who accuse me of rejecting all the holy teachers of the church. I do not reject them. But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they have erred, as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred. This St. Paul bids me to do in I Thess. 5:21, where he says, "Test everything; hold fast what is good." St. Augustine writes to St. Jerome to the same effect, "I have learned to do only those books that are called the holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that none of their writers has ever erred. All others I so read as not to hold what they say to be the truth unless they prove it to me by holy Scripture or clear reason."⁵⁵

Luther did not reject the tradition of the church but he did, as Heiko Oberman argued, reverse the Roman order of authority.⁵⁶ The authority of church and tradition is subordinate to the Scriptures.

Holy Scripture must necessarily be clearer, simpler, and more reliable than any other writings. Especially since all teachers verify their own statements through the Scriptures as clearer and more reliable writings, and desire their own writings to be confirmed and explained by them. But nobody can ever substantiate an obscure saying by one that is more obscure; therefore, necessity forces us to run to the Bible with the writings of all teachers, and to obtain there a verdict and judgment upon them. Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men's books and human teachers.⁵⁷

In light of this and many other places in Luther we may question Oberman's judgment that Calvin and Luther had different relations to the principle of *sola scriptura*, that Calvin's (and von Bodenstein's) legal training caused them to test church teaching by "Scripture and Scripture alone." Further, he argued, "[t]his does not, however, apply to Martin Luther, at least not in

this form. The exclusive authority the Holy Scriptures was not a part of his Reformation discovery—a fact that gave rise to tensions in the sixteenth century and has caused misunderstanding to this present day.”⁵⁸

Calvin certainly thought he was following Luther on *sola scriptura*. To be sure, neither Luther nor Calvin were biblicists. They did not imagine that they were the first to read Scripture nor did either think it proper to attempt to read Scripture in insolation from the church. Both were creedal and churchly theologians. Luther wrote creedal documents, e.g., the Large and Small catechisms (1529).⁵⁹ He heartily endorsed Melancthon’s work in the *Augsburg Confession* (1530).⁶⁰ Both confessed the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. Calvin wrote two catechisms for use in Geneva and participated in the drafting of the French Confession of 1559.⁶¹ Both devoutly sought to be biblical in their theology, piety, and practice but neither was a biblicist.⁶² They were confessional pastors and theologians.

Behind their shared doctrine of *sola scriptura* was a shared distinction between *theologia crucis et gloriae*, which Luther announced in his 1518 Heidelberg Disputation. In thesis 19 he declared, “He is not worthy to be called a theologian who looks upon the ‘invisible things of God’ (Rom 1:20) as though they were clearly ‘perceptible in those things which have actually happened’ (1 Cor 1:21-25).”⁶³ The first question for Luther was who is to be considered a theologian of the cross. The second question was whether the Christian looks to grace (Christ) or to nature (law) for salvation. Luther, as Calvin, believed in natural revelation and natural law. Indeed, he identified the substance of the natural law with the Decalogue.⁶⁴ Saving knowledge, however, is found in Christ alone, in Scripture alone. This is the import of thesis 20: “But he is worthy of being called a theologian who looks upon the visible things or backside of God seen through the passions and the cross.”⁶⁵ He was, of course, alluding to Exodus 33:23 in the Vulgate, “Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”⁶⁶ For Luther, the it is the theologian of the cross (and not the medieval realists) who know what a thing really is.⁶⁷

Calvin’s frequently appealed to Luther’s doctrine of the hiddenness of God to those who are wise by nature and his surprising self-revelation in Christ, on the cross. In (1559) *Institutes* 1.5.8 he wrote about God’s hiddenness in darkness to the foolishness and made the same use of 1 Corinthians as Luther had done in 1518.⁶⁸ His account of the hiddenness of God’s providence echoes Luther’s language in *De servo arbitrio* (1525).

For since Moses proclaims that the will of God is to be sought not far off in the clouds or in abysses, because it has been set forth familiarly in the law..., it follows that he has another hidden will which may be compared to a deep abyss; concerning which Paul also says: "O depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'" And it is, indeed, true that in the law and the gospel are comprehended mysteries which tower far above the reach of our senses.⁶⁹

The tension that he established in book 1, he resolved in book 2, in Christ, whom he called the "mirror" of our election. "But if we are elect in Christ, we will not discover the certainty of our election in ourselves nor even in God the Father if we imagine him stripped (*nudum*), without the Son. For Christ is the mirror in which we may, without fraud, contemplate our election."⁷⁰ These passages and many others like it might just as well have been written by Luther.

Luther's profound influence on Calvin expressed itself in the way that Calvin structured his theology. For example, the first edition of his *Institutes* (1536) had what we might call a Lutheran structure.⁷¹ It has essentially two parts: law and gospel. As Ganoczy observed, "[ev]en the outline of the *Institutes* reveals Luther's influence. Just as Luther's *Small Catechism* treats Christian doctrine in the order of law, faith, prayer, and sacraments, the first four chapters of Calvin's compendium are entitled "Law," Faith," "Prayer," and "The Sacraments."⁷² Ganoczy notes the verbal parallels between Luther and Calvin in their expositions of what Calvin numbered the nine commandments. It seems almost certain that either he Luther's *Small Catechism* before him or else he had committed it to memory. Either way, the Luther's influence is palpable across wide swaths of Calvin's theology.⁷³ Further, it is not as if Luther (and Lutheran) influence dissipated in the following years. Richard Muller argues that the 1539 *Institutes* marked the turning point in their development. It was Melancthon's commentary on Romans (and perhaps Calvin's own sermons on Romans) that caused him to re-structure the *Institutes*.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the law/gospel structure of 1536 is still present in the editions from 1539–54.⁷⁵ One finds an expanded prolegomena in chapters 1–2. Chapter 3 begins essentially the same discussion of law as found in the 1536 edition. The discussion of vows in chapter 4 functions

as something of an appendix to chapter 3. Chapter 5 begins his discussion of faith, i.e., free salvation by *sola gratia*, *sola fide* and that is followed (in chapter 6) by his exposition of the Apostles’ Creed, which is gospel, not law. In short, the development of the *Institutes* from 1539 through 1554 did not alter or overturn this fundamental Lutheran structural commitment to distinguishing law and gospel.

The structural revisions in the final Latin edition (1559) may be analyzed in a variety of ways. *Prima facie*, the 1559 *Institutes* have a creedal structure: God the Father (book 1), God the Son (book 2), and God the Holy Spirit (books 3–4).⁷⁶ Still, the older Lutheran substructure is discernible. Book 1, “On the Knowledge of God the Creator,”⁷⁷ expanded the earlier arguments but remained essentially law. In book 2, “On the Knowledge of God the Redeemer, In Christ, Who Is First Revealed to Us Under the Law and Then Under the Gospel,”⁷⁸ the discussion had become more redemptive-historical and arguably more covenantal in character but the fundamental distinction is still present. Christ is the Savior for sinners. Book 3, “On the Means of Perceiving the Grace of Christ: The Fruit Which Comes For from It Unto Us and Who and the Effects Which Follow It,”⁷⁹ was an explanation of the application of the gospel by the Holy Spirit and of the Christian life lived in union with Christ, in light of the gospel. Book 4, “On the External Means or Aids by which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christians in which He Retains Us,”⁸⁰ located the mysterious work of the Spirit in the visible church and identified it chiefly with the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

For Luther, the distinction between law and gospel was one of the hallmarks of the Reformation. Making this “certain distinction between the law and the gospel, between commands and promises, is the highest art in Christendom.”⁸¹ For Luther, whoever fails at this is pagan or a Jew but not a Christian. Though one might not know it from some Calvin scholarship, Calvin agreed heartily with Luther on this point. We might fill the entire essay with quotations from Calvin, who sometimes spoke in terms of law and gospel and sometimes in terms of grace and works, nevertheless making substantially the same point as Luther. He was so insistent upon this distinction for the same reasons the Reformed theologian J. H. Alsted (1588–1638) would later follow Luther by saying, “the article of justification is the article of the standing of the church.”⁸² For Calvin there is a “principal axis” (*praecipuum*

cardinem) of the Christian religion: the doctrine of justification.⁸³ The editor of the *Opera selecta* notes that this language is drawn from the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession* and Melanchthon's 1535 *Loci communes*.⁸⁴

So, like Luther, in *Institutes* 3.11.17 Calvin explained the importance of making the distinction between law and gospel:

Do you see how he makes this the distinction (discrimen) between law and gospel: that the former attributes righteousness to works, the latter bestows free righteousness apart from the help of works? [Romans 10:9] is an important passage, and one that can extricate us from many difficulties if we understand that that righteousness which is given us through the gospel has been freed of all conditions of the law.⁸⁵

This was Calvin's approach throughout his Protestant ministry from the early 1530s until his death in 1564. For example, the language he used in against Rome in his *Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote* (1547).

For the words of Paul always hold true, that the difference between the law and the gospel lies in this, that the latter does not like the former promise life under the condition of works, but by faith. What can be clearer than the antithesis — “The righteousness of the law is like this: The man who does these things shall live by them.” But the righteousness which is of faith speaks thus: “Whoever believes,” etc. (Romans 10:5). To the same effect is this other passage, “If the inheritance were of the law, faith would be made void and the promise abolished. Therefore it is of faith that in respect of grace the promise might be sure to every one who believes” (Romans 4:14).⁸⁶

In his 1546 commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6–7 Calvin made this same distinction pointedly.⁸⁷ Here we must disagree with Lillback who contrasts Luther's law-gospel hermeneutic” with Calvin's alleged “Letter-Spirit distinction.”⁸⁸ He writes of a “hermeneutical divide” on this issue between Luther and Calvin.⁸⁹ Did Calvin propose a “Letter-Spirit” distinction in his 1546 commentary on 2 Corinthians?

Addressing the clause, “*Non litterae, sed Spiritus*” Calvin wrote, “He now pursues a comparison between Law and Gospel.”⁹⁰ We should not overlook the obvious. To begin explain what Paul means by “Letter” and “Spirit” the

first category Calvin invoked was “Law and Gospel.” Is it plausible to think that Calvin, who had structured his *Institutio* along the lines established by Luther’s distinction and Melancthon’s 1521 *Loci Communes*, who would articulate the distinction in 1547 against Trent, who would express and appeal to the distinction repeatedly in his *Institutio*, was here articulating a principle *in opposition* to Luther’s? If so, he was uncharacteristically unclear since no reader in the second half of the 1540s would expect Calvin to use Luther’s language to articulate a radically different approach.

It is true sometimes when Calvin wrote “law and gospel,” he was writing about the history of redemption and sometimes about law and gospel as distinct principles. Here, however, he used the expression in both senses, “At any rate, there is now doubt that by ‘letter’ he understands the Old Testament and by ‘Spirit’ nominally the gospel.”⁹¹ He criticized Origen’s understanding of letter as the superficial sense of the text and spirit as the figurative sense of the text. He explained that the embedded in the contrast between letter and Spirit is a contrast between Moses and Christ as in John 1:17. The question was not whether grace was active under Moses but rather that of office. For Calvin, the same saving grace operating under the New Covenant was active under Moses but Jeremiah’s (Jer 31:31–34) and Paul’s contrast between Moses and Christ “suffices” (*sufficit*) to show that grace “was not a proper benefit of the Law.”⁹² Moses’ peculiar office was to have “handed over a doctrine of life” with added “warnings and promises.”⁹³ Its ministry is death-dealing.⁹⁴ By contrast, “the preaching of the Gospel, because it is living, therefore its ministry is life-giving.”⁹⁵ Calvin was arguing that Paul’s *historical* contrast between Moses and the New Covenant contained within it a *theological* contrast between two distinct principles: that of salvation on the basis of personal obedience to the law and that of salvation *sola gratia, sola fide*.

He recognized that there are layers of nuance to be added to his explanation, e.g., the distinction is not made “*simpliciter*,”⁹⁶ because the external preaching of the gospel is not always “Spirit,” i.e., not good news to all. Not all who hear the good news are elect. Not all who hear are regenerated by the Spirit.⁹⁷ When, however, law and gospel are compared “the nature of the law is literally said to be to teach men such that it reaches no farther than the ear. The nature of the gospel, however, is to teach spiritually because it is the instrument of the grace of Christ.”⁹⁸ Again, Calvin here distinguished *theologically* between law

and gospel as two distinct principles, with two distinct offices.

We may be confident this is what Calvin was arguing because he said so under his explanation of vs.7: “The Gospel therefore is a holy and inviolable covenant, because it was struck by the Spirit of God as the surety. Hence it follows that the Law was a ministry of condemnation and death.”⁹⁹ Like his successors who followed him, Calvin was beginning to cast redemptive history in covenantal terms, not so as to overturn Luther, but to elaborate on his basic insight and to establish it. This is the very same doctrine that Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83) articulated in his *Summa theologiae* Q. 36, where he correlated the law to the prelapsarian covenant of works and the gospel to the postlapsarian covenant of grace.¹⁰⁰

Calvin’s approach to the doctrine of justification was indistinguishable from Luther’s and intentionally so. Luther’s 1545 recollection, in the preface to his Latin works, is perhaps the most famous account of his breakthrough on justification, when he realized that it was not “active justice,” i.e., by grace and cooperation with grace or by progressive sanctification that we stand before God but on the basis “passive justification,” i.e., the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us received through apprehending faith.

There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.¹⁰¹

Calvin followed Luther step for step on justification so that in his 1548 commentary on Galatians 5:6, he wrote, “Therefore when you turn to the case of justification, beware lest you admit any mention of love or of works, but hold fast tenaciously to the exclusive particle.”¹⁰² That exclusive particle, of course, was *sola*. The contrast he was making was with the Roman doctrine

of *fides formata caritate*.¹⁰³ For Calvin, as for Luther, faith justifies the sinner not because it sanctifies but because it apprehends Christ’s righteousness.

His account of justification in his 1540 commentary on Romans chapter 4 confirms his debt to Luther. The exposition of the chapter returned repeatedly to the agreed Protestant understanding of justification and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.¹⁰⁴ In the 1559 *Institutio*, his account of justification was substantially Luther’s. He began 3.11.1 by again distinguishing between the sinner’s state of condemnation under the curse of the law (*Lege maledictis*) and “one sole help of recovering salvation, by faith.”¹⁰⁵ Salvation entails a *duplex gratia*: justification *sola gratia, sola fide* and renovation in the image of God (sanctification) as a fruit (*fructus*).¹⁰⁶ His definition of justification was Luther’s: “One is said to be justified with God who is reckoned just in the judgment of God, who is accepted on account of [Christ’s] righteousness.”¹⁰⁷

Luther’s account of election and reprobation was deeply influential among the Reformed, Calvin included.¹⁰⁸ At the Colloquy of Montbéliard (1580), between the Lutheran and Reformed, when the topic turned to predestination (election and reprobation), Theodore Beza (1519–1605) argued at length from Luther’s *De servo* (1525) that the Reformed held Luther’s view in contradistinction to Jakob Andrae *et al.*¹⁰⁹ Beza’s view in 1580 was no different from the view he had articulated in the 1550s when he defended Calvin against his critics, e.g., Jerome Bolsec.¹¹⁰ Calvin’s treatment both in his *Institutio* and in his earlier *Defensio...doctrinae de servitute...humani aribitrii* (1543) echoed Luther.¹¹¹ Indeed, the title of the latter work not only echoed Luther’s *De servo* but Calvin wrote it to defend Luther’s doctrine of predestination, which Albert Pigghe (c. 1490–1542), a Roman theologian had criticized the year previous.¹¹² The nature and structure of the *Institutes* differs from Luther’s point-by-point refutation of Erasmus but the substantial similarity between Calvin and Luther on the hiddenness of God’s decree, on its revelation in Christ, and on the comfort that unconditional election gives to the believer should not be missed.¹¹³

Even when Calvin disagreed with Luther substantively, as he arguably did on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, he rarely mentioned it. It is difficult to find Calvin criticizing Luther’s doctrine of baptism. To be sure, there are ambiguities in Luther’s doctrine of baptism that were flattened in Lutheran orthodoxy.¹¹⁴ It is unclear to me whether, in his *Small Catechism* (1529) Luther taught baptismal regeneration. Calvin was clear, however, in his

rejection of baptismal regeneration in the second (1545) *Genevan Catechism*.¹¹⁵ If one compares Luther's *Small Catechism* (taken on its own terms and not as interpreted in the much later *Book of Concord*) with the *Genevan Catechism*, there are differences but they are not vast. Lutheran orthodoxy may be correct that, for Luther, the Gospel is so identified with the sacrament that it necessarily gives what it signifies, i.e., new life but just where Luther might have made that teaching explicit he seemed to draw back. Yet Calvin was comfortable saying that in baptism "we are clothed with Jesus Christ and receive his Spirit, provided that we do not make ourselves unworthy of the promises given to us in it."¹¹⁶ This is just as strong as anything Luther taught in his *Small Catechism*. Yet, Calvin was perhaps more explicit about the role of faith in apprehending Christ and his benefits, that upon regeneration and faith, baptism seals what faith has received.¹¹⁷ Even where Calvin did disagree with Luther, e.g., on the Supper (more on this below) he was at pains to say that he wanted what Luther wanted, namely to say that, in the Supper, believers are fed with the body and blood of Christ. Obviously, he disagreed with Luther regarding *how* that happens and why but he was with him on the *what*.¹¹⁸

A PROTESTANT: CALVIN'S DISSENT FROM LUTHER

In his January 12, 1538 letter to Bucer, almost as soon as Calvin expressed his heartfelt desire that Luther should accept the Reformed and their confession (see above) as fundamentally with Luther, he expressed perplexity about Luther. "What I should think about Luther I do not know. I am quite persuaded of his piety."¹¹⁹ He explained to Bucer that he believed what he was reading and hearing from mutual friends, that Luther's "constancy is mixed with stubbornness."¹²⁰ He excoriated his spiritual father's partisan "appetite for victory" over the Swiss Reformed as distinct from "coalescing sincerely in agreement around the pure truth of God."¹²¹

In his letter to Farel on October 10, 1544 it takes little sensitivity to perceive the degree to which Calvin was frustrated with what he perceived to be Luther's overheated rhetoric toward and impatience with the Zürichers. He could not see what the Swiss had said that had so "inflamed" (*inflammatu*s) Luther.¹²² Considering the fruitfulness of a potential trip to Zürich, which Farel was urging upon him in order to try to pacify the two sides, Calvin had

concluded that the trip would produce little since the problem lay not with Zürich but with Luther.¹²³ He wondered to Farel what concessions would have to be extorted (*extorquebitur*) from the Swiss to pacify Luther.¹²⁴

In a letter in November 1544, Calvin expressed to Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75) his sympathy at the “atrocious invective” (*atroci invectiva*) with which Luther had “broken out” (*prorupisse*) against “us all” (*in nos omnes*).¹²⁵ Despite the injustice of the things that were being said against Bullinger, Calvin begged him to remain silent against Luther because of “how great a man Luther is and how excellent his talents, his fortitude and constancy of intellect (*animi*), his readiness, the extent of the efficacy of his teaching toward overthrowing the reign of the Antichrist [i.e., the Papacy] while simultaneously zealously spreading the doctrine of salvation.”¹²⁶ Remember, Calvin wrote this letter (and others like it) *before* writing his January 1545 letter to Luther. Apparently Calvin was much concerned Luther’s about wrath. In the same month, he mentioned it again, perhaps after Melanchthon pocketed his letter to Luther, writing that it was not a good time “for consulting Luther because his spirit had barely settled from the fervor of contention.”¹²⁷ In June he wrote to Melanchthon to complain at some length about Luther’s intemperance and even of Luther’s tyranny and pleading with Philipp to speak to Luther about it for the sake of the Reformation. Referring to Luther as “your Pericles” (a reference to Luther’s “unchallenged ascendancy”—to use Margaret Howatson’s description of Pericles’ power and influence.¹²⁸ “How intemperately is your Pericles carried away in his fulminating, especially when his case is no better [than that of the Zürichers]. And what is accomplished by means of such commotion, lest the whole world judge him to be mad? Certainly I venerate him from the heart (*ex animo*), but by this he is greatly shamed.”¹²⁹

Sometimes the issue for Calvin was not Luther as much as the way Luther was regarded by some of his followers.¹³⁰ Indeed, writing to Bullinger in January 1549, presumably in connection to the drafting of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (The Zürich Agreement), which was published in May 1549 he declared, “If you love a free profession of the truth, there never was in my spirit a desire to change what I wrote. If there are others who flatter Luther, I am not among their number.”¹³¹ It is true that Calvin had been criticizing Luther’s vehemence against the Zürichers but the tone of his 1545 letter to Luther might be fairly characterized as fawning. The tenor of his criticism of

Luther's tone was one but that of his public interaction with Luther another. To Martin Sidemann, in March 1555, he expressed frustration and compared the vehemence of Luther's followers (e.g., Joachom Westphal) unfavorably with Luther's own heated rhetoric. "Would that Luther were still living. For however much always his vehemence was excessive in the case of the Sacramentarian incident (*actio*), it is nothing compared to their intemperance or madness." ¹³² "If they persist," he wrote, as "implacable" (*implacibiles*) they will drive all the those with restraint (*modestos*) to side with Calvin and company.¹³³ The reality was, as he saw it, that the Lutheran *epigoni* "offer themselves with clamoring as Luther's genuine disciples but they have none of his virtues."¹³⁴

He also dissented from Luther's method of biblical exposition. Specifically, he criticized him for not paying sufficient attention to the grammar and to the redemptive-historical context of the text at hand, for rushing too quickly to the theology of the text.¹³⁵ This criticism reveals perhaps a sub-structural difference between Luther and Calvin. Both were pre-modern, i.e., that made pre-modern assumptions about the nature of things (given) and about the source of authority (extrinsic) but Luther was a trained medieval theologian.¹³⁶ Calvin was a trained humanist.¹³⁷ As such he was *relatively* more interested in the original context of a passage, its place in redemptive history, and in the intent of the human author its original intent and Luther was *relatively* more interested in what the medievals would have called the doctrinal sense of the biblical text.

Calvin was also jealous to defend his liberty to dissent from Luther when interpreting Scripture. To Francis Burkhard (February 27, 1555), Secretary to the Elector Saxony,¹³⁸ he defended his right as an interpreter to disagree with Luther. "Now another charge against me remains, that I do not everywhere subscribe the interpretations of Luther. If it is no longer permitted for each interpreter to bring forward his view, how far into servitude have we fallen? Wherefore, if it is not permitted to dissent anywhere from the opinion of Luther, you would suppose the office of interpreter to be absurd and ridiculous."¹³⁹

He did genuinely disagree with Luther over the implications of what the Reformed numbered as the second commandment, particularly over what, in his response to Sadoleto, he called, the "rule of worship."¹⁴⁰ He criticized Bucer for defending "Luther's ceremonies."¹⁴¹ For Calvin, Luther organized worship services on a different (and false) principle, namely

whatever is not forbidden is permitted. For Calvin, the rule is that the church may do in worship only what is commanded. Nevertheless, despite his passionate commitment to pure worship, he was not willing to separate from Luther over it.¹⁴²

The two greatest areas of disagreement were closely related: Christology and the Lord’s Supper. In an undated letter to Bucer he complained, as he asked rhetorically, “What is that adorable Sacrament of Luther, unless it is an idol in the temple of God?”¹⁴³ The larger context of the letter suggests that the topic under consideration was the nature of the presence of Christ in the Supper and behind that the question of the ubiquity of Christ’s humanity. Calvin chastised Bucer for overlooking Brenz’ view that at the moment of the incarnation Christ’s humanity became ubiquitous.¹⁴⁴ He remonstrated with Bucer for soft-pedaling the Reformed conviction that Christ’s true humanity is at the right hand of the Father (and not ubiquitous).

Calvin had already carved out some distance between his view of the Supper (and thus his Christology) and Luther’s in his 1541 *Traicté de la Sainte Cene*.¹⁴⁵ There he mentioned the failure of the two sides to reach an understanding but he simultaneously criticized Luther’s language about the Supper (namely his complete identification of the bread with the body of Christ) and excused it to some degree.¹⁴⁶

Thus, in his dispute with Joachim Westphal (1510–74), whom W. Robert Godfrey characterizes as a “hyper-Lutheran,”¹⁴⁷ Calvin had two great tasks: first to justify his claim to being Luther’s faithful theological son while dissenting from the developing Lutheran orthodoxy and second to vindicate his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. Calvin’s cooperation with Bullinger and Zürich in the 1549 *Consensus Tigurinus* was, to Westphal and Tilemann Heshusen (1527–88), the unforgivable sin.¹⁴⁸ The *Consensus* doomed Calvin to status of sacramentarian in the eyes of Lutheran orthodoxy. In his *Second Defense* (1556) he wrote:

For when I began to emerge from the darkness of the papacy, after receiving a slight taste of sound doctrine, I read in Luther that, according to Oecolampadius and Zwingli there remains nothing in the sacraments but beyond bare and empty figures. Thus, I confess, I was so alienated from their books that I long abstained from reading them.¹⁴⁹

Here we have both a confirmation of Luther's early influence on Calvin and an implicit complaint that Luther had, to some degree, mislead him about two Reformed writers. Against Hesshusen Calvin aligned himself with Melancthon as a fellow student of Luther in distinction from Hesshusen who merely and stupidly aped Luther.¹⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

Calvin wrote response after response to the likes of Westphal *et al.* because he valued genuine ecumenicity and communion and believed sincerely that he was not a pretender, a "subtle sacramentarian" but Luther's loyal, theological son. Luther's influence on Calvin was architectonic. It shaped the questions Calvin asked, the categories he adopted, and the conclusions he reached. It was not necessary for Calvin to quote Luther endlessly because he saw himself preaching the same gospel, doing the same work, to the same ends. In this respect, then the Lutheran orthodox picture of Calvin as Zwinglian is unfounded. Calvin read Zwingli late in life and though, under Bullinger's influence, he may have come to read him more sympathetically than Luther had (who, after all agreed on fourteen of the fifteen points with Zwingli at Marburg), he never identified with Zwingli nor did Zwingli shape his thought. Melancthon and Bucer may be said to have had a strong influence on Calvin. Indeed Melancthon's influence on Calvin remains relatively under explored but neither of them had the fundamental influence on him that Luther did. Those interpreters of Calvin, whether from confessional Lutheranism or from confessional Reformed circles, who fail to grasp the breadth and depth of Calvin's debt to Luther will continue to misunderstand his theology, piety, and practice.

¹ The historical account relies on Wulfert De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin, Expanded Edition. An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 93-94 and upon B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 29.

² See *Opera Calvini* (hereafter CO) 32.240-41 in C. G. Bretschneider, ed., *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1834), 60.240-41.

³ So DeGreef, *ibid.*, 93.

⁴ Gerrish, *ibid.*, 28. For an account of the role that hostility toward Calvin played in the formation of the confessional Lutheran self-identity in the USA see R. Scott Clark, "Calvin: a Negative Boundary Marker in the Self-identity of American Lutherans 1871-1934," In *Sober, Strict, and Scriptural: Collective Memories of*

- John Calvin, 1800–2000* (ed. Herman Paul Johan de Niet, and Bart Wallet; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 245–66.
- 5 Gerrish, *ibid.*, surveys the European and Anglo-American literature to 1982. This essay will address the literature since that time that speaks to the relations between Luther and Calvin.
 - 6 Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. H. Böhlau, 1883–), Br 8, 569. Hereafter, WA; Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 50.190. Hereafter, LW.
 - 7 CO 5.385–416. See also Sadoletto’s letter and Calvin’s reply in John Calvin, *Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 1.1–69. All the other references to Calvin in the LW are supplied by the editors.
 - 8 LW 38.11.
 - 9 In sixteenth-century rhetoric, a “sacramentarian” was essentially one who held the putative Zwinglian view of the Lord’s Supper, that it is merely a memorial of Lord and not actually a Supper wherein one is fed by Christ’s body and blood. The Calvinists, however, professed to eat the “true” (Calvin) and “proper and natural” (Belgic Confession art. 35) body and blood of Christ by faith, through the mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit. See Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 482. In the more recent translation, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 504, the Zwinglians are denominated “crude sacramentarians” and the Calvinists as “cunning sacramentarians.”
 - 10 See also Clark, “Negative Boundary Marker.”
 - 11 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 272–73, n. 125.
 - 12 Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History* (rev. edition, trans. James Murdock; ed. J. S. Reid; London and Belfast: 1848), 659.
 - 13 *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (ed. Robert Benedetto and James O. Duke; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), s.v., “Zwingli, Huldrych.”
 - 14 “Ubinam Ecclesia nostra fuerit ante Lutheram et Zuingliam, et quibus mediis sit conservata?” Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae...*, 3 vols. (Geneva, 1687–90), 18.10.1
 - 15 See Alexander Schweizer, *Die Protestantischen Centraldogmen...*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Orell und Füssli, 1856), 1.5–47, 356–73; *idem*, *Die Glaubenslehre der Evangelisch-Reformirten Kirche...*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Orell und Füssli, 1844–47), 1.40–59, 65–79. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1.62, 124–32.
 - 16 B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 356–58.
 - 17 Charles Partee, “Calvin’s Central Dogma Again.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 191–99.
 - 18 Thomas L. Wenger, “The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretations” *JETS* 50 (2007): 311–28.
 - 19 Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition on the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 202–43; J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union With Christ in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).
 - 20 Edward A. Dowey, “Law in Luther and Calvin” *Theology Today* 41 (1984): 146–53.
 - 21 Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 71.
 - 22 Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* (trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 137–45.
 - 23 David C. Steinmetz, *Steinmetz, Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 172.
 - 24 Marcus Johnson, “Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ,” *Fides et Historia* 39 (2007): 59–77.
 - 25 Machiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin* (trans., Reinder Bruinsma; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 22–24.
 - 26 See B. A. Gerrish, “‘To the Unknown,’ Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God,” in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin’s Theology of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 39–42, 52–53, 101.
 - 27 R. Ward Holder, ed. *Calvin and Luther: the Continuing Relationship* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 7.
 - 28 R. Scott Clark, “Law and Gospel in Early Reformed Orthodoxy,” In *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of the Theological Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 307–20. See also the survey of the secondary literature in *ibid.*, 309–11.

- ²⁹ Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).
- ³⁰ See CO 9.52. Zébédée would later become a violent critic of Calvin, siding with Bolsec against Calvin in 1554. See Michael W. Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays De Vaud, 1528–1559* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 218. Bruce Gordon describes Zébédée as an “ardent Zwinglian.” See *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 170.
- ³¹ CO 10.346. See also Jules Bonnet ed., *Letters of John Calvin*, trans. D. Constable and M. R. Gilchrist, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 4.402–04 (hereafter, Calvin, *Letters*).
- ³² CO 10.345. “de corporis et sanguinis Domini participatione, quam fideles in coena recipiunt”
- ³³ This absence, of course, as noted below, is not conclusive but the apparatus in the Battles edition of the *Institutes* may tend to create a false impression of the theological relationship between Zwingli and Calvin.
- ³⁴ *Institutes* 4.17.5 arguably refers to and rejects Zwingli’s view of the Supper. In his 1561 sermons on 1 Samuel he explicitly rejected the idea that the Lord’s Supper is a “mere sign.” See *Supplementa Calviniana*, 1.137.5–8; Heiko A. Oberman, “The ‘Extra’ Dimension in the Theology of Calvin,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 50.
- ³⁵ For an account of Luther’s theological development see R. Scott Clark, “Iustitia Imputata: Alien Or Proper to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (2007): 269–310.
- ³⁶ See e.g., WA 1.354.
- ³⁷ CO 6.250. John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will. A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice Against Pighius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 28.
- ³⁸ CO 10.137. “Si potest Lutherus cum nostra confessione nos amplecti, nihil est quod libentius velim.”
- ³⁹ CO 10.429–32.
- ⁴⁰ CO 10.432. “Cogita Lutheri ingenuitatem.”
- ⁴¹ CO 10.432. “Philippus autem ita scribebat: Lutherus et Pomerahus Calvinum et Sturmium iusserunt salutari. Calvinus magnam gratiam iniit.”
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, “Facile erit statuere quid causae habeant qui tam pertinaciter ab eo dissident.”
- ⁴³ CO 10.432.
- ⁴⁴ CO 10.432. “Spero quidem ipsum olim de nobis melius sensurum, sed aequum est a bono ingenio nos aliquid ferre.”
- ⁴⁵ CO 10.432.
- ⁴⁶ It has long been an article of faith among confessional Lutherans that Calvin signed the *Augustana Invariata*, i.e., the original text 1530 of the Augsburg. E.g., see Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia, 1875), 180, 756. The *Invariata* confesses in art. 10 that in the Supper Christ is “truly present” (vere adsint) whereas Melancthon had revised the article 10 in the *Variata* (1540) to read “truly exhibited” (vere exhibeantur). See Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3. It is historically unlikely, however, that Calvin would have had access to the *Invariata*. The *Variata* functioned for decades as the *de facto* text of the *Augustana*. The Lutheran conviction that Calvin must have signed the *Invariata*, rather than signaling Calvin’s unity with Luther, instead serves only to reinforce their conviction that he is a “subtle sacramentarian,” i.e., a Zwinglian who pretends to be closer to Luther than he really is.
- ⁴⁷ CO 6.459. “ut rite colatur Deus, ut unde salus sibi petenda sit, noverint homines.” For more on the first of these two causes see Clark, “Calvin’s Principle of Worship.”
- ⁴⁸ CO 6.459. “...Deus initio Lutherum et alios excitavit...”
- ⁴⁹ CO 6.459. “qui nobis facem ad reperendam salutis viam praetulerunt, et quorum ministerio fundatae sunt et institutae nostrae ecclesiae...”
- ⁵⁰ CO 12.6–8. See also Jules Bonnet ed., *Letters of John Calvin* (trans. D. Constable and M. R. Gilchrist, 4 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 1.440–42. Pace Holder, Calvin wrote in 1545, not 1542. See Holder, ed., *Calvin and Luther*, 7.
- ⁵¹ E.g., *Petit traicté, monstrant que c’est que doit faire un home fidele...entre les papistes...Comment...Jésus Christ es la fin de la loy...* translated as *A Short Treatise Setting Forth What the Faithful Man Must Do When He is Among the Papists and Knows the Truth of the Gospel* (1543) in John Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them: Anti-nicodemite Writings of John Calvin* (trans. Seth Skolnitsky; Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 45–95. For background on the Nicodemite crisis see Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: the Reformation of Worship From Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 234–75.
- ⁵² Calvin attached a remarkably blunt letter (CO 12.9–12) to Melancthon—evidently it trusted Melancthon implicitly not to show the cover letter to Luther—in which he expressed worry about Luther’s temper and

- commits the disposition of his letter to Luther Melancthon’s care and judgment.
- ⁵³ Gordon, *Calvin*, 169–70.
- ⁵⁴ Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and The New*, 27.
- ⁵⁵ *LW* 32.10.
- ⁵⁶ Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 283–85. See also R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Tradition: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 8–17; Michael S. Horton, “Reformed and Always Reforming” in *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey* (ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim; Escondido: Westminster Seminary California), 116–34.
- ⁵⁷ *LW*, 32.11–12.
- ⁵⁸ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 223.
- ⁵⁹ See e.g., Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.74–92; Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 358–460.
- ⁶⁰ Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.3–73.
- ⁶¹ *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English translation* (ed. James T. Dennison, 4 vol.; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–14), 1.353–392, 1.467–519; Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.356–82.
- ⁶² For the sense in which I am using this term see Clark, *Recovering*, 19–25.
- ⁶³ WA 1.354. “19. Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspici.”
- ⁶⁴ See R. Scott Clark, “Calvin and the *Lex Naturalis*,” *Stulus Theological Journal* 6 (1998): 10–12.
- ⁶⁵ WA 1.354. “20. Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit.”
- ⁶⁶ Robert Webber, ed. *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969): “tollamque manum meam et videbis posteriora mea faciem autem meam videre non poteris.”
- ⁶⁷ WA 1.354., “21. Theologus gloriae dicit malum bonum et bonum malum, Theologus [22] crucis dicit id quod res est.”
- ⁶⁸ OS 3.52.323.53.2–5. “Nihilo magis aut potentia, aut sapientia in tenebris latent.... Sapientia vero ipsa manifeste excellit dum optima unamquamque rem opportunitate dispensat: quamlibet mundi perspicaciam confundit, deprehendit astutos in astutia sua: nihil denique non optima ratione attemperat.” See also *Institutio* 1.17.1.
- ⁶⁹ *Institutes*, 1.17.2.
- ⁷⁰ OS 4.415.30–416.3. “Quod si in eo sumus electi, non in nobis ipsis reperiemus electionis nostrae certitudinem: ac ne in Deo quidem Patre, si nudum illum absque Filio imaginamur. Christus ergo speculum est in quo electionem nostram contemplari convenit, et sine fraude licet.”
- ⁷¹ See Joannis Calvini, *Opera selecta* (ed. P. Barth; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926–62), 1.20 (hereafter OS); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).
- ⁷² Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 137.
- ⁷³ Ganoczy traces out these connections. See *ibid.*, 138–45.
- ⁷⁴ Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125–27.
- ⁷⁵ CO 1.279–1152.
- ⁷⁶ On this see R. Scott Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 77–91.
- ⁷⁷ OS 3. 31; *Institutio* 1.1.1.
- ⁷⁸ OS 3.228; *Institutio* 2.1.1.
- ⁷⁹ OS 4.1; *Institutio*, 3.1.1.
- ⁸⁰ OS 5.1; *Institutio* 4.1.1.
- ⁸¹ WA, 36:9, lines 9, 28–29. See also Martin Luther, “The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel: A Sermon By Martin Luther January 1, 1532,” *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 153–63; Clark, “Law and Gospel in Early Reformed Orthodoxy,” 307–08.
- ⁸² J. H. Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica* (Hanover, 1618), 711. “...articulus iustificationis dicitur articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.”
- ⁸³ OS 4.182.15; *Institutio* 3.11.1.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 7.
- ⁸⁵ *Institutes* 3.11.17 modified from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). See also *Institutes* 2.5.12; 2.7.3, 7, 14; 2.9.4; 2.11.7, 9; 3.11. 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19; 3.14.10; 3.15.1; 3.17.1; 3.18.19; 3.19.1, 2, 4; 4.13.6, 13.

- ⁸⁶ Translation revised from John Calvin, *Tracts*, 3.156; CO 7.480. “Stat enim semper illud Pauli, in eo differre a lege evangelium, quia non sub conditione operum, sicut illa, sed ex fide vitam promittat. Quid enim illa antithesi clarius: Legis iustitia talis est: qui fecerit haec, vivet in ipsis: at quae ex fide est iustitia, sic habet: qui crediderit, etc. (Rom. 10, 5). Eodem et alter ille locus spectat: Si ex lege esset haereditas, exinanita esset fides, et abolita promissio. Ergo ex fide est, ut secundum gratiam firma sit promissio omni credenti (Rom. 4, 14).”
- ⁸⁷ Jean Calvin, *Jean, Commentarii in Secundam Pauli Epistolam ad Corinthios*, ed. Helmut Feld (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1994), 53.6–58.30.
- ⁸⁸ Lillback, *Binding*, 154. See *ibid.*, 70–80, 153–55, 186–89, 192–93, 207.
- ⁸⁹ Lillback, *ibid.*, 125.
- ⁹⁰ *In secundum ad corinthios*, 53.14.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.7–9. “Caeterum non dubium est, quin per litteram Vetus testamentum intelligat, sicuti Euangelium Spiritus nomine.”
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 55.7–8. “...quod non fuerit proprium Legis beneficium.”
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 55.9. “quum vitae doctrinam tradidisset, additis minis et promissionibus.”
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.10. “quia per se mortua sit praedicatio...”
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.11–12. “Euangelium ver Spiritum, quia vivax sit, imo vivificum eius ministerium.”
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.13.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.20–34.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.14–17. “Sed ubi ad collationem utriusque venit, vere et congruenter dicitur Legis naturam esse literaliter docere homines, ita ut ultra aures non peneret; Euangelii autem naturam esse spiritualiter docere, quia gratiae Christia sit instrumentum.”
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.40–42. “Euangelium ergo foedus est sanctum et inviolabile, qui percussum Spiritu Dei sponse. Hinc quoque sequitur Legem ministerium fuisse damnationis et mortis.”
- ¹⁰⁰ Zacharias Ursinus, *Catechesis, summa theologiae...* in *D. Zachariae ursini...opera theologica*, ed. Q. Reuter, 3 vols. (Heidelberg, 1612), 1.14. See the English translation in Lyle D. Bierma, Charles D. Gunnoe, Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields eds., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 168–69.
- ¹⁰¹ LW 34.337. For more on this see Clark, *Iustitia Imputata*, 291–306.
- ¹⁰² Jean Calvin, *Commentarii in Pauli epistolas ad Galatas, ad Ephesios, ad Philippenses, ad Colossenses*, ed. Helmut Feld (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992), 120.11–13. “Ergo quum versaris in causa iustificationis, cave ullum charitatis vel operum mentionem admittas, sed mordicus retine particulam exclusivam.”
- ¹⁰³ See *ibid.*, 119.18–121.6.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ioannis Calvini, *Commentarius in epistolam pauli ad romanos*. Ed. T. H. L. Parker et al. *Opera Omnia Series II, Opera Exegetica*, vol. XIII (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999), 79–100.
- ¹⁰⁵ OS 4.181.35–182.1. *Institutio* 3.11.1.
- ¹⁰⁶ On this theme in Calvin see Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The “Twofold Grace of God” and the Interpretation of Calvin’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). See also Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant*, idem, “The Benefits of Christ: Double Justification in Protestant Theology Before the Westminster Assembly,” Anthony T. Selvaaggio, ed., *The Faith Once Delivered: Celebrating the Legacy of Reformed Systematic Theology and the Westminster Assembly. Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne Spear*. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007), 107–34.
- ¹⁰⁷ OS 4.182.24–27. “Iustificari coram Deo dicitur, qui iudicio Dei et censetur iustus, et acceptus est ob suam iustitiam.”
- ¹⁰⁸ For Luther’s *De servo arbitrio* see WA 18.600–787; LW 33.
- ¹⁰⁹ See Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbéliard: Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207–10.
- ¹¹⁰ See Richard Muller, “The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza’s *Tabula Praedestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 33–61.
- ¹¹¹ CO 6.225–405. *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias alberti pighii campensis* (Geneva, 1543); John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (trans. G. I. Davies; ed. A. N. S. Lane; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).
- ¹¹² Wulfert De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin, Expanded Edition. An Introductory Guide* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 144–46.
- ¹¹³ OS 4.410–32. *Institutio* 3.24.1–17.

- ¹¹⁴ Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord*, 349.
- ¹¹⁵ *Reformed Confessions*, 1.513. See Questions 327–30. See also his explicit renunciation of it in *Institutio* 4.15.10.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Q. 331.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.
- ¹¹⁸ See e.g., his 1541 *Traicté de la Sainte Cene* and his discussion of the Supper in *Institutio* 4.17.1–11.
- ¹¹⁹ CO 10.138. "Quid de Luthero cogitem nescio, quanquamde eius pietate optime sim persuasus." *Letters*, 4.384.
- ¹²⁰ CO 10.138. "eius constantiae nonnihil pertinaciae admixtum."
- ¹²¹ CO 10.138. "victoriae...appetit..." "nunquam poterit sincera in puram Dei veritatem concordia coalescere."
- ¹²² CO 11.755.
- ¹²³ CO 11.755. "Non enim iam ab ipsis est periculum, sed a Luthero."
- ¹²⁴ CO 11.755. "Mitigandus ille foret. An hoc extorquebitur a Tigurinis ut suppliciter Lutherum deprecentur Caveri multo ante oportuit ne camarinam moverent."
- ¹²⁵ CO 11.774.
- ¹²⁶ CO 11.774. "Sed haec cupio vobis in mentem venire: primum quantus sit vir Lutherus, et quantis dotibus excellat, quanta animi fortitudine et constantia, quanta dexteritate, quanta doctrinae efficacia hactenus ad profligandum Antichristi regnum et simul propagandam salutis doctrinam incubuerit."
- ¹²⁷ CO 12.26. "tempus consulendi Lutheri esse adhuc alienum, quia animus vixdum bene a contentionis fervore resedisset."
- ¹²⁸ M. C. Howatson, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v., "Pericles."
- ¹²⁹ CO 12.99. "Vester autem Pericles quanta intemperie ad Mminandum rapitur? praesertim quum eius causa nihilo sit melior. Et quid in hunc modum tumultuando proficit, nisi ut totus mundus eum furere iudicet? Me certe, qui eum ex animo veneror, vehementer ipsius pudet."
- ¹³⁰ On Luther's status among confessional Lutherans in the period see Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).
- ¹³¹ CO 13.165. "Si liberam veritatis professionem amas, nunquam mihi in animo fuit quae scripsi ad hominum gratiam inflectere. Si qui Luthero vel aliis blanditi sunt, non sum ex eorum numero."
- ¹³² CO 15.501. "Utinam hodie viveret Lutherus. Quamvis enim semper modum excesserit eius vehementia in causae sacramentariae actione, nihil tamen ad horum intemperiem ac vesaniam."
- ¹³³ CO 15.502.
- ¹³⁴ CO 15.502. "scilicet quum nullam prorsus teneant ex Lutheri virtutibus, clamitando se venditant pro genuinis eius discipulis."
- ¹³⁵ CO 11.36. "Lutherus non adeo anxius de verborum proprietate aut historiae circumstantia satis habet fructiferam aliquam doctrinam elicere."
- ¹³⁶ See David V. Bagchi, "Sic et Non: Luther and Scholasticism" in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 3–15.
- ¹³⁷ See e.g., Q. Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931); Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant*, 39–58.
- ¹³⁸ So Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 99.
- ¹³⁹ CO 15.454. "Restat iam alterum crimen, quod nonubique Lutheri interpretationibus subscribam. Verum si iam cuique interpreti non licebit de singulis scripturae locis quod sentit in medium proferre, quorsum servitutis recidimus? Imo, si mihi usquam a Lutheri sententia discedere non licuit, munus interpretandi suscipere absurdum fuit ac ridiculum. Hoc modo videndum erat, an cupide accersam diversos sensus, an proterve exagitem, an odiose perstringam, an contumeliose insecter."
- ¹⁴⁰ CO 5.392. "Denique, modis omnibus assuefacimus, ut una colendi Dei regula contenti, quam ex illius ore habent, commentitios omnes cultus valere iubeant."
- ¹⁴¹ CO 10.341. "Quod Bucerus porro defendit Lutheri caeremonias..."
- ¹⁴² CO 10.341. "Tantum non patitur, ut ob externas illas observatiunculas a Luthero disiungamur. Nec sane iustas esse puto dissidii causas." On Calvin's rule of worship see R. Scott Clark, "Calvin's Principle of Worship," in *Tributes to John Calvin: a Celebration of His Quincentenary* (ed. David Hall; Philipsburg: P&R, 2010), 247–69.
- ¹⁴³ John Calvin, *Ioannis calvini epistolae et responsa* (Amsterdam: Schipper, 1671), 49b. "Quorsum enim illud Lutheri adorabile Sacramentum, nisi ut idolum in templo Dei erigatur?" D. Constable, the English translator of volume 2 of the Bonnet edition of Calvin's letters, suggests a February, 1549 date for the letter. *Letters*, 2.220. If this date is correct, and some of Calvin's comments support this hypothesis, then Bucer received

this letter while he was in Cambridge.

¹⁴⁴ On Christological controversy between the Reformed and the Lutherans, including an account the Christology of Brenz and Chemnitz, see Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant*, 104–36.

¹⁴⁵ *Traicté de la Saincte Cene de Nostre Seigneur et Seul Saveur Jesus Christ*.

¹⁴⁶ CO 5.458. “Quand Luther commença à enseigner, il traictoit en telle sorte la matiere de la Cene, que touchant la presence corporelle de Christ, il sembloit advis qu’il la laissast telle que le monde la concevoit pour lors. Car en condamnant la transsubstantiation, il disoit le pain estre le corps de Christ, d’autant qu’il estoit uny avec. Oultre plus, il adioustoit des similitudes, lesquelles estoient un peu dures et rudes. Mais il le faisoit comme par contrainte, pource qu’il ne pouvoit autrement expliquer son intention. Car il est difficile de donner à entendre une chose si haulte, sinon en usant de quelque impropriété.”

¹⁴⁷ W. Robert Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 100.

¹⁴⁸ For background to this controversy, see DeGreef, 178–81.

¹⁴⁹ CO 9.52. “Quum enim a tenebris papatus emergere incipiens, tenui sanae doctrinae gustu concepto, legerem apud Lutherum, nihil in sacramentis ab Oecolampadio et Zvinglio reliquum fieri praeter nudas et inanes figuras, ita me ab ipsorum libris alienatum fuisse fateor, ut diu a lectione abstinuerim.”

¹⁵⁰ CO 9.461–517. E.g., 465–67.

Can This Bird Fly?

Repositioning the Genesis of the Reformation on Martin Luther's Early Polemic against Gabriel Biel's Covenantal, Voluntarist Doctrine of Justification

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TURNING THE TURNING POINT

History is a series of turning points that hinge on decisions inherently theological in nature. The publication and posting of the ninety-five theses by Martin Luther in 1517 is, in the opinion of many historians, that turning point on which the entire modern era depends. Historical inquiries into those theses naturally focus on Luther's growing discontent with the indulgence system. As Luther himself would increasingly discover, his own desire for reform would be pastorally motivated, troubled as he was by the way indulgences had swayed the average late medieval Christian to use what little money he had to secure the removal of temporal punishment for sins in purgatory. Tetzl's dramatic sermon pressuring the purchase of an indulgence only confirms that Luther's fears were warranted.¹

Nevertheless, contemporary histories pay little tribute to the complicated

medieval soteriology behind Luther's early outrage over indulgences in 1516 and 1517. The shape of late medieval soteriology, especially as it relates to a covenantal, voluntarist framework, has taken a backseat to the more conspicuous political, social, and ecclesiastical circumstances that surround October 31, 1517. For those unacquainted with the vortex of medieval soteriology, Luther's earliest polemics, which are filled with reactions against certain late medieval schoolmen, leave one mystified. Unfamiliar with late medieval justification theories, interpreters of Luther may come dangerously close to misunderstanding the reformer's own reaction, which is no small danger considering the momentous weight Protestantism has placed on Luther's rediscovery of *sola fide* over against Rome.

What follows is a small contribution to remedy such an oversight and fill a historical lacuna. The purpose is methodologically motivated: we will aspire to shift the spotlight off the usual storyline and shine it instead on Luther's polemical reaction to Gabriel Biel's covenantal, voluntarist doctrine of justification. More importantly, however, the argument is theological: apart from understand *why* Luther reacted so negatively to Biel, one cannot, at least in full, do justice to Luther's own journey into an Augustinian justification theory and, eventually, beyond Augustinianism into a forensic view of justification, one that would characterize Protestantism for centuries to come.

What follows is not a claim to discover anything "new" so much as it is an attempt to move histories of the Reformation in a different direction, even relocate the genesis of the Reformation within the late medieval context that defined the young Luther, almost successfully driving him into religious and psychological insanity. Luther's early academic life will be instrumental, specifically his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, for there we discover a budding Augustinian theologian trapped in the categories of the *via moderna* until he can break free by means of a paradigm that, ironically enough, took the name of his own monastery. Should the story of the Reformation begin within that context, it will become obvious why Luther's forensic doctrine of imputation is no mere modification of medieval soteriology but an entire paradigm shift, one that radically redefines covenantal, anthropological, and soteriological presuppositions.

THE VIA MODERNA VERSUS THE SCHOLA AUGUSTINIANA MODERNA

Gabriel Biel (c. 1420-95), commonly recognized as the last of the scholastics, arrived just on the eve of the Reformation. Yet the issues he was addressing originate before his time with the collision of two medieval schools of thought. Although Biel develops his own justification synthesis, his covenantal and voluntarist preunderstanding is not necessarily novel but inherent in the *via moderna*. Over the span of multiple centuries, the *via moderna* took form in the thought of William of Ockham (c. 1285/88- c. 1348/49), Robert Holcot (c. 1290-1349), and Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420), among others.²

Matriculating from universities such as Heidelberg, Biel was an engaged academic, yet his attention was particularly devoted to life in the church, being himself a priest and a known preacher. Such a pastoral emphasis stems from his background in the *Devotio Moderna*, the Brethren of the Common Life.³ That fact is not irrelevant, for Biel's insistence upon man's ability, as captured in the slogan *facere quod in se est*, was pastorally motivated. Only if man possessed the spiritual ability to do his very best or that which lies within him could reconciliation with his Maker be attainable. "Biel's concern is to provide a way to justification within the reach of the average Christian."⁴

The *schola Augustiniana moderna*, on the other hand, perceived the *via moderna* as a return to Pelagianism. The modern Augustinian school consisted of theologians such as Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290-1349), Gregory of Rimini (c. 1300-1358), and Hugolino of Orvieto. Bradwardine is especially fascinating for his own conversion out of Pelagianism. A student-turned-lecturer at Merton College, Oxford University, he would later be Chancellor of St. Paul's, London, and eventually Archbishop of Canterbury in Avignon. It was during his years at St. Paul's that he wrote *De causa Dei contra Pelagium* (*The Cause of God against Pelagius*) in 1344.⁵ In that work, Bradwardine reflected on his own personal experience, having been absorbed by what he believed was Pelagianism at Oxford only to discover *sola gratia* through a text like Romans 9.⁶ Bradwardine would be the formidable nemesis of Robert Holcot, whom the former encountered in Durham.⁷

Despite the force of Bradwardine, historians often point to another theologian from the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine at the University of Paris, Gregory of Rimini, as the man responsible for a revival of Augustinianism.⁸ Frank James III notes how it was Rimini who reintroduced Augustine's

predestinarianism, eventually influencing Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Italian reformer Thomas Cranmer recruited to come to England (Bradwardine's influence on other reformers, like Luther and Calvin, is contested).⁹

The influence of each school cannot be minimized. For instance, the *via moderna* was not only the position reformers like Luther and Calvin were taught to embrace, but representatives as late as Biel would leave a notable impression on sixteenth century Roman theologians and councils as well. For example, Biel's soteriology is inherent within the theology of Luther's arduous opponent Johannes von Eck, as well as the Council of Trent (1545-63).¹⁰ Writing to Frederick the Wise, Luther said concerning his 1519 debate at Leipzig with Eck: "In debating with me he [Eck] rejected Gregory of Rimini as one who alone supported my opinion against all theologians."¹¹ Aligning himself with an Augustinian like Gregory in 1519 was but the outcome of Luther's stance two years earlier as he rigorously set his aim on Biel, who will serve as the appropriate foil to understanding Luther's departure from the *via moderna*.

BIEL'S COVENANTAL, VOLUNTARIST ACCOUNT OF JUSTIFICATION

The starting point to comprehend properly Biel's doctrine of justification is the divine *pactum*. Such a starting point may not be, at first glance, immediately relevant. For instance, in his sermon, "Circumcision of the Lord," Biel spends most of his effort explaining infused grace and defining meritorious actions. Not until the end does he briefly introduce the "rule" or "covenant." Nevertheless, this covenant will be critical to Biel's *processus iustificationis*.

According to Biel, "God has established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to Him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship."¹² The covenant established is voluntary on God's part and gracious in its inception. Recognizing man has lost his way, God deliberates, leading him to initiate an agreement in which the possibility of eternal life might become a reality. Yet the covenant is not only voluntary in the sense that God chose to institute a rule he did not have to establish, but it is voluntarist in nature as well. The covenant is God's way of accepting man's works, even if they be unworthy in and of themselves. Biel puts forward a parable to convey this point:

Let us say that there is a most lenient king who shows so much mercy to his people that he publishes a decree saying that he will embrace with his favor any of his enemies who desire his friendship, provided they mend their ways for the present and the future. Furthermore, the king orders that all who have been received in this fashion into his friendship will receive a golden ring to honor all who are dedicated to his regime, so that such a friend of the king may be known to all. *The king gives to such a man by way of delegation of his royal authority such a position that every work done to the honor of the king, regardless of where performed or how large or small it is, shall be rewarded by the king above and beyond its value. And to give him extra strength to perform this kind of meritorious work, precious and powerful stones are inserted in the ring to encourage him who wears it, so that his body does not fail him when he needs it but increases in ability to gain further rewards the more the body is exercised and accustomed to resist every adverse force.*¹³

That phrase, “lenient king,” is most telling. Leniency is the prime characteristic of the covenant God inaugurates. His enemies deserve not his friendship. Nevertheless, should they be determined to “mend their ways,” and should they perform works that honor the king to the best of their abilities, it matters not whether those works are inherently worthy, reaching the perfect standard of divine justice. The leniency of the king and his contract mean that he will accept such works regardless. Such works may even be rewarded above and beyond any inherent value they possess. The king has that right or authority by virtue of his royal office. With that scheme in mind, it is appropriate to label Biel’s covenantalism voluntarist in nature.

THE INTELLECTUALIST APPROACH: THOMAS AQUINAS

The *via moderna* intentionally parts ways with the intellectualism of Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) before him, in which the divine intellect held primacy over the divine will. For the medieval intellectualist, prioritizing the divine intellect meant the inherent value of man’s merits mattered. God did not necessarily reward *above and beyond* the inherent value but *according to* the inherent value of one’s works, otherwise his own justice could be thrown into question. Approaching justification through an intellectualist framework avoided the charge that God’s *liberum arbitrium* was arbitrary—a very dangerous charge in the Middle Ages.¹⁴

Distinguishable, as well, is the *iustificationis* embraced by an intellectualist. For Aquinas, justification was an ontological transformation, one that involved the habit of grace being infused into man's soul, a habit necessary for man to be pleasing to God. With the habit of grace infused, man might cooperate (exercising his free will) in order to be made righteous.¹⁵ As his nature is changed by habitual grace—a substance supernatural in orientation—man becomes more and more satisfactory in the eyes of God (i.e., *gratia gratis faciens*). Aquinas writes in his *Summa Theologiae*, “God infuses a habitual gift into the soul,” an infusion of “certain forms or supernatural qualities into those whom he moves to seek after supernatural and eternal good, that they may be thus moved by him to seek it sweetly and readily.” The “gift of grace,” he reasons, “is a certain quality.”¹⁶ The ontological transformation habitual grace manufactures is the preliminary ground upon which God is then justified in his justification of the ungodly.

The main thrust of such a point can be simplistically pictured in diagram one, where such an infusion is presented as prevenient. Enabled by infused grace, man's acquired merit is rewarded, complimented according to the measure of value it possesses. Justice is a priority in this schema; God is obligated to bestow the just reward every act of merit deserves.

DIAGRAM 1: THE BASIC PROCESSUS IUSTIFICATIONIS ACCORDING TO THOMAS AQUINAS



Aquinas did not always prioritize grace to man's freedom. Earlier in his career, Thomas wrote a commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* where he would (to be anachronistic) sound like Biel centuries later. Man was to do his best and his best would be rewarded by grace, a grace that would prepare

him for justification. Man's best did not meet God's perfect standard, but God would accept it anyway due to his sovereign generosity.¹⁷ Later on, as his *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa contra Gentiles* evidence, Aquinas would reverse the order, claiming instead that grace must come first if works are to follow at all.¹⁸ It is essential to observe at this point that the *iustificatio* involves an *ordo* in which infused grace holds primacy to the movement of the will, thereby excusing Aquinas not only of Pelagianism but Semi-Pelagianism as well.¹⁹ As McGrath observes, *quod in se est* now takes on a different meaning: "doing what one is able to do when aroused and moved by grace."²⁰ Yet unlike the sixteenth century Reformers, justification remains a transformation, one in which the individual is made righteous in his inner nature, not a forensic declaration as the Reformers would argue at a much later date.²¹

THE VOLUNTARIST APPROACH: SCOTUS, OCKHAM, AND BIEL

By contrast, the voluntarist conception would differ completely. Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and English Franciscan William of Ockham believed Aquinas had demolished God's freedom. By restricting or obligating God to reward works inherently worthy, God's freedom to reward works above and beyond what they are worth is undermined. God can and does reward however he sees fit; as God he is free to do so. The freedom and sovereignty of the divine will entail that something is only good because God says it is good. If the liberality of God's choice is to be prioritized, then God is not to be held accountable to an external standard of justice but justice itself is to be defined according to whatever God chooses to accept as just.²²

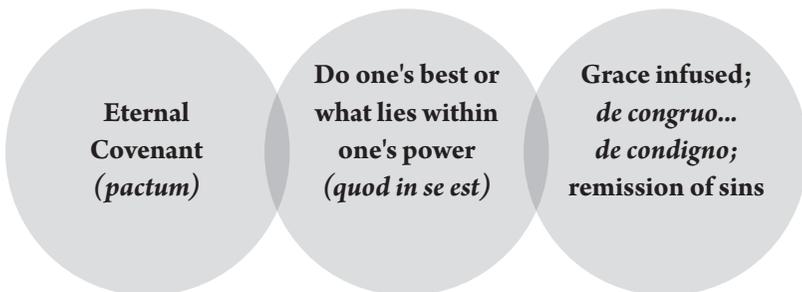
In that vein came the perceived genius of Biel's covenantal conception, though its covenantal flavor is not original to Biel but is present in *via moderna* representatives like Holcot. Through the establishment of a voluntary *pactum*, God obligates himself rather than being obligated by the inherent value of man's merit via habitual grace. That covenantal obligation preserves the freedom of his will, for he chooses if and how he will reward man's effort, and it need not be according to the weight of its value. In that sense, Biel believes his view to be *more* gracious than challenging views. If God is not bound to bestow the inherent value according to some external standard but is free to go above and beyond, then his reward for man's deeds can exceed

their worth. The worth or value of man's merits is assigned or ascribed, but cannot be inherent, innate, or inborn.

Furthermore, Pelagianism is avoided since man doing his best is not meant to merit God's grace *de condigno*, as his deeds are unworthy in and of themselves, but rather *de congruo*. It is not "that man's moral efforts unaided by grace are full meritorious of God's rewards (*de condigno*) but rather that they are graciously regarded by God as half merits or merits in a metaphorical sense (*de congruo*). The relationship between God's bestowal of grace and sinful man's best effort rests on 'contracted' rather than 'actual' worth and is a result of God's liberality in giving 'so much for so little.'"²³

Nevertheless, there is a theological catch for Biel. The voluntarist nature of the covenant may mean God goes "above and beyond," but that is only true should one do his best. To be fair to Biel, the point is stated by him far more positively. All one must do is one's best to receive God's reward, even if one's best does not add up to God's perfect standard. Should he do his best, infused grace will subsequently matriculate. Hence we return to that previous statement from Biel: "God has established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to Him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship."²⁴ A more sophisticated, detailed diagram will be offered later, but for now what's being outlined can be simplistically pictured as follows:

DIAGRAM 2: THE BASIC PROCESSUS IUSTIFICATIONIS ACCORDING TO GABRIEL BIEL



Biel's anthropological assumption: *actum facientis quod in se est*

There is, however, one major assumption—and in the eyes of Biel’s nemeses, the Achilles heel of Biel’s position—namely, that one is able to do one’s best to begin with. Infused grace is a subsequent reality, conditioned upon one doing what lies within. There is a strong anthropological optimism in Biel, one that would be characteristic of adherents to the *via moderna* system overall. God may graciously establish a covenant whereby he accepts man’s best, however unqualified his best may be. Yet Biel assumes man has a “best” to offer. Consider the power he credits to man’s will in his work *In II Sententiarum*:

The soul, by removing an obstacle towards a good movement to God through the free will, is able to merit the first grace *de congruo*. This may be proved as follows: because God accepts the act of doing “what lies within its powers” [*actum facientis quod in se est*] as leading to the first grace, not on account of God’s generosity. The soul, by removing this obstacle, ceases from acts of sin and consent to sin, and thus elicits a good movement towards God as its principal end; and does “what lies within its powers” [*quod in se est*]. Therefore God accepts, out of his generosity [*ex sua liberalitate*], this act of removing an obstacle and a good movement towards God as the basis of the infusion of grace.²⁵

Such phrases as *actum facientis quod in se est* and *quod in se est*—phrases that originate not with Biel but with his Franciscan master, Alexander of Hales—are revealing.²⁶ In man’s power is the ability to “merit the first grace *de congruo*,” a point we shall return to. Although the covenant may be prevenient, the first grace is subsequent to man’s merit. Man’s “good movement towards God” serves as the condition for future grace, the “basis of the infusion of grace.” Free will, then, is very much alive, so much so that one wonders to what extent, if any, it has been affected by the Fall.

To be accurate, however, Biel does believe man is a fallen creature, corrupt in his nature. Biel’s emphasis on man’s corruption is stronger than other medieval schoolmen. “More than Duns Scotus and Occam,” says Oberman, “Biel stresses that man’s original nature has been corrupted by original sin; man is not only *spoliatus a gratuitis* but also *vulneratus in naturalibus*.” Oberman elaborates, “Man’s miserable condition after the fall is not only due to a vertical imputation by God, but also to a horizontal continuation of infirmity, through an infection in which all mankind

partakes and through which the will is wounded, so that it is more inclined to evil than to good deeds.”²⁷

Biel is, unfortunately, unclear as to the specifics. He “does not elucidate the exact relation of the potential disorder of man’s created nature before the fall to the corruption of that nature—the law of the flesh reigning over man—after the fall.”²⁸ What is clear is that the will is not so corrupted or wounded that it cannot perform meritorious acts. Man’s will may be wounded and in need of repair, but it is not so wounded that freedom has been lost, that is, a freedom to act righteously, even if imperfectly. Apart from such freedom, man cannot do his best or what lies within him, which is necessary if he is to be rewarded with infused grace and merit divine justification. Original sin’s grip, Oberman observes, is not ontological but psychological in its effect.

Though man may be said to be in a miserable position, enslaved by the law of the flesh which requires that there be a healing aspect to the process of justification, his will is nevertheless free, original sin being a certain outgrowth of natural difficulties which can therefore be healed with natural medicines. Original sin has primarily a psychological, not an ontological impact on the free will of man; it destroys the pleasure of eliciting a good act and causes unhappiness and fear, thus changing the direction of the will. This does not, however, interfere with the freedom of the will as such. This presentation prepares us for Biel’s psychological prescription for those who would like to reach the level of the *facere quod in se est* and thus dispose themselves for the infusion of grace.²⁹

For that reason, Oberman seriously doubts Biel is “Thomistic or Augustinian,” a claim Oberman finds “groundless,” despite Biel’s own claims.³⁰

GRACE DEFINED: THE IMPEDIMENT TO FLIGHT HAD BEEN LESSENED

Notwithstanding the heavy stress on the freedom of the will after the fall, Biel believes he is far from bordering Pelagianism. The grace God gives as a reward to those who do what lies within them does not originate from man but from God.

Having quoted Romans 11:6 in his sermon, “Circumcision of the Lord,” Biel then claims, “Because nature cannot make something out of nothing,

that which is created comes from God alone. If grace could come from the creature, a grace which would suffice unto salvation, then any creature would be able to save himself by his own natural powers, that is, do what only grace can do. That is the error of Pelagius.”³¹ And again: “Now we must see just what this grace is by which the sinner is justified and what is actually accomplished in us. The grace of which we speak is a gift of God supernaturally infused into the soul. It makes the soul acceptable to God and sets it on the path to deeds of meritorious love.”³² Biel then occupies the majority of his sermon under three headings:

1. “God makes acceptable for this reason alone, that it is present in and is part of that nature which can be beatified, that is, man.” Biel appeals to Scotus to explain how:

[G]race is an enrichment of nature that is pleasing to God’s will. Grace makes human nature acceptable to God by adorning it not with an ordinary acceptance but with that special acceptance by which man is according to God’s decision ordained toward life eternal. For to be acceptable, to be beloved by God and to be His friend, means to be in such a state that one will attain eternal life unless one loses this state through sin.³³

2. “And because grace makes the sinner acceptable to God it follows that it also justifies him.” Biel then breaks justification down into two aspects: (a) “remission of guilt,” and (b) “acceptation to eternal life, since it is impossible for one who is going to be accepted to eternal life to be at the same time condemned to eternal punishment.” To be forgiven of one’s guilt is, for Biel, a requirement of entering paradise.³⁴

Biel does seem to distinguish between an infused grace that invites justification (“remission of guilt” and “acceptation to eternal life”) and an infused grace that arrives after initial justification to continuously cultivate good works throughout the Christian life. Quoting Romans 3:24 to support his claim, Biel writes, “But if grace is infused into someone who is already justified, that which it accomplishes is not justification. An example would

be the grace once given to the holy angels and now daily given to those who are upright of heart, who through their good works earn an additional gift of grace above and beyond the grace already in them.”³⁵

3. “Thus God makes these our works meritorious and acceptable for eternal reward, not actually all our works but only those which have been brought forth by the prompting of grace.”³⁶ If any act is to be ultimately meritorious, in Biel’s framework, it must be, he says, “brought forth by the prompting of grace.” Hence, not all acts qualify. But those acts prompted by grace should result in love for God above all else.³⁷

Biel does follow in the footsteps of Lombard, listing two components of a meritorious act: *liberum arbitrium* and the grace of God.

There is no human merit that does not depend partly on free will. The principal cause of meritorious moral action, however, is attributed to grace. But grace does not determine the will. The will can ignore the prompting of grace and lose it by its own default. The prompting of grace is toward meritorious acts for the sake of God. Therefore, the act as such stems primarily from grace. This is the case because it is performed by someone who has grace in accordance with the prompting of grace.³⁸

Indispensable to a meritorious act is *liberum arbitrium*. Biel does label grace essential, even the “principal cause of meritorious moral action.” Nevertheless, he qualifies, the will is never necessitated or determined by grace, but can resist and defeat grace. Subsequent grace, in the life of those who’ve done their best and been rewarded by infused grace, can even be lost altogether. Grace may prompt, but not efficaciously.³⁹

Biel calls grace the principal cause, but what exactly is grace? When Biel uses the word “grace” he has in mind “love” or “infused love.” Love and grace, he says, “are exactly the same.”⁴⁰ (On this point he differs, by his own admission, from Scotus who distinguishes love from grace.) Furthermore, grace is a “habit, although it is not acquired but infused.” Biel explains,

Grace accomplishes in the soul something similar to the effects of a naturally acquired habit, although in a far more perfect fashion than an acquired

habit. The naturally acquired habit is a permanent quality in the power of the soul which stems from frequently repeated acts. This habit prompts and urges the man to repeat the same act. ...But grace elevates human power beyond itself, so that acts which had been turned by sin toward evil or inward toward one's self now can be meritoriously redirected against the law of the flesh and toward God. Grace leads, assists, and directs in order that man may be prompted in a way which corresponds with divine charity. And thus grace weakens the remaining power of sin, not—as many doctors say—because it forgives or wipes out sins, but because it strengthens human power.⁴¹

The preacher that he is, Biel uses the illustration of a bird trying to fly with a stone attached. He can “scarcely fly away” but “if this bird's wings were strengthened, then we would say that the impediment to flight had been lessened, although the weight of the stoned had not been lessened.”⁴² Similarly, grace infused into man strengthens him to overcome sin which weighs him down. Biel stresses, quite strongly, that this infused grace is a gift from the triune God. “By this grace we are able to remain without difficulty in His friendship, and to grow continually through good works. On such a foundation we can easily overcome the onslaughts of the devil, the world, and flesh, and gain a great reward in store for us.”⁴³

THE CONDITION OF THE COVENANT

Despite Biel's toil to emphasize the indispensability of God's infused, assisting grace, he ends his sermon, as noted earlier, with a *major* theological qualifier, as brief as it may be: “Thus God has established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to Him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship.”⁴⁴ For a sermon that so stresses the import of infused grace, this may appear to be a surprising way to end. Infused, assisting grace may be necessary for justification, but due to the covenantal arrangement, Biel views man doing what he can as a *preliminary step* toward the reception of such grace at all. If man “does what he can” then he “will receive forgiveness” and God will infuse “assisting grace” into him. That is the condition of the covenant, and the parable of the golden ring narrated already only seems to

confirm that covenantal condition.

As gracious as it may be for God to infuse grace into man (like a bird suddenly strengthened in its wings by a power outside itself), nevertheless, whether man receives the infused grace depends upon him doing his best. When Biel says meritorious acts rely on two factors— *liberum arbitrium* and grace—the latter, according to the nature of the covenant, is decisive for procuring the former. Not only can the Christian can lose grace after justification due to the stubborn disinclination of the will, but it would seem possible (likely?) that some may not receive infused grace at all should they not will to do their best in the first place, though Biel never says so in that many words. In short, as gracious as grace may be for Biel once the gift is given, whether the gift is given (and the covenant put into action) is an altogether different matter, one that depends entirely upon man turning to God at the start.

FROM MERITUM DE CONGRUO TO MERITA DE CONDIGNO

Heiko Oberman has been the leading medievalist historian to examine Biel's justification theory. In doing so, he has produced an elaborate chart that sets Biel's soteriology within an ecclesiastical framework.⁴⁵ For our purposes, it is the condition of the covenant (*facit quod in se est*) that is relevant, and has been stressed in bold.

[OBERMAN'S] SCHEMA I.

A Chart of the Interrelation of Justification and Predestination

| THE ELECT [PREDESTINATI] | FALL | SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM | THE SINNER'S DISPOSITION | THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE | ETERNAL REWARD |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Those foreknown to fulfill the requirements set in God's eternal decrees [iustitia dei] | Original sin [spoliatus a gratuitis, vulneratus in naturalibus] | Habit of grace | He Does His Very Best [facit quod in se est] | The Decisive Transition | Acceptation |
| | State of mortal sin The virgin Mary exempted | Infused and substituted for original righteousness ↓ | Not necessarily aided by prevenient grace [gratia gratis data] | Confrontation with the preached Word [lex nova] ↓ | Good works produced in state of grace are necessarily by God's commitment—second decree— accepted as full merits [merita de condigno] |
| | | Usually a relapse into a state of mortal sin | Ordinarily [regulariter] facere quod in se est is the basis [causa] for infusion | Acquired faith [fides acquisita] ↓ | They determine man's status in purgatory or heaven |
| | | | The Virgin Mary, the Apostle Paul, and some others are exceptions to this rule | Supreme love for God [amor dei super omnia] ↓ | [N.B. The status in purgatory can also be influenced by indulgences acquired from the treasure of the Church and applied to members of the Church Militant which encompasses not only the living but also the dead who are not beati.] |
| | | | God's general assistance [influential generalis] is necessary for all acts, both good and evil | God has committed himself—first decree—to reward those who are doing their best ↓ | Immediately of eventually ↓ gloria |
| | | | | Semi-merit [meritum de congruo] ↓ | |
| | | | | Restoration of the state of grace in anticipation of [in proposito] or at time of absolution [gratia gratum faciens] by infusion of faith, hope and love | |

[OBERMAN’S] SCHEMA I. CONTINUED...THE REPROBATE

| THE REPROBATE [PRESCITI] | FALL | SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM | THE SINNER'S DISPOSITION | THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE | ETERNAL WORD |
|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| Those foreknown not to fulfill the requirements set in God's eternal decrees [iustitia dei] | Original Sin [spoliatus a gratuitis, vulneratus in naturalibus] | Habit of Grace | He Does Not Do His Very Best [non facit quod in se est] | demerita | Rejection |
| | State of mortal sin | Infused and substituted for original righteousness ↓ | Remains in a state of mortal sin; or if temporarily in a state of grace, he is in a state of sin at the time of his death | | Guilt is punished by eternal damnation [culpa ↓ pena damnationis] |
| | | Usually a relapse into state of mortal sin | Guilt [culpa] | | |
| | | | God's general assistance [influential generalis] is necessary for all acts, both good and evil | | |

Oberman’s visualization of Biel’s justification process is illuminating for a variety of reasons. First, Oberman reminds interpreters that for Biel there is, in the sacrament of baptism, a habit of grace that is “infused and substituted for original righteousness.” Tragically, man’s “relapse” into a “state of mortal sin” undermines such a habit of grace. After baptism grace is compromised and a further infusion is needed, though one that depends upon man doing his best according to the *pactum* arrangement.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, Oberman confirms that *facit quod in se est* is (ordinarily; *regulariter*) the *causa* or basis for infused grace in Biel’s mind. Grace “does not prepare the sinner for the reception of this justifying grace since *grace is not the root but the fruit of the preparatory good works*. ... This *facere quod in se est* is the necessary disposition for the infusion of grace and implies a movement of the free will, which is at once aversion to sin and love for God according to Eph. 5:14.”⁴⁶ Within the context of the penance system, “God has committed himself—first decree—to reward those who are doing their very best.”

Such a “reward” produces *meritum de congruo* and the “state of grace” is recovered (when? before or during absolution “by infusion of faith, hope and love”). It is *meritum de congruo* that flowers into *merita de condigno*, as

agreed upon by God himself in his multi-layered *pactum* (multi-layered because *merita de condigno* is located in God's "second degree"). Therefore, the ordering of *meritum de congruo* and *merita de condigno* is critical, the former being conditioned upon man's best works but the latter being acquired as one does one's best within a state of infused grace. "Once this genuine love for God's sake is reached," writes Oberman, "the last obstacle is removed and the road to acceptance is paved by the eternal decrees of God according to which this *facere quod in se est* is first *de congruo* rewarded with the infusion of grace, while then, secondly, acts performed in state of grace are rewarded *de condigno* with acceptance by God."⁴⁷

PELAGIAN OR SEMI-PELAGIAN? BIEL'S INTERPRETERS

Since the covenantal condition (*actum facientis quod in se est*) results, if performed, in the gift of infused grace, some interpreters of Biel have labelled this grace a "reward" for prior merit. Though his focus is on Ockham (in contrast to Aquinas), what Steven Ozment writes in *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550* can be equally applied to Biel:

In opposition to [Aquinas and company] making salvation *conditional* upon the presence of a *supernatural habit of grace*, Ockham argued that one could perform works acceptable to God simply *by doing the best one could with one's natural moral ability*. Not only did Ockham believe it possible for those lacking such a habit to love God above all things and detest sin, but he argued further that God found it "fitting" to *reward with an infusion of grace* those who did so. Whereas Aquinas ... had required the presence of such grace *before* any positive relationship with God could exist, Ockham [and Biel] made the reception of grace a reward for *prior moral effort* ... Ockham appeared to free divine acceptance from absolute dependence on infused habits of grace only to make God's will dependent on the good works man could do in his natural moral state. Unassisted ethical cooperation now preceded, as a condition, the infusion of grace, which, with subsequent ethical cooperation, won man salvation. To the traditional mind such an argument was Pelagianism.⁴⁸

Or consider Oberman, whose conclusion is just as affirmative but more nuanced along the way. Oberman concludes that for Biel, "sin has not made

it impossible for man to act without the aid of grace.”⁴⁹ Yet Biel “can speak in what appears to be such bold Pelagian language about the respective contributions of free will and grace as regards the moral quality of an act because he feels that he brings the full biblical doctrine of grace to bear on the relation of good deeds and meritorious deeds.”⁵⁰

Additionally, the *pactum*, by design, is meant to be gracious. “The gratuitous character of God’s remuneration is therefore not based on the *activity* of the habit of grace or on the *presence* of the habit of grace, but on God’s decree according to which he has decided to accept every act which is performed in a state of grace as a *meritum de condigno*.”⁵¹ As Biel reveals in his commentary on the Mass, “the infusion of grace is granted to the sinner when he does his very best, not on grounds of a previous pact, but on grounds of God’s generosity. Biel invites his auditors and readers to find God’s overriding love and sovereignty expressed in the most articulate way, not in the full merit of justice, but in the semi-merit of generosity.”⁵²

Given the complexity of the *pactum*—a *pactum* initiated by God out of his generosity yet conditioned for its success upon man doing his best—Oberman believes he is warranted to conclude that Biel’s doctrine of justification is “at once *sola gratia* and *solis operibus!*”

By grace alone—because if God had not decided to adorn man’s good works with created and uncreated grace, man would never be saved.

By works alone—because not only does man have to produce the framework or substance for this adornment, but God by the two laws of grace is committed, even obliged to add to this framework infused grace and final acceptation. Once man has done his very best, the other two parts follow automatically.

It is clear that the emphasis falls on “justification by works alone”; the concept of “justification by grace alone” is a rational outer structure dependent on the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*.⁵³

Oberman chides past historians (e.g., Vignaux, Weijnenborg) for allowing Biel’s “outer structure” (i.e., the *pactum*) to excuse the Pelagian feel of Biel’s inner structure (i.e., man doing his very best). “*It is therefore evident,*” Oberman says confidently, “*that Biel’s doctrine of justification is essentially Pelagian.*”⁵⁴

McGrath, however, strongly disagrees with Oberman. To understand

why, it is necessary to regress briefly into McGrath's portrait of Biel. According to the McGrath, Biel's doctrine of *liberum arbitrium* can be summarized as follows:

1. The human free will may choose a morally good act *ex puris naturalibus*, without the need for grace.
2. Humans are able, by the use of their free will and other natural faculties, to implement the law by their own power, but are unable to fulfil the law in the precise manner which God intended (that is, *quoad substantiam actus*, but not *quoad intentionem praecipientis*).
3. *Ex puris naturalibus* the free will is able to avoid mortal sin.
4. *Ex puris naturalibus* the free will is able to love God above everything else.
5. *Ex suis naturalibus* the free will is able to dispose itself towards the reception of the gift of grace.⁵⁵

In view of numbers one and five, why would McGrath disagree with Oberman? McGrath believes the *pactum* itself removes the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian charge, for the existence of the *pactum* is proof that God has taken the first initiative. All that is required of man is a "minimum human response to the divine initiative" in this *pactum*.⁵⁶ If the charge of Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism means "that the *viator* can take the initiative in his own justification, the very existence of the *pactum* deflects the charge; God has taken the initiative away from humans, who are merely required to *respond* to that initiative by the proper exercise of their *liberum arbitrium*."⁵⁷

Furthermore, the presence of the *pactum* itself in Biel's soteriology is absent in historic Pelagianism. Biel and Pelagius, therefore, cannot share a strict alignment. The Pelagian controversy did not have "so sophisticated a concept of causality as that employed by the theologians of the *via moderna*, expressed in the *pactum* theology, so that the applications of epithets such as 'Pelagian' to Biel's theology of justification must be regarded as historically unsound."⁵⁸

Additionally, and perhaps most significantly for McGrath, the charge of Pelagianism is historically untenable since Biel himself was not under suspicion for heresy nor seen as contradicting prior councils. McGrath indirectly accuses Oberman of anachronism, judging him unfair to apply "one era's understanding of 'Pelagianism' to another."⁵⁹ What criteria would have been

used in Biel's day to judge whether he was Pelagian? "The sole legitimate criteria ... are the canons of the Council of Carthage—the only criteria which medieval doctors then possessed."⁶⁰ Biel simply did not have knowledge of or access to Orange II. McGrath concludes that if "Biel's theology is to be stigmatized as 'Pelagian' or 'semi-Pelagian,' it must be appreciated that he suffered from a historical accident which affected the entire period up to the Council of Trent itself."⁶¹

What is to be made of the McGrath-Oberman debate? On the one hand, McGrath makes a fine point about the Council of Carthage, as well as Orange II. It would be unfair to hold an individual or movement accountable to documents not possessed. McGrath is also correct that Biel's introduction of the *pactum* defies a strict comparison between the *via moderna* and Pelagianism. The presence of a *pactum* does mean that God's initiation precedes man's, something which Pelagianism cannot say, at least not in the exact same way.

On the other hand, McGrath overlooks several factors and may be guilty of overreacting to Oberman. First, while McGrath accuses others of anachronism, McGrath himself does not entirely pay attention to the historical context and soil in which Biel's theology grew. If the *via moderna*, and with it the theology of the *pactum*, does not begin with Biel but can be traced back to Scotus, Ockham, and Holcot, then it is far too generous to conclude that the charge of Pelagianism crosses a line or would be foreign should it have been lobbed against Biel. One need only revisit the controversy between Holcot and Bradwardine to note the title of Bradwardine's polemic book of 1344: *De causa Dei contra Pelagium*. Even without access to Orange II, Bradwardine's work demonstrates that theologians in the fourteenth century (even before Biel) still assumed, and sometimes asserted outright, a certain criterion for whether one had crossed the heretical line. That is a reminder that even if confessional and conciliar documents are absent, the theological content of past theologians or movements is not necessarily lost but continues. Furthermore, simply because Biel was not charged with the Pelagian heresy in his day does not mean his view is innocent. If that were the criteria, then any figure in the history of church to escape public accusations must be considered orthodox.

Second, and perhaps most vitally, is how McGrath downplays the role of *liberum arbitrium* in Biel's *processus iustificationis*. To call *quod in se est* a "minimum human response to the divine initiative" as if mankind is "merely

required to *respond* to that initiative by the proper exercise of their *liberum arbitrium*,” is not only to overlay the power of the *pactum* prior to infused grace but is to underplay the magnitude of *liberum arbitrium*. McGrath believes that the positioning of the *pactum* at the start of the *processus iustificationis* eliminates Pelagian tendencies. Yet that is a failure to see how and when the *pactum* actually functions.

It is true that God has taken the initiative by establishing an agreement to reward man’s very best. However, that is all it is—an agreement, a promise, a pledge—until man does so. Stated otherwise, the *pactum*, as Oberman’s chart demonstrates, is never actualized if *non facit quod in se est* (he does not do his very best). This is the most common oversight in those who believe Biel has escaped Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian tendencies. It is the reason why Oberman admonished older historians. Seeing the “outer structure” (as Oberman calls it) of the *pactum*, they glossed over what we might label the “inner structure,” namely, man doing his very best. As generous as the *pactum* may be, it does not and cannot functionally be applied until man does what lies within his power. In that sense, at least according to the “inner structure,” it is man who is primary, not God, for God’s *pactum* is conditioned upon man’s best.

It follows that although the *pactum* may have chronological priority, man’s *liberum arbitrium* has causal priority, for whether God rewards man with infused grace entirely depends upon man’s undetermined choice. The *pactum* may issue a promise but whether it is fulfilled or finds its application in man rests upon *liberum arbitrium*, and not just any free act but man’s *best* free act. Ironically, Biel’s covenantal scheme may intend to protect a voluntarist conception of God, but in the end, it conditions divine sovereignty upon human choice.

For that reason, the charge of Pelagianism is not far off the mark, even if the specifics of its alignment be contested. Suppose one softens the label to Semi-Pelagianism due to the introduction of the *pactum*; it is still difficult to avoid just how conditioned that *pactum* is upon man’s best merits. Looking back on the *processus iustificationis* of the ungodly, one might conclude that only Semi-Pelagianism applies to Biel since the *pactum* took effect when man did his very best. However, when one reflects on the pilgrimage of the *unjustified*, one realizes that as promising as the *pactum* may have sounded in theory, in reality it meant little as man never did his very best. To play off Biel’s imagery, the bird never left the ground. Man’s *liberum arbitrium*

had the last word. Long before Biel, Aquinas identified the Pelagian heresy only to counter it by claiming that matter “does not move itself to its own perfection; therefore it must be moved by something else.”⁶² It is difficult to see how Biel could agree when the *pactum* does not actually move anyone but only promises divine movement should man move himself to the best of his abilities.

LUTHER’S REVOLT AGAINST BIEL AND THE VIA MODERNA

Martin Luther’s theological education was birthed out of the womb of the *via moderna*. While Luther was no doubt influenced by a variety of professors, one of them was John Nathin. Scott Hendrix believes Nathin was a student of Biel himself, or at least a student who encountered Biel’s teaching firsthand.⁶³ It was at Tübingen that Nathan completed his doctoral degree and it is most probable that Nathan listened to Biel’s lectures.

When Luther studied under Nathan, Nathan assigned to Luther Biel’s commentary on the canon of the mass.⁶⁴ Like his teacher, Luther absorbed Biel’s soteriology in the process. So influential was Biel via Nathan that when Luther started lecturing on the Psalms (1513-1515), it was Biel’s soteriological assumptions that rose to the surface. For instance, Luther writes, “The doctors rightly say that, when people do their best, God infallibly gives grace. This cannot be understood as meaning that this preparation for grace is *de condigno* [meritorious], as they are incomparable, but it can be regarded as *de congruo* on account of this promise of God and the covenant (*pactum*) of mercy.”⁶⁵ Yet Luther wraps *quod in se est* within the voluntarist framework as well: “Righteousness (*iustitia*) is thus said to be rendering to each what is due to them. Yet equity is prior to righteousness, and is its prerequisite. Equity identifies merit; righteousness renders rewards. Thus the Lord judged the world ‘in equity’ (that is, wishing all to be saved), and judges ‘in righteousness’ (because God renders to each their reward).”⁶⁶

Progressively, sometimes slowly, Luther started to take issue with Biel, a turn that would occur as Luther transitioned from lecturing on the Psalms to lecturing on Romans (1515-1516), Galatians (1516-1517), and Hebrews (1517-1518).⁶⁷ His lectures at the University of Wittenberg on Romans are the first of the three to signal a shift. The *via moderna* is not spoken of as favorably as before as Luther sounds considerably more Augustinian. The

sinner is not active in the *via moderna* sense—doing his best or doing what lies within—but passive in the reception of divine grace.⁶⁸

Any hostility to the *via moderna* that remained in seed form in the years 1515-1516 reached its full potential by 1517. Luther went from skeptical to critical, believing the *via moderna* soteriology he had been fed was not only incompatible with a Pauline anthropology and soteriology but the root cause of his frustrations with the late medieval system. Although Franz Günther was to defend a set of theses that year as a requirement to earning his bachelor degree, it was Luther who wrote the theses for public appearance at the University of Wittenberg. These theses, which now bear the title *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, were presented on September 4, 1517. Grimm observes that they must have “grew out of” Luther’s “commentary on the first book of Aristotle’s *Physics*,” which he wrote for the purpose of “dethroning the god of the scholastics.”⁶⁹

DISPUTATION AGAINST SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY (1517)

The *Disputation* begins with an outright contrast between Augustine and Pelagius, recognizing Pelagianism as heretical, a move that may strategically cast Biel in an unorthodox shadow. The *Disputation* resembles Luther’s future work, *The Bondage of the Will*, in countless ways, the first being Luther’s opening theological claim that man is a “bad tree” and on that basis he “can only will and do evil [Cf. Matt. 7:17-18].”⁷⁰ That Luther chose man’s corrupt identity, and with it his spiritual inability, as his point of departure, immediately situates him against the *via moderna*’s anthropological optimism. Luther has precluded any attempt to attribute to man the initiation or cooperation of his conversion.

Moreover, Luther not only asserts man “can only will and do evil” but that such a necessity of man’s inclination to evil is grounded in his nature. The image of a “bad tree”—Matthew 7:17-18—assumes the legitimacy of an Augustinian doctrine of original sin. The will’s spiritual ineptitude is not the result of wicked decisions but the will’s perverse acts are due to corruption inherent within (i.e., man’s nature). A “free” will is not, therefore, at all entertained by Luther, at least not in the sense it was by Biel. Captivity, on the other hand, is the choice word and concept: “It is false to state,” Luther warns, “that man’s inclination is free to choose between either of

two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.⁷¹ Acts that proceed from the will, in other words, should not be defined as if a choice can be made between two egalitarian options: imaginatively, sin or righteousness, or in Luther's world, the devil and God. The inclination of man is captivated, no doubt by sin, the world, and Satan himself.

Any conception of an ability to do one's best by doing what lies within is non-sensical to Luther since what lies within is nothing but captivity to debauched inclinations. Luther says this much in his next thesis, not only naming Biel but Biel's forerunner, Scotus: "It is false to state that the will can by nature conform to the correct precept. This is said in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel."⁷² Man cannot conform "by nature" to God's command since his nature is tainted by Adam's pollution to begin with, enslaving any inclination to righteousness. Grace, unlike Scotus and Biel, cannot merely be a reward for man doing his best, but is necessarily a liberating force that precedes any willful action; in a depraved nature only grace can turn man's passivity into activity. "As a matter of fact," Luther corrects Scotus and Biel, "without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil."⁷³ To qualify, Luther does not mean that the will in itself is evil, as if God created mankind with a skewed will from the start. The will is not, Luther clarifies, "by nature evil," or "essentially evil," a view held by the Manichaeans.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the will is "innately and inevitably evil and corrupt," and therefore "is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good," again a point that is "in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel."⁷⁵

Do not the commands of God assume that one can do one's best or do that which lies within him? Prescription entails ability, does it not? To the contrary, says Luther, the will is not "able to will or not to will whatever is prescribed."⁷⁶ It is man's duty to love his Creator, but post-fall it is "absurd to conclude that erring man can love the creature above all things," despite what "Scotus and Biel" claim.⁷⁷ If Jesus is right that man is a "bad tree," then it is not "surprising that the will can conform to erroneous and not to correct precept."⁷⁸ One must conclude, Luther insists, that "since erring man is able to love the creature it is impossible for him to love God."⁷⁹ Luther could not state man's inability and captivity any stronger.

It may be tempting to think that Luther's concept of captivity eliminates the will altogether. That would be inaccurate. For Luther, the matter is

not whether the will exists or acts but what it is *capable* of acting for or against. Desire is the issue. Whether or not the will desires to love God is what is impossible after the fall. The problem concerns what man does and does not *want*. Or as Luther explains, “Man is by nature unable to want God to be God.”⁸⁰ Present in Luther’s argument is a two-fold emphasis: (1) Man does not desire or want to love God, but (2) the corruption of his nature means he is unable and incapable of wanting to want to love God. “To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were.”⁸¹

Biel utilized the concept of friendship to frame the covenant God conditioned upon his slogan: *actum facientis quod in se est*. Luther, however, is convinced Biel has misunderstood *why* such friendship is possible to begin with. It has nothing to do with the capabilities of man’s nature, but is entirely dependent upon divine grace. “An act of friendship is done, not according to nature, but according to prevenient grace. This in opposition to Gabriel.” Luther further stresses the relation between will and nature when he concludes, “No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.”⁸² For the unregenerate, will and nature work together in harmony prior to conversion, but such an agreement between the two is only in the direction of unrighteousness. Man’s nature sets his will and the acts that follow on a course to destruction. No harmony exists, not yet at least, between nature and will that would lead the ungodly down the road of eternal life. Only divine grace can shift man’s trajectory, for only grace can liberate man’s nature, and the will with it, from not wanting God to be God.

Luther names Biel eleven times in the *Disputation* (Scotus only four times). Biel is not named in thesis 26—the thesis that most directly attacks the scholastic’s soteriology. “An act of friendship is not the most perfect means for *accomplishing that which is in one*.” Luther nearly quotes Biel’s exact phraseology. Luther then writes, “Nor is it the most perfect means for obtaining the grace of God or turning toward and approaching God.”⁸³ Instead, “it is an act of conversion already perfected, following grace both in time and by nature.”⁸⁴

Yet does not a legion of passages prioritize man’s effort—i.e., “accomplishing that which is in one”—to return, draw near, and seek as that which is prerequisite to God responding with grace (cf. Zech 1:3; Jas 4:8; Matt

7:7; Jer 29:13)? Luther warns that if such texts are interpreted in such a way then we differ not from the “Pelagians” and what they “have said.”⁸⁵ Rather than crediting man as he who does that “which is in” himself, clearly the motivating factor in God bestowing grace in Biel’s soteriology, Luther bypasses man’s will altogether and travels back in eternity to credit the electing grace of God instead. “The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole disposition toward grace is the eternal election and predestination of God.”⁸⁶

While Biel would point to man’s best as that which must precede the infusion of divine grace, Luther observes that if the spotlight is focused on man, all one will find is a will disinclined to God, inclined only to rebel against God. “On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except indisposition and even rebellion against grace.”⁸⁷ Indisposition, not disposition, is the reason why God’s predestining grace in eternity must be the cause of man’s reception of grace in time and space. Appeal to predestination is the only way forward. It is but a false hope to think “that doing all that one is able to do”—again, Luther quotes Biel precisely—“can remove the obstacles to grace.”⁸⁸ Despite what the “philosophers” imagine, we “are not masters of our actions, from beginning to end, but servants.”⁸⁹ Servitude is what defines the will, but it is a matter of which master the will must serve.

Luther does not directly address Biel’s covenantal conception. The closest he comes is thesis 55: “The grace of God is never present in such a way that it is inactive, but it is a living, active, and operative spirit; nor can it happen that through the absolute power of God an act of friendship may be present without the presence of the grace of God. This in opposition to Gabriel.”⁹⁰ Although Biel’s *pactum* remains unnamed, Luther’s language does seem to assume his knowledge of such a *pactum*. Identifying the “absolute power of God” (*potentia Dei absoluta*) is one indicator. When Luther denies that absolute power can put forward a friendship without grace being actually present, he seems to have in mind Biel’s *ordo*, in which God proposes a “friendship” via the establishment of a *pactum* but does not actually bestow infused grace until man does his best. “Inactive” grace and grace not “present” are Luther’s way of criticizing Biel’s belief that God can look gracious by presenting a *pactum* while withholding infused grace until man’s does his best.

Despite thesis 55, Luther mostly focuses on Biel's articulation of law and grace, which is unsurprising given how law and gospel would largely define Luther's hermeneutic. Luther is persuaded not merely that Biel has misunderstood the proper role of law and grace, but that Biel has turned grace into law, which is the same charge Augustine levelled against Pelagius and his disciples centuries earlier. In a series of theses, Luther explains his reasoning:

57. It is dangerous to say that the law commands that an act of obeying the commandment be done in the grace of God. This in opposition to the Cardinal and Gabriel.
58. From this it would follow that "to have the grace of God" is actually a new demand going beyond the law.
59. It would also follow that fulfilling the law can take place without the grace of God.
60. Likewise it follows that the grace of God would be more hateful than the law itself.
61. It does not follow that the law should be complied with and fulfilled in the grace of God. This in opposition to Gabriel.⁹¹

Thesis 59 is especially poignant for Luther. As much as God might establish a "friendship" by his absolute power, grace remains inactive and operationally absent, conditioned upon man doing his best in obedience to the law. Luther counters in the opposite direction, stressing not only the necessity of grace but its prevenient character as long as man's inclinations follow his corrupt nature:

68. Therefore, it is impossible to fulfil the law in any way without the grace of God.
69. As a matter of fact, it is more accurate to say that the law is destroyed by nature without the grace of God.⁹²
70. A good law will of necessity be bad for the natural will.
71. Law and will are two implacable foes without the grace of God.
72. What the law wants, the will never wants, unless it pretends to want it out of fear or love.
73. The law, as taskmaster of the will, will not be overcome except by the

“child, who has been born to us” [Isa. 9:6].

74. The law makes sin about because it irritates and repels the will [Rom. 7:13].
75. The grace of God, however, makes justice abound through Jesus Christ because it causes one to be pleased with the law.
76. Every deed of the law without the grace of God appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin. This in opposition to the scholastics.
77. The will is always averse to, and the hands inclined toward, the law of the Lord without the grace of God.⁹³

Then comes Luther’s most critical point:

79. Condemned are all those who do the works of the law.

Luther may not be articulating his mature understanding of law and gospel (a point we will return to shortly). Nevertheless, the seed has been planted in these theses, and it is Biel who has watered the soil.

For Luther, law and will are antithetical *as long as* the will is captivated to Adam’s nature. “Since the law is good,” Luther later explains, “the will, which is hostile to it, cannot be good. And from this it is clear that everyone’s natural will is iniquitous and bad.”⁹⁴ The will can only (and is only) reconciled with the law if grace itself mediates between the two.⁹⁵ Three theses in a row, Luther corrects Biel:

90. The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the will, lest it err even in loving God. In opposition to Gabriel.
91. It is not given so that good deeds might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed. In opposition to Gabriel.
92. It cannot be denied that love is superfluous if man is by nature able to do an act of friendship. In opposition to Gabriel.⁹⁶

Biel believes the will can act in love toward God but Luther, with the full captivity of the will in mind, counters that the will is completely misdirected and will only love God if grace intervenes at the start. Biel assumes the will can act, taking steps in a Godward direction, only for grace to then come

along and spur the will on to take further steps. To build off Biel's previous illustration, the bird does the best he can to start flying and if he does his best at flying God will reward such effort by infusing strength into that bird's wings so that he might fly better and more acceptably.

Luther never addresses the bird illustration but if he did, based on these theses, he might have colloquially quipped: "Biel, you make a moot point. This bird cannot fly. So damaged are its wings that this bird is grounded." Grace must be primary, prevenient, and, as Luther will later come to state in his *Bondage of the Will*, grace must be effectual. Otherwise, the will remains enslaved to its corrupt nature. Hence thesis 92: should man "by nature" be able to initiate friendship with God, then love itself is "superfluous."

FACERE QUOD IN SE EST, THE CRISIS OF ASSURANCE OF SALVATION, AND THE NECESSITY OF AMOR DEI SUPER OMNIA

Luther's *Disputation* rarely, if ever, explores how Biel's soteriology might influence, or be influenced by, the atonement. Luther's *theologia crucis* would be forcefully present, however, in his other treatises, but in this 1517 debate it was not at the forefront of Luther's argument.

Nevertheless, it is not unrelated, nor was it the case that Luther had not connected one *loci* to another. Prior to 1517, Luther was not only raised on the *via moderna* in the classroom, but he attempted to put it into practice in his own spiritual struggle to find a gracious God. Doing so, however, drove Luther to the edge of insanity. If the benefits of the cross—acceptance with God and infused grace—were withheld until one did one's best, then how was one to ever know if he had done his best? How would one know if *non facit quod in se est* was the real outcome of one's effort? That is a question Biel left unanswered, but one that drove Luther mad, unsure whether his assurance of salvation was justified or illegitimate. As Grimm clarifies,

Although Luther thought highly of Ockham and Biel, he could not accept their doctrines of freedom of the will, good works, and justification. Ockham and Biel believed that man by nature could will to love God above all things and prepare the way for God's saving grace. Since, according to them, Christ's work

of atonement became operative only after man had proven himself worthy of it, Luther could not be certain that he would be saved.⁹⁷

One might be sure God would reward grace if one did one's best, but one could never be sure one had ever done one's best—i.e., whether one's "best" really was one's best—in order to qualify for such a reward. Such a crisis over assurance can be traced back to the type of love that must be present in the act of doing one's best, namely, *super omnia*. Oberman explains:

To desire God's help is doing one's very best, and those fallen Christians who in this way detest sin and adhere to God their creator may be certain that God will grant them grace, thus freeing them from the bonds of sin. But although a sinner may be certain of God's mercy in granting his grace to those who do their very best, he has no certainty that he has in fact done his very best. The standard required is a love of God for God's sake, that is, an undefiled love: *super omnia*. It is this last condition in particular which makes it practically impossible to know with certainty that one has really reached the stage of the *facere quod in se est*.⁹⁸

Fast forward to Luther again: Luther's early struggle was one over *super omnia*. No matter how sincere his love for God or his repentance of sin, Luther never knew if his thoughts, words, and actions were truly conceived out of an "undefiled love." He could see a million ways, real and hypothetical, his love might be defiled by the remaining residue of his sinful nature. That was an existential problem inherent in Biel's *pactum*. Supreme love for God—*amor dei super omnia*—is essential, but Luther found it impossible to attain.

We might also add that Biel's voluntarist system only created further distress for those who so rigorously applied it to the Christian's trust in the character of a gracious God. Biel claimed that God was absolutely free (i.e., *potentia Dei absoluta*) to establish or not establish a covenant by which man might be accepted with God should he do his best. Nevertheless, once he entered into such a covenant, he was obligated to come through on the agreement of his *pactum* (ordinate power; *potentia Dei ordinata*).

Or was he? Could God even go back on his *pactum*? If God's will always has priority over his intellect, then what would stop God from prioritizing his absolute freedom rather than continuing with the *pactum* that binds

him to certain salvific benefits? Could God decide, according to *potentia Dei absoluta*, that he might remove justifying grace at some point? Oberman and McGrath, both examining Biel's *pactum*, think not, and they would be right.⁹⁹ However, at a popular level the application of the *via moderna* in late medieval Europe may not have been so careful when handling such nuances.

It is conceivable that for the average late medieval Christian, a voluntarist God would be difficult to reconcile with absolute assurance of salvation in the Christian life. Luther's existential crisis, he believed, was proof enough. And as he witnessed at the pastoral level, the combination of voluntarism and justification could potentially create untold angst in the those seriously committed to doing their best. Would a lifetime of striving to achieve one's best be undermined should God change his will on a whim? Technically, based on Scotus, Ockham, and Biel, the answer is "no." But pastorally, what was to keep the average medieval Christian from taking a voluntarist conception to its logical extreme, wondering (worrying) if God would, in the end, honor his *pactum*? These are the types of questions that rationally flowed out of a *via moderna* mentality, regardless of whether the *via moderna* believed in their validity. Lutheran theologian Korey Maas highlights just how problematic the situation had become:

Thus, at least in theory, God could justify sinners even without the bestowal of his grace and their subsequent cooperation. Further, and more worryingly, the opposite was also understood to be the case: being bound by no necessity, God might deny salvation even to those who cooperate with the grace he has provided. Ockham's reasoning, following that of his predecessor Duns Scotus, was that "nothing created must, for reasons intrinsic to it, be accepted by God." That is, neither grace nor one's cooperation with it are deserving of salvation in and of themselves; they are accepted and rewarded only because God has voluntarily agreed to do so. Ultimately, then, one's salvation was understood to be dependent not only upon divine grace together with human cooperation but also, and most fundamentally, upon God's keeping his promise to regard these as meriting eternal life.¹⁰⁰

Only when Luther abandoned the anthropological and soteriological presuppositions of the *via moderna* altogether and discovered instead that one

is justified not by doing one's best but through faith alone, did Luther then possess assurance of his right standing with God. Or as Grimm says,

Such certainty came only with his discovery of justification by faith alone. This basic insight led him to repudiate scholasticism as a whole. Because he believed that it actually hindered God's work of saving man he vehemently attacked the schoolmen, Aristotle, and reason.¹⁰¹

One must forgive Luther if his rhetoric was aggressively anti-scholastic for he felt a heavy sense of disgust for the way its schoolmen and their heirs had led not only Luther but the church to hell (Luther was convinced that heaven and hell hung in the balance). Luther had imbibed its theology and his soul, by his own admission, was nearly damned in the process. Luther's breakthrough is often pictured in positive terms (he discovered *sola gratia* and *sola fide*), but it could equally be portrayed in negative terms (he discovered his reading of Paul had been skewed by the scholasticism others had taught him). While Luther's break with Biel may have had more to do with his understanding of law and gospel than a mature covenantalism, Luther had touched the raw nerve of the *via moderna*, exposing its instability.

In the variegated nexus of the Biel-Luther debate, that raw nerve and instability came down to one central issue: Biel assumed the power and freedom of the will. Lecturing on Romans, Luther not only came to a different conception of the righteousness of God but the unrighteousness of man as well. Consequently, Luther's greatest argument against Biel was the same argument he would put forward against Erasmus: the will is captive.¹⁰² Biel's entire covenantal, voluntarist view of justification crumbled with that one, anthropological premise, a premise Luther was absolutely sure originated not merely from Augustine but from scripture itself. And scripture was, without a doubt, Luther's magisterial authority, as his turn to *sola scriptura* during those formative years manifests.¹⁰³

EARLY LUTHER: AUGUSTINIAN, BUT NOT YET PAULINE

We would be mistaken to conclude, however, that in his 1517 *Disputation* Luther had come to his mature understanding of forensic justification. Evidently Luther had converted to a different tribe, shifting away from the

via moderna to the *schola Augustiniana moderna* in some form. Doing so not only meant establishing the captivity of the will but recapturing the primacy, necessity, and sovereignty of grace.

Nevertheless, justification was still a *process* in which man was *made* righteous in his nature. That belief—which all medieval Christianity assumed—would quickly disintegrate the closer Luther approached excommunication from Rome. Even so, in his *Disputation* there are signs, though they be miniscule, that Luther has not yet reached his mature doctrine of justification. He writes:

40. We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds. This is opposition to the philosophers.¹⁰⁴
54. For an act to be meritorious, either the presence of grace is sufficient, or its presence means nothing. This in opposition to Gabriel.¹⁰⁵

One should not read too much into these theses since Luther's intent is more polemical than didactic. At the same time, they do serve as bench markers in Luther's journey to a forensic doctrine of justification, and it appears he has not yet arrived. Grace may be prevenient, primary, and even effectual in the Augustinian sense, but it does not exclude meritorious acts but enables them in the process of inner renewal. In a real sense, one must "become righteous."

Luther corrects Biel's *ordo*, crediting God, not man: "having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds." The righteousness of God, therefore, is a gift, a notion present one or two years earlier in Luther's lectures on Romans (1515-1516).¹⁰⁶ Still, justification, is an intrinsic transformation, an assumption Luther will eventually abandon when, through Paul, he comes to see that justification cannot be the renovation of one's nature. Instead, it is a change in one's status, a legal declaration that one is righteous on account of the righteousness of another, namely, Christ. If justification and sanctification were not always distinguished in medieval thought, the Reformers would refine the two, noting their distinction, though without sacrificing their inseparability. That starts with Luther.

Exactly when Luther arrived at his mature, forensic doctrine of justification and imputation is disputed. In a recent study, however, Korey Maas makes a strong case that it did not happen until 1518 or later. Maas supports his

claim by pointing to Luther's lectures on Hebrews which, like his lectures on Romans, still teach a "progressive and sanative scheme formulated by Augustine and embraced by virtually all medieval theologians."¹⁰⁷ As Luther says in those lectures, the ungodly are righteous "not because they are, but because they have begun to be and should become people of this kind by making constant progress."¹⁰⁸ By 1521, however, Luther switched his definition of grace from "an inherent quality or substance by which one is prepared to become righteous" to "favor of God," language present in Luther's work *Against Latomus*.¹⁰⁹

What pushed Luther beyond such an Augustinian conception of the medieval era to an altogether different paradigm? Maas is persuaded it was the addition of Philipp Melancthon to the Wittenberg faculty, a claim that strikes against 20th century Luther scholarship that attempted to read discontinuity between the two reformers, but one consistent with older Luther scholarship that defended continuity.

The impetus for this sudden change almost certainly lay with the recently arrived Melancthon, who from at least 1520 was making the case for understanding grace as God's favor or good will. He did so perhaps most clearly in the same year that Luther first embraced this definition, in the first edition of his *Loci Communes*, where he wrote that "the word 'grace' does not mean some quality in us, but rather the very will of God, or the goodwill of God toward us." This articulation in Melancthon's *Loci* is significant not only because this work may justifiably be considered the first "systematic theology" of the Reformation but also because it profoundly influenced Luther, who regularly expressed his unreserved agreement with it, going so far as to assert hyperbolically that it deserved to be canonized.¹¹⁰

Maas goes on to give an extensive defense of this claim by appealing to Luther's dependence upon Melancthon for his interpretation of Hebrews 11, a chapter which would move Luther to rethink the biblical definition of *pistis*, faith.

As Luther progressively redefined grace and faith, as well as the righteousness of God, his doctrine of justification transitioned from a process to a declaration, from infusion to imputation, and from active to passive righteousness. Though ungodly, he who looks not to his own works but trusts (*sola fide*) in the perfect work of Christ alone (*solus Christus*) not

only has the total penalty of his sins forgiven but has imputed to him a new status, namely, the righteous status of the infallible Mediator. With imputation, justification now became instantaneous and forensic, rather than a gradual, metaphysical renewal. Luther writes in his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*,

But [contrary to the scholastics] this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteousness but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others, listed above, are active. For here we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely, God. Therefore it is appropriate to call the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness “passive.”¹¹¹

A forensic notion of imputation was the key that opened heaven’s paradise because it provided Luther with the very thing he could not find no matter how many times he did his best, namely, Christian assurance.

Therefore the afflicted conscience has no remedy against despair and eternal death except to take hold of the promise of grace offered in Christ, that is, this righteousness of faith, this passive or Christian righteousness, which says with confidence: “I do not seek active righteousness. I ought to have and perform it; but I declare that even if I did have it and perform it, I cannot trust in it or stand up before the judgment of God on the basis of it. Thus I put myself beyond all active righteousness, all righteousness of my own or of the divine Law, and I embrace only that passive righteousness which is the righteousness of grace, mercy, and the forgiveness of sins.” In other words, this is the righteousness of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, which we do not perform but receive, which we do not have but accept, when God the Father grants it to us through Jesus Christ.¹¹²

After an early struggle attempting to apply Biel’s justification theology to the Christian life, only to lose Christian assurance in the process, Luther had found peace with God and it came outside of himself (that is, *extra nos*), though never outside of his Savior (*extra Christum*).

FACIENTIBUS QUOD IN SE EST DEUS NON DENEGAT GRATIAM: GOOD NEWS?

Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam—God does not withhold his grace from those who do their very best.¹¹³ To Biel, that motto is good news. God will give grace; just do one's very best. For Luther, that motto is a death sentence, the worst news possible. Not only can one never know if he has done his best, but the scriptural witness is unambiguous: man has not the spiritual ability to do his best to begin with. The only possible outcome is damnation. Luther hated God because God hung grace out like the sweet nectar of a flower in front of a hummingbird, an illustration Biel cherished in preaching to his parishioners. Yet Luther knew from watching his parishioners run to the indulgence tables what a false hope that proved to be. As promising as the nectar may be, the bird cannot fly.

For the bird to fly, an alternative paradigm was necessary, and it would prove revolutionary for Luther and all Protestantism to follow. Biel was correct that a divine *pactum* was essential if justification was to be gracious. However, Biel fundamentally erred by concluding that the *pactum* must be contingent upon man doing his very best, an impossibility for an enslaved will. Rather, the success of the *pactum* depended entirely upon the best of another, one who could obey the law perfectly in the place of the ungodly. So worthy, so perfect, and so inherently valuable and sufficient are the works of this substitute that God need not turn a blind eye to justice or prioritize his will in order to accept that which is inherently unacceptable. The obedience of the Son is counted perfectly sufficient by the Father, enabling him, as Paul says, to be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). Justification, in the end, was based on works, but, contrary to Biel, Luther discovered it was not the works of man but the works of the God-man, the sinless high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ alone was the gospel to be found. Should that good news be weighed down, even in the slightest way, by the works of man, it will cease to be good news at all.

There is a clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public ... this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and

salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.¹¹⁴

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- ¹ E.g., “Summary Instruction for Indulgence Preachers,” and “John Tetzel: A Sermon [1517],” in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (rev. ed., New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 14-18, 19-21.
- ² For example, consult Robert Holcot, “Lectures on the Wisdom of Solomon,” in *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (ed. Heiko Oberman; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 142-150.
- ³ Oberman, *Forerunners*, 137.
- ⁴ Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 157.
- ⁵ See Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei*, ed. Henry Savile (Frankfurt: Gruyter, 1964), 1.42. One of the best studies is Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians: A Study of His “De Causa Dei” and Its Opponents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 69. Heiko A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 64-112.
- ⁶ “Idle and a fool in God’s wisdom, I was misled by an unorthodox error at a time when I was still pursuing philosophical studies. Sometimes I went to listen to the theologians discussing this matter [of grace and free will], and the school of Pelagius seemed to me nearest the truth. ... In the philosophical faculty I seldom heard a reference to grace, except for some ambiguous remarks. What I heard day in and day out was that we are masters of our own free acts, that ours is the choice to act well or badly, to have virtues or sins and much more along this line. ... every time I listened to the Epistle reading in church and heard how Paul magnified grace and belittled free will—as is the case in Romans 9, ‘It is obviously not a question of human will and effort, but of divine mercy,’ and its many parallels—grace displeased me, ungrateful as I was.” Then something changed. “However, even before I transferred to the faculty of theology, the text mentioned came to me as a beam of grace and, captured by a vision of the truth, it seemed I saw from afar how the grace of God precedes all good works with a temporal priority [God as Savior through predestination] and natural precedence [God continues to provide for His creation as ‘first mover’]. ... That is why I express my gratitude to Him who has given me this grace as a free gift.” *De Causa Dei*, Book II, ch. 32, p. 613; as quoted in Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners*, 135.
- ⁷ All such details can be found in fuller form in Oberman, *Forerunners*, 136.
- ⁸ Heiko A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe* (trans. Dennis Martin; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 70-71; idem, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 151-64. Trapp calls Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) “the first Augustinian of Augustine.” Damasus Trapp, “Augustinian Theology of the Fourteenth Century,” *Augustiniana* 6 (1956), 181.
- ⁹ Frank A. James III, “Peter Martyr Vermigli,” in *The Reformation Theologians* (ed. Carter Lindberg; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 205. Also see John P. Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Frank A. James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Inheritance of an Italian Reformer* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); idem, “Peter Martyr Vermigli: At the Crossroads of Late Medieval Scholasticism, Christian Humanism and Resurgent Augustinianism,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 62-78; Frank A. James, “A Late Medieval Parallel in Reformation Thought: Gemina Praedestinatio in Gregory of Rimini and Peter Martyr Vermigli,” in *Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation* (ed. Heiko A. Oberman and Frank A. James; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 157-88; Gordon Leff, *Gregory of Rimini: Tradition and Innovation in Fourteenth Century Thought* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1961). On Rimini’s influence upon Luther and Calvin, see Heiko A. Oberman, “Headwaters of the Reformation,” in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era* (ed. Heiko A. Oberman; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 40-88; Alister E. McGrath, “John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought: A Study in Late Medieval Influence upon Calvin’s Theological Development,” *ARH* 77 (1986): 58-78; Robert

- Spieler, "Luther and Gregory of Rimini," *LQ 5* (1953): 160.
- ¹⁰ See Oberman, *Forerunners*, 137.
- ¹¹ *LW 31*: 322.
- ¹² Gabriel Biel, "The Circumcision of the Lord," in *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 173.
- ¹³ Emphasis added. Biel, "The Circumcision of the Lord," 173.
- ¹⁴ Why dangerous? McGrath answers: "Thomas rejected the opinion that *iustitia Dei* is merely an arbitrary aspect of the divine will. To assert that *iustitia* ultimately depends upon the will of God amounts to the blasphemous assertion that God does not operate according to the order of wisdom. Underlying *iustitia* is *sapientia*, discernible to the intellect, so that the ultimate standard of justice must be taken to be right reason." Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85.
- ¹⁵ I hesitate to use the word "cooperate" because it might give the impression that Thomas is a synergist like many in the late medieval or post-Reformation eras. Thomas's predestination theology would preclude such an assumption. The language of cooperation is only meant to acknowledge the role of man's responsible agency.
- ¹⁶ *Aquinas on Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica* (ed. A. M. Fairweather; Library of Christian Classics; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 159-60 (in the *Summa*: 12ae, Q. 110, Art. 2). Also consult Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ¹⁷ E.g., *In II Sent.* dist. xxviii q. 1 a.4 and 4um; *In IV Sent.* dist. xvii q. 1 aa.3-4. See *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum* (ed. W. Werbeck and U. Hoffman; 4 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1973-84).
- ¹⁸ Oberman, *Forerunners*, 130. Contrary to some who think Aquinas is contradicting himself, McGrath demonstrates that a change in Aquinas's view of nature and grace has occurred. See *Iustitia Dei*, 110-111.
- ¹⁹ E.g., *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae q. 112 a. 3; IaIIae q. 109 a. 6 ad 2um.
- ²⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 112.
- ²¹ McGrath stresses such a point, arguing that it is a misinterpretation of Aquinas to take that final step—remission of sin—and assume justification is forensic. "Some commentators have misunderstood Thomas' occasional definition of justification solely in terms of remission of sin, representing him as approaching a forensic concept of justification. It will be clear that this is a serious misunderstanding. Where Thomas defines justification as *remissio peccatorum*, therefore, he does not exclude other elements—such as the infusion of grace—for the following reasons. First, justification is thus defined without reference to its content, solely in terms of its *terminus*. Such a definition is adequate, but not exhaustive, and should not be treated as if it were. Second, Thomas' understanding of the *processus iustificationis* means that the occurrence of any one of the four elements necessarily entails the occurrence of the remaining three. The definition of *iustificatio* as *remissio peccatorum* therefore expressly includes the remaining three elements." The four elements McGrath references are: (1) The infusion of grace; (2) The movement of the free will directed towards God through faith; (3) The movement of the free will directed against sin; (4) The remission of sin. McGrath has in mind *Summa*, IaIIae q. 113 a. 8; IaIIae q. 113 a. 6; IaIIae q. 113 a. 6 ad 1um. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 64.
- ²² "Gabriel Biel insists upon the priority of the divine will over any moral structures by declaring that God's will is essentially independent of what is right or wrong; if the divine will amounted to a mere endorsement of what is good or right, God's will would thereby be subject to created principles of morality. What is good, therefore, is good only if it is accepted as such by God. The divine will is thus the chief arbiter and principle of justice, establishing justice by its decisions, rather than acting on the basis of established justice. Morality and merit alike derive from the divine will, in that the goodness of an act must be defined, not in terms of the act itself, but in terms of the *divine estimation of that act*. Duns Scotus had established the general voluntarist principle, that every created offering to God is worth precisely whatever God accepts it for. ... Applying this principle to the passion of Christ and the redemption of humankind, Scotus points out that a good angel could have made satisfaction in Christ's place, had God chosen to accept its offering as having sufficient value: the merit of Christ's passion lies solely in the *acceptation divina*." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 86. In view is: Gabriel Biel, *Canonis missae expositio* 23E (ed. Heiko Oberman and W.J. Courtenay, 4 vols.; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1963-67), 1.212; *In I Sent.* dist. xliii q. 1 a. 4 cor., in *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum* (ed. W. Werbeck and U. Hoffman, 4 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1973-84), 1.746.5-7; *In II Sent.* Dist. xxvii q. 1 a. 3 dub. 4, in *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum*, ed. W. Werbeck and U. Hoffman, 2.253.7-9. As for Scotus: *Opus Oxoniense* III dist. xix q. 1 n. 7.
- ²³ Oberman, *Forerunners*, 129.
- ²⁴ Biel, "The Circumcision of the Lord," 173.
- ²⁵ Gabriel Biel, *In II Sententiarum* dist. xxvii q. unica art. 3 conc. 4; in *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum* ed. W. Werbeck and U. Hofmann, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973-84), 517.1-8. Latin translation comes from Alister

- E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader* (4th ed.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 6.30.
- ²⁶ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 132. Hence Oberman will summarize Biel: "After the fall man is still able to detest sin and seek refuge with God with his own powers, without the help of any form of grace. This, of course, does not exclude God's general *concursus* in every deed, god, bad or indifferent, since without this 'natura' energy man would not be able to act at all" (175).
- ²⁷ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 128.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-31.
- ³¹ Biel, "The Circumcision of the Lord," 168.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Biel clarifies, "It is assumed of meritorious work that the person who performs it is accepted, since the acts of a person who has not been accepted or of an enemy cannot please God." Biel, "The Circumcision of the Lord," 169.
- ³⁷ "This grace prompts us to love God above all things and in all things, that is, to seek after the glory of God as the goal of every action, and to prefer the ultimate good, God, ahead of one's self and everything else. Therefore, all those things which are not directed consciously or unconsciously toward God do not come from the prompting of grace and therefore are surely not worthy of eternal life." "The Circumcision of the Lord," 169.
- ³⁸ And again: "Moreover, without grace it is absolutely impossible for him to love God meritoriously. Such is the rule established by God that no act should be accepted as meritorious unless it be prompted by grace." "The Circumcision of the Lord," 170.
- ³⁹ Biel appeals to Augustine for support, especially Augustine's illustration of a rider and a horse. It is doubtful Augustine would have agreed with how Biel is appropriating him. "The Circumcision of the Lord," 170.
- ⁴⁰ "The Circumcision of the Lord," 171.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 172.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 173.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 194-195.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 140, 152. Oberman, elsewhere, adds a key clarification as to how Biel understands "grace": "The most important point to be kept in mind for the further presentation of Biel's doctrine of justification is the conclusion that when Biel discusses the necessity of grace in the process of justification, its relation to man's free will, and its relation to the *ex opera operato* efficacy of the sacraments, he has always the *gratia gratum faciens* in mind—by which the sinner is made acceptable to God—and is not thinking of another kind of grace, traditionally often called *gratia gratis data*, the grace of divine vocation, by which the sinner is provided with the proper disposition for the reception of the *gratia gratum faciens*. Biel denies that the sinner would be incapable of providing such a disposition with his own power by doing good works." Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 140.
- ⁴⁷ Oberman, *Forerunners*, 184.
- ⁴⁸ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 41-42.
- ⁴⁹ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 164.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 170.
- ⁵² Strictly speaking, then, Biel "rejects the idea that a sinner is able to earn the first grace *de condigno*: neither with an act that precedes nor with an act caused by this first grace can he do so." We might add, according to Oberman's chart, that *meritum de congruo* is another matter. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 171.
- ⁵³ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 176-77.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 177. Later, Oberman observes how Biel's Pelagianism makes a doctrine of predestination non-existent. "As we can gather from the absence of any discussion of predestination in his sermons, this doctrine does not really function in Biel's theology. This should not surprise us. It is the traditional task of the doctrine of predestination proper to form a protective wall around the doctrine of justification by grace alone—a doctrine which does not necessarily imply justification by faith alone. Since we have found that Biel teaches an essentially Pelagian doctrine of justification, absolute predestination is not only superfluous but would even be obstructive. And seen against the background of his doctrine of justification, we can well understand that foreordination would in Biel's hands

- have to be transformed into foreknowledge" (196).
- ⁵⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 99-100.
- ⁵⁶ "As Biel himself makes clear, his discussion of the role of individuals in their own justification must be set within the context of the divine *pactum*. The requirement of a minimum response on the part of the humans of the divine offer of grace is totally in keeping with the earlier Franciscan school's teaching, such as that of Alexander of Hales or Bonaventure. Biel has simply placed his theology of a minimum human response to the divine initiative in justification on a firmer foundation in the theology of the *pactum*, thereby safeguarding God from the charge of capriciousness." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 100.
- ⁵⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 101
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 149, 1.
- ⁶³ Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 36.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ WA 4.262.4-7 (cf. 3.288.37 – 289.4). Translation is McGrath's: *Iustitia Dei*, 116. Also cf. Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms II*, in *LW* 11:396.
- ⁶⁶ WA 55 L.70.9-11. McGrath comments, "Luther here produces the key aspects of Biel's understanding of *iustitia Dei*: *iustitia* is understood to be based upon divine equity, which looks solely to the merits of humans in determining their reward within the framework established by the covenant. The doctors of the church rightly teach that, when people do their best (*quod in se est*), God infallibly gives grace (*hinc recte dicunt doctores, quod homini facienti quod in se est, Deus infallibiliter dat gratiam*). Luther's theological breakthrough is intimately connected with his discovery of a new meaning of the 'righteousness of God', and it is important to appreciate that his earlier works are characterized by the teaching of the *via moderna* upon this matter. Luther's later view that anyone attempting to do *quod in se est* sinned mortally remains notionally within this framework, while ultimately subverting its theological plausibility." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 88-89. Cf. WA 4.262.4-5.
- ⁶⁷ For an extensive study comparing Biel and Luther, see L. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam 1517* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962).
- ⁶⁸ On this point, see Korey D. Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary* (ed., Matthew Barrett; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 517-18.
- ⁶⁹ Harold J. Grimm, "Introduction" to "Disputation to Scholastic Theology," in *LW* 31:6.
- ⁷⁰ Luther, "Disputation to Scholastic Theology," in *LW* 31:9 (thesis 4).
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31:9 (thesis 5).
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 31:9 (thesis 6).
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 31:9 (thesis 7).
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31:9 (thesis 8).
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31:9 (theses 9, 10).
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 11).
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 13).
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 14).
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 16).
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 17).
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 18).
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 20, 21). Luther adds in thesis 23: "Nor is it true that an act of concupiscence can be set aright by the virtue of hope. This in opposition to Gabriel."
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31:10 (thesis 26).
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 27).
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 28).
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 29).
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 30).
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 33).
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 31:11 (thesis 39).
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31:13 (thesis 55).
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 31:13.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 31:15.

- ⁹³ Ibid., 31:14.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 31:15 (thesis 87, 88).
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 31:12 (thesis 89).
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 31:15.
- ⁹⁷ Harold J. Grimm, "Introduction" to "Disputation to Scholastic Theology," in *LW* 31:6.
- ⁹⁸ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 133.
- ⁹⁹ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 169-72; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 87.
- ¹⁰⁰ Korey D. Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," 516.
- ¹⁰¹ Grimm, "Introduction," in *LW* 31:6.
- ¹⁰² See my lengthy treatment of the Luther-Erasmus debate: Matthew Barrett, "The Bondage and Liberation of the Will," in *Reformation Theology*, 451-510. There I explore the type of freedom Luther affirmed. It was not Biel's "inalienable spontaneity" as Oberman calls it. See Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 161.
- ¹⁰³ See Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 33-52.
- ¹⁰⁴ Luther, "Disputation to Scholastic Theology," in *LW* 31:12 (thesis 40).
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 31:13 (thesis 54).
- ¹⁰⁶ E.g., Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, in *LW* 25:496.
- ¹⁰⁷ Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," 519.
- ¹⁰⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews*, in *LW* 29:139.
- ¹⁰⁹ Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," 519. See Martin Luther, *Against Latomus*, in *LW* 32:227.
- ¹¹⁰ Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," 519, quoting Philipp Melancthon, *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521), in *Melancthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck, trans. Lowell J. Satre, LCC 19 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 87.
- ¹¹¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, in *LW* 26:5-6.
- ¹¹² Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, in *LW* 26:5-6.
- ¹¹³ Or: *Facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*—God does not deny grace to the person who does what is in him.
- ¹¹⁴ *LW* 26:3.

A Treasure Above All Treasures: Martin Luther on Dying Well

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In the early morning hours of February 18, 1546, Martin Luther (1483–1546) lay dying in the town where he was born, miles away from his beloved family. His room at the Eisleben inn was crowded with witnesses hastily gathered by his friend and associate Justus Jonas (1493–1555). Anxious questions filled their heads: Would the great terrorizer of Rome finally recant or would he willfully die outside of the Church? Would he hold fast to his Evangelical confession or would he call for a priest to administer extreme unction? Would he demonstrate peace with God by remaining calm and fearless in the face of death; or would the Devil himself snatch the old Doctor from this life without warning? Every minute of his final hours was faithfully recorded for posterity; every statement dutifully confirmed by the witnesses.¹ The future of the Reformation itself seemed to hang in the balance. As twentieth-century biographer Heiko A. Oberman explains, “The deathbed in the Eisleben inn had become a stage; and straining their ears to catch Luther’s last words were enemies as well as friends.”²

What they eventually heard has echoed down through the centuries. Two days prior to his death, Luther produced his last written statement, which

ended in the famous line: “We are beggars: this is true.”³ In his final moments, he offered himself to God, reciting the words of Psalm 31:5 in a three-fold repetition: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth.”⁴ Then, as he closed his eyes for the final time and grew quiet, Jonas and his colleague Michael Coelius (1492–1559) leaned in to ask one final question, “Reverend Father, do you wish to die, standing up for Christ and for the Teaching that you have preached?” Without reservation, Luther uttered one final confession of faith, “Yes.”⁵

Carl Trueman captures the symbolic significance of this moment when he says, “It was a quintessential Protestant end: faith in the Word—no final unction, last rites, or final communion ... Indeed, his own way of dying exemplified how he had himself transformed pastoral care and, indeed, the piety of dying.”⁶ This article utilizes Trueman’s reflection on Luther’s final moments as a starting point. Just how exactly did Martin Luther transform the piety of dying? How did a former monk in service to the Church come to reject its rituals and what did he commend in their place? This article explores these questions by considering the general approach to death in the Middle Ages, by examining Luther’s writings on the subject, and by seeking to reconstruct how the great reformer administered pastoral care to the sick and dying. By applying Reformation doctrines to the deathbed, Luther helped the dying discover assurance of salvation not in their own efforts but through faith in the finished work of Christ.

DEATH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

According to Johan Huizinga, no other epoch of history “has laid so much stress on the thought of death” as the late Middle Ages.⁷ This preoccupation was somewhat understandable given the high mortality rates throughout Europe at the time. Beginning in the fourteenth century, plagues terrorized the continent at regular intervals. During an outbreak, a person could be seemingly healthy one day and in his grave but a few days later. Unreliable medicine, lack of personal hygiene, and poor living conditions further contributed to the early deaths of many, creating a morbid uncertainty that hung like a cloud over everyday life.

The grim reality of death found its way into the art and literature of the period. The “death dance” was a common scene depicted in paintings and

woodcuts, which usually included a skeletal figure dragging a person to the grave.⁸ According to Huizinga, the image was intended to teach “the frailty and vanity of earthly things” in addition to “social equality as the Middle Ages understood it.”⁹ Death would eventually come to all; so it was wise to be ready. Handbooks on how to prepare for death, known broadly as the *ars moriendi* (“art of dying”) were prevalent throughout the era. Recent studies suggest that these works were rooted in the late medieval doctrine of the uncertainty of salvation and in the belief that individuals could merit salvation through their own choices.¹⁰

The certainty of death and the ambiguity of the afterlife led to widespread fear and various attempts to explain the terrors of the age. The plagues were traced back to the wrath of God. Unforeseen accidents were viewed as the Devil’s work. The manner of a man’s death became a verdict on his life. This context led naturally to the rise of the Roman Catholic practice of extreme unction. Dying well seemed more important than ever before.

By Luther’s day, extreme unction was looked to as a final opportunity for absolution before death, but the general practice of anointing with oil did not always have this association. The ancient Israelites anointed the body with the hope of physical healing (e.g., Isa 1:6; Lev 14:15–18; Ps 103:3). In the NT, James prescribed a specific method for anointing and praying for a sick person’s recovery, suggesting a relationship between the health of the body and the health of the soul (James 5:13–16). As Brian C. Brewer demonstrates, over time the pastoral call to anoint the sick became conflated with the promise of spiritual healing through penance.¹¹

In the ninth century, Bishop Theodulf of Orleans (750–821) developed specific instructions for anointing the body of a sick person that included directives on how to spiritually prepare for death. Among other things, he recommended reciting the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and making the sign of the cross in order to ward off demonic activity.¹² According to Brewer, this method “gradually became the predominant view in the Middle Ages” as the Christian call to anoint the sick became synonymous with the administration of last rites.¹³

In time, these last rites—or *extrema unctio* as first termed by Peter Lombard (1100–1160)—were believed to absolve all sin before death. By the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) articulated the following as the accepted position of the Church: “We must say that the principal effect

of this sacrament is the remission of sin as to its remnants, and consequently even as to its guilt.”¹⁴ This notion was codified in the Council of Florence’s Decree for the Armenians in 1439 and became standard Roman Catholic practice throughout Europe.

In addition to extreme unction, various superstitions began to surround the deathbed itself. Some believed that repeating particular verses of Scripture with one’s final breaths could ensure forgiveness of sins.¹⁵ In Germany, individuals looked to relics, pilgrimages to sacred sites, and even magic to ward off whatever devilish activity might hinder the path to heaven.¹⁶ Recognizing that death threatened to call at any moment, the people of the Middle Ages were hungry for whatever hope and assurance they could find.

This is the world in which Martin Luther came of age. He grew up hearing folk tales of the devil’s trickery. He watched plagues sweep through Wittenberg on three separate occasions.¹⁷ In his youth, he famously made a covenant with a saint to become a monk if only she would spare his life. As Theodore G. Tappert notes, “A sense of the nearness of death . . . played a prominent part in [his] life.”¹⁸ While Luther would eventually transcend such notions, he first absorbed them.

In many ways, Luther was, as Timothy George remarks, “just like everyone else, only more so.”¹⁹ His tender conscience would not settle for the superstitions of his day. So when he embraced the gospel of justification by faith alone, it naturally led to change. According to Ernst Walter Zeeden, Luther found that “everything—polity, worship, and law—had to be transformed or reshaped in such a way that it was consonant with the new doctrine or at least did not contradict it.”²⁰ The Christian’s approach to death was no different; but this change took time. A close look at Luther’s published works and pastoral correspondence reveals that as his theology developed, his understanding of the piety of dying transformed as well.

PUBLISHED WORKS

Fourteen Consolations

Luther’s first printed comments on the subject of death appeared in a short work entitled *Fourteen Consolations*, which he wrote to comfort Frederick III (1463–1525) when it seemed the Elector was near death.²¹ Although this treatise would not be published until 1520, Luther

composed it in August 1519, offering an early glimpse into how the reformer thought about death and dying. *Fourteen Consolations* takes its structure from a popular German legend of the Christ child surrounded by fourteen saints, each of whom is assigned to ward off a particular disease. Luther employed the framework to highlight seven evils from which Christ has delivered the believer and seven blessings that Christians enjoy, even in the face of death. Combined, these fourteen consolations provide a “literary altar screen” for the dying Christian to contemplate in his final hours.²²

Luther began with an emphasis on the role of the Word as the root of the Christian’s comfort, noting that true consolation is “to be drawn from the Holy Scriptures.”²³ The Word calls the Christian to keep both suffering and blessing ever before him, regardless of circumstances (cf. Ecclesiasticus 11:25). In the first half of the work, Luther endeavored to put the Elector’s suffering in a proper perspective by focusing on seven evils. This was not a diversion but an application of Luther’s theology of the cross to his sovereign’s present affliction. At the cross, Jesus “consecrated and hallowed all suffering” so that “death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing, and shame the mother of glory.”²⁴ As the believer reflects on the evils within and around him, he should see how his own difficulties pale in comparison to what Christ endured, and recognize that the death and resurrection of Jesus triumphs over all suffering.

In the second half of the work, Luther considered seven blessings offered through Christ’s transformation of death. For the believer, death can be called a blessing because it helps a person appreciate grace, promises an end to earthly struggles, and begins eternal joy. Such conclusions are the fruit of meditating on the blessings available through the risen Lord, where “the heart can find its supreme joy and lasting possessions.”²⁵

Luther’s approach to consoling Elector Frederick was to call him to fix his eyes on the finished work of Christ. As Jane Strohl summarizes, “This whole treatise is concerned with what one sees.”²⁶ However, Luther did not want his reader looking to the saints or to relics for help. Frederick was renowned for his extensive collection of relics, which numbered over nineteen-thousand at the time and claimed to include such items as a fragment of the crown of thorns and some of Mary’s milk.²⁷ At this stage in his career, Luther did not directly oppose the possession of such relics but instead steered his reader

away from hoping in them: “For you there are far greater merits, rewards, and blessings in these sufferings than in those relics.”²⁸ In sum, Luther encouraged his Elector to look to the agony of Christ to put his own suffering in perspective and as his ultimate hope to triumph over death.²⁹

A Sermon on Preparing to Die

Luther’s first published statement on extreme unction was actually an affirmation of the practice. In the summer of 1519, George Spalatin (1484–1545) asked Luther to send a word of encouragement to one of Elector Frederick’s counselors named Mark Schart, who was particularly distressed about the thought of dying. It took several months and a follow-up request before Luther was able to pen a response, but he eventually obliged, composing a lengthy sermon addressed to the troubled man.³⁰ While he adapted the genre to fit his own theology and purposes, Luther’s *Sermon on Preparing to Die* was a conscious contribution to (and reformation of) the *ars moriendi* tradition.³¹

The work moved swiftly through twenty specific injunctions aimed at helping a person prepare for an honorable death. Ever the practical thinker, Luther first counseled Schart to order his temporal goods and make amends with anyone whom he had wronged. Then, Luther turned his primary attention to preparing the soul to meet God. Whereas the *ars moriendi* tradition tended to focus on the readiness of the individual, Luther highlighted the merits of the sacraments themselves: “We must occupy ourselves much more with the sacraments and their virtues than with our sins.”³² Contra popular opinion in his day, Luther did not consider the efficacy of the sacraments dependent upon the recipient’s worthiness, but instead on the sure promises of God.³³ Here, Luther offered a depth of consolation that he believed was lacking in the *ars moriendi* literature.³⁴ He understood that thoughts about death, sin, and hell were terrifying. So, he counseled his reader to turn his mind away from such realities and to “gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ” instead.³⁵ In Jesus, the believer would find one who not only conquered these evils but also provided a model for how to endure them. According to Austra Reinis, “Luther’s conviction that the Christian is to believe the promises of Christ, and to appropriate the benefits of Christ’s work, sets Luther apart from much of the *ars moriendi* tradition.”³⁶

How can a Christian fix his gaze on Jesus? Luther’s answer reveals his thinking on the role of the sacraments at this point. One should prepare for

death through “a sincere confession” and “with the holy Christian sacrament ... and with unction.”³⁷ On the one hand, it is perhaps not surprising that Luther would still affirm unction at this stage. However, a letter written to Spalatin dated December 18 of the same year reveals that his views on the subject were quickly changing. That fall, Luther worked on a series of sermons on the sacraments, but after addressing penance, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, he determined not to continue with the other sacraments recognized at the time. In the letter to Spalatin, Luther explained why, articulating a seminal form of the position that he would publish in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* the following year.³⁸ It seems that Luther’s understanding on the sacraments developed throughout the latter half of 1519 as he took a closer look at what the Scriptures taught on the subject.

Even at this point, some of Luther’s mature theological positions are discernible in *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. Throughout the work, he emphasized both the objectivity of the sacrament and the necessity of personal faith. He considered the sacraments “a truly great comfort and at the same time a visible sign of divine intent.”³⁹ They possessed the power to ease the conscience and hold the attention of the dying believer, who might be tempted to fixate on the terrors of death instead. However, as Luther argued, “Faith must be present for a firm reliance and cheerful venturing on such signs and promises of God.”⁴⁰ No sacrament would be effective apart from personal faith. True comfort is found in not only receiving the sacrament but in esteeming it as God’s ordained means of grace. In this way, the sacraments function like the many other blessings God offers to his children in the midst of great trials. After recapping these blessings a final time, Luther ended the work with a note of encouragement: “Therefore, we ought to thank him with a joyful heart for showing us such wonderful, rich, and immeasurable grace and mercy against death, hell, and sin, and to laud and love his grace rather than fearing death so greatly.”⁴¹

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

The following year, Luther published his first extensive assault on the sacramental system in his famous polemic, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.⁴² Arguing that a true sacrament was a promise from God represented by a sign, Luther rejected the long-held belief that the NT established seven sacraments, which had been accepted Catholic teaching since the twelfth

century.⁴³ Luther found only two ceremonies that met his criteria for a sacrament: baptism and the bread. While much of the book focused on restoring proper observation of the Lord's Supper and baptism, Luther devoted a section to each of the other five practices to demonstrate why they were not sacraments. Regarding unction, Luther was unequivocal in his dismissal of the official position of the Church: "If ever folly has been uttered, it has been uttered especially on this subject."⁴⁴

From his perspective, the James 5 proof text was problematic. Notwithstanding his concerns about the book as a whole, Luther argued, "No apostle has the right on his own authority to institute a sacrament ... For this belongs to Christ alone."⁴⁵ Lombard had admitted as much in the twelfth century but argued that since the NT confirmed the practice, unction was still established by God.⁴⁶ Luther disagreed, citing how Paul dutifully passed along only what he "received of the Lord" to the Corinthian church concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23). Without such a divine promise in the text of Scripture, Luther saw no reason to admit unction as a sacrament.

He also took exception to the inconsistent application of the practice in his day. If unction truly possessed the power to effect healing, why relegate it only to the dying? Luther pointed out, "[James] says expressly: 'Is any one sick?' He does not say: 'Is any one dying?'"⁴⁷ By relegating unction to one's final hour, the Roman interpretation deprived countless sick persons of the proper benefits of this rite; furthermore, the passage seemed to suggest that this practice should lead to the person's recovery, not precede his death. If unction were truly effective, it would not signal the *extreme* end of life, but the beginning of healing. As Luther put it, "If it is extreme unction, it does not heal, but gives way to the disease; but if it heals, it cannot be extreme unction."⁴⁸

It is important to note that Luther did not dismiss the practice commended by James when it was properly understood and applied; he merely questioned its status as a sacrament. In his view, James was not calling for a priest to perform last rites over a dying person but was encouraging the church—and its leaders in particular—to pray in faith. Here Luther's burgeoning doctrine of the priesthood of all believers can be seen. Were God's people to exercise faith, Luther believed that God might indeed heal the sufferer. However, the practice set forth by James was different from the so-called sacrament of extreme unction "in form, use, power, [and] purpose."⁴⁹ Brewer summarizes

Luther's concern as follows: "By converting this simple yet powerful ministry of the faithful to one another into a sacerdotal and sacramental ritual for the dying, the popes and clerics ... [had commandeered] the common and honorable pastoral ministry of the church."⁵⁰ Luther believed that James was simply calling for the mature members of a congregation to pray with faith for the sick among them. As such, he pointed out that the blessings supposedly offered through this sacrament were actually available to anyone who "hears and believes the Word of God."⁵¹

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther dispelled the notion that extreme unction should be regarded as a sacrament without dismissing the practice altogether.⁵² He interpreted the Jacobean passage as a portrait of pastoral care, rather than as a prescription for last rites. He argued that the call to pray could be answered by any within the church and that suffering persons needed to be reminded of the hope of the gospel more than they needed a particular deathbed ceremony. Instead of looking to a priest to offer final absolution from sin, they should look to the finished work of Christ on the cross.

In his published works, Luther began to dismantle the system by which the Catholic Church prepared its congregants to die. In his pastoral writings, Luther reconstructed a new model rooted in the sufficiency of Christ and the assurance offered in the gospel of grace. If extreme unction was unnecessary, how exactly could a minister help a Christian die well? Luther never produced a manual to this end, but his correspondence and personal example provide sufficient evidence to understand how he would have answered the question.

PASTORAL WRITINGS AND KEY THEMES EMPHASIZED

Tappert observes that amid all of Luther's recognition as an ecclesial reformer and national hero, "It is sometimes forgotten that he was also—and above all else—a pastor and shepherd of souls."⁵³ As a pastor, Luther was frequently called upon to advise and console others. In many cases, these requests interrupted his work; yet the reformer demonstrated a remarkable willingness to administer pastoral care.⁵⁴ Luther's approach to dying well is visible in several key themes that often appeared in his counsel to the sick and the bereaved.

Look to Christ

In the winter of 1530, Luther was troubled over reports of his father's ill health. Ever the committed son, Luther would have gladly visited his father or allowed his parents to move in with his family if circumstances permitted, but in this case, a letter had to suffice. After expressing affection and recounting his prayers, Luther called on his father to look to Christ in the midst of his suffering. "He has such great power over sin and death," the son wrote, "that they cannot harm us, and he is so heartily true and kind that he cannot and will not forsake us, at least if we ask his help without doubting."⁵⁵ To encourage his father in the face of doubt, he reminded him that suffering for the sake of Christ was God's confirmation of his faith. If God willed for him to survive, he would grant him grace to accept a few more years in this "vale of tears."⁵⁶ If death was to come soon, Luther wanted his father to know that his passing was a small thing to God and should not be feared. Throughout the letter, Luther encouraged his father to look to Christ and his unfailing love:

He has proved his love in taking your sins upon himself and paying for them with his blood, as he tells you by the gospel. He has given you grace to believe by his Spirit, and has prepared and accomplished everything most surely, so that you need not care or fear any more, but only keep your heart strong and reliant on his Word and faith. If you do that, let him care for the rest. He will see to it that everything turns out well.⁵⁷

Luther's personal correspondence was consistent with the advice he gave in his published works. Rather than looking to penance or unction for comfort, he encouraged others to fix their thoughts on Christ and his power over death.

Rest in God's Purposes

Just over a year after his father died, Luther composed a similar final message to his other parent, who was now fatally ill. In this letter, Luther assumed the role of spiritual comforter, seeking to offer his mother the kind of consolation he would gladly speak to her in person if he could. In terms of understanding Luther's approach to preparing for death, few available documents are more helpful than this tender letter to his dying mother.

He first encouraged his mother to recognize that her suffering was God's

“gracious, fatherly chastisement,” and, as such, it was far less severe than the afflictions of the godless, certain other believers, or even Christ himself.⁵⁸ Luther often pointed to the agonies Christ endured to help believers put their own trials in perspective.⁵⁹ He counseled his mother to receive her suffering as from the hand of God and to rest in his will. In his other writings, Luther acknowledged various divine purposes at work in the difficulties of this life but he tended not to speculate on the specific reasons for particular events. As he explained to a father grieving over the death of his son, “It is enough for us that we have a gracious God. Why he permits this or that evil to befall us should not trouble us at all.”⁶⁰

After pointing to God’s greater purposes for her suffering, Luther reminded his mother that Christ was more than a mere example to follow; he was the true foundation to her faith. The remainder of the letter focused on Jesus’ words in John 16:33: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” This statement grounded the believer’s hope in Christ’s victory over the devil, sin, and death. If his mother were to waver in this hope, she would be restoring the tyranny of these conquered foes. Instead, Luther imagined how his mother might set her heart at rest by speaking boldly to her greatest fears: “Dear death, dear sin, how is it that you are alive and terrify me? Do you not know that you have been overcome? Do you, death, not know that you are quite dead?”⁶¹ Thus, Luther counseled his mother to set her heart at rest in God’s sovereignty over suffering and Christ’s victory over death.

The Word and the Sacraments

Resting in God provided freedom from the superstitious practices of the day. In a 1524 letter to an Austrian nobleman, Luther urged a grieving man to stop his daily masses and vigils for the soul of his deceased wife, for such “unchristian practices ... greatly anger God.”⁶² Reflecting his own development on an issue that he was ambivalent about just a few years prior, Luther sounded off against the practice without reservation:

Such vigils are a mockery of God ... It is a shameful and terrible thing that men should be so bold as to change this and other institutions of God from a sacrament for the living into a good work and a sacrifice for the dead. Beware of this. Do not be a participant in this horrible error which priests and monks have invented ... to get money and property without helping either the dead or the living.⁶³

In the place of such rituals, Luther counseled the grieving to seek consolation in the Scriptures, especially the Psalms.⁶⁴ To his dying father, Luther had recommended Psalm 91 in particular, which he considered ideal to read to the sick.⁶⁵ He hoped that his father's pastor would be called to his side for this purpose.⁶⁶ Though he dismissed the necessity of extreme unction, Luther saw great value in having a minister present at one's death. Upon hearing that Erasmus (1466–1536) had rejected such an offer on his deathbed, Luther exclaimed: "God forbid that in my last hour I shouldn't want to have a godly minister of the Word, that I couldn't summon the nearest one at hand, that I shouldn't want to thank God!"⁶⁷ In response to an inquiry from a neighboring pastor about the minister's responsibility to his people during an outbreak of the plague, Luther highlighted the importance of pastoral care: "In time of death one is especially in need of the ministry which can strengthen and comfort one's conscience with God's Word and Sacrament in order to overcome death with faith."⁶⁸

When properly understood, Luther sought to help others focus their attention on the objective promises found in the Lord's Supper in their final hours. He did not think it necessary to take the sacrament a final time, but he saw great value in calling to mind the blessings it offered. In his letter to his mother, he pointed out the true hope she possessed in contrast to the papal errors she had left behind. As Luther explained, the Catholic Church ignorantly taught people to rely on their own works, on the mother of God, and on the saints because they considered Christ "a severe judge and tyrant."⁶⁹ The gospel, by contrast, presented Jesus as "our mediator, our throne of grace, and our bishop before God in heaven."⁷⁰ For Luther, these spiritual realities were manifested in this world by the sacraments. So, he wrote to his mother, "In the gospel, in Baptism and in the Sacrament [of the Altar] you possess his sign and seal of this vocation, and as long as you hear him addressing you in these, you will have no trouble or danger."⁷¹

Thus, the Word and the sacraments provide an objective hope to which suffering Christians can cling. Luther knew well the great terrors surrounding the possibility of death.⁷² But he did not want anyone turning to weak imitations for comfort. Instead, he pointed suffering believers to the Word of God and the sacraments as tangible ways to look to Christ in the midst of their pain.

Faith and Fear

If death seemed near, Luther encouraged a person to embrace faith and reject fear. He commended those who were “unafraid of death, that sleep which is the common destiny of all good men.”⁷³ He accepted the popular notion that a tranquil death was evidence of a person’s secure relationship with God.⁷⁴ To this end, he sometimes mocked death and played down its terrors.⁷⁵ At other times, he sought to comfort the dying that they might go in peace.

At the bedside of his wife’s aunt, who lived with the Luthers in their Wittenberg home, Luther spoke tenderly, knowing that his suffering relative had but a few hours to live. “Your faith rests alone on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the resurrection and the life. You shall lack nothing. You will not die but will fall asleep like an infant in a cradle, and when morning dawns, you will rise again and live forever.”⁷⁶

While he did counsel the godly to look to Christ and suffer with courage, he was no stoic. Indeed, fear of death loomed large in his own theology.⁷⁷ He once remarked, “I don’t like to see examples of joyful death ... Fear is something natural because death is a punishment, and therefore something sad.”⁷⁸ The only people who seemed to face death without any emotion were the heathen who gave no thought to God nor the coming judgment.⁷⁹ For the believer, death provoked a final onslaught from the Devil and thus, the need for faith in the promises of God to silence the enemy’s rage.⁸⁰

So, Luther recognized that death caused a mixture of emotions for the Christian. It called for faith but fear was quite natural. The beginning of joy was rooted in sorrow. In the wake of his daughter’s death, Luther marveled at how he could be so thankful in his spirit and yet so troubled in his flesh.⁸¹ In the end, death provided an affirmation of the sovereignty of God and an opportunity to reflect on his power above all things: “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s—in the genitive singular and not in the nominative plural.”⁸²

A Christian End

Luther was just as concerned about dying well as everyone else, but he came to define the criteria in his own way. Last rites and absolution were not necessary but a man’s final hours still testified to his faith (or lack thereof). In various letters to grieving friends and family, Luther commended those who died well and came to a proper Christian end.

To a weeping widow, he wrote, “It should console you to know that when

your husband died he was in his right mind and had Christian confidence in our Lord, which I was exceedingly glad to hear.”⁸³ To a hurting husband, he commended the man’s wife for her “resolute spirit and firm faith in Christ” during her final hours: “Knowing that she was facing death, she confessed him again and again, called upon Christ alone, and, offering herself wholly to God, was resigned to his will.”⁸⁴ Such an end constituted “a good death” in Luther’s view and was reason for thanksgiving.⁸⁵ As he reminded another widower, “An affectionate wife is the greatest treasure on earth, but a blessed end is a treasure above all treasures and an everlasting comfort.”⁸⁶

For Luther, a blessed end—expressed by faith in Christ and trust in the will of God—came to replace the deathbed rituals of Rome as the concrete hope of eternal life. When a young man died at the university, Luther consoled his parents on these very grounds:

Let this be your best comfort, as it is ours, that he fell asleep (rather than departed) decently and softly with such a fine testimony of his faith on his lips that we all marveled. There can be as little doubt that he is with God, his true Father, in eternal blessedness, as there can be doubt that the Christian faith is true. Such a beautiful Christian end as his cannot fail to lead heavenward.⁸⁷

Such an end provided tangible proof of God’s saving grace.⁸⁸ Extreme unction was unnecessary so long as faith was present: “It is well with us as long as we fall asleep with sure confidence in the Son of God.”⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

As is often the case with Luther, it is tempting to remember him as more of a modern Evangelical than he truly was. He certainly transformed the piety of dying during his lifetime and cast aside the medieval notion that extreme unction was necessary to die well. Yet, he did not dismiss the practice altogether and he continued to place the sacraments at the center of Christian spirituality.⁹⁰ Furthermore, his perspective on death was still influenced by the haunting fears of his age. Yet, in the midst of “this world with devils filled,” he learned to look beyond himself and beyond the empty rituals of the Church.⁹¹ In his preaching, in his correspondence, and on his deathbed, he sought a sure confidence in Christ alone.

The sufficiency of Christ and the efficacy of faith brought comfort to Luther even in the midst of personal tragedy. In September 1542, Luther's beloved thirteen-year-old daughter, Lena, lay sick in bed.⁹² He spoke tenderly to her: "Dear Magdalene, my little daughter, you would be glad to stay here with me, your father. Are you also glad to go to your Father in heaven?" Lena replied, "Yes, dear father, as God wills."⁹³ A few days later, the little girl died in her father's arms. In the midst of their grief, the family took comfort in her courage. Months later, this sense of peace was on Luther's mind as he wrote to Justus Jonas, commending his friend's wife for her "many godly and blessed expressions of faith" in her final hours. Recognizing the value of such a noble Christian death, Luther reflected, "It was in this way that my daughter also fell asleep, and this is my great and only consolation."⁹⁴ Luther was confident in Lena's salvation because his daughter had demonstrated confidence in Christ. No last rites were needed; the little girl was justified by faith. In this way, Luther applied the core doctrines of the Reformation to the deathbed, creating a uniquely Protestant path to dying well.

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- ¹ The primary accounts are gathered in Martin Ebon, ed., *The Last Days of Luther by Justus Jonas, Michael Coelius, and Others* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970). In addition to these reliable versions, Ebon makes reference to numerous rumors that circulated at the time claiming that Luther had taken his own life or drank himself to death. Martin Ebon, "Only Thirty-One Days," in Ebon, *Last Days*, 18.
- ² Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (trans., Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.
- ³ This document is reproduced in Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 54 (ed., Theodore G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 476.
- ⁴ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations come from the King James Version.
- ⁵ Justus Jonas, Michael Coelius, et al., "Concerning the Christian Departure from this Mortal Life of the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther," in Ebon, *Last Days*, 77.
- ⁶ Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 54.
- ⁷ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999). See also, T. S. R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972).
- ⁸ For pictorial examples, see Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages*.
- ⁹ Huizinga, *Waning of Middle Ages*, 131.
- ¹⁰ See Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007), 17–46.
- ¹¹ See Brian C. Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 140–45.
- ¹² William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1964), 35; via Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 142.
- ¹³ Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 142.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, Suppl. 30, 3:2671–72; via Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 144.
- ¹⁵ Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms II*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 11 (trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; ed. Hilton

- C. Oswald; St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), 401.
- ¹⁶ Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 145.
- ¹⁷ Luther lived through at least three such outbreaks in Wittenberg—in 1527, 1535, and 1539. In 1527, he wrote a lengthy letter to a neighboring pastor about how ministers should respond during an outbreak. Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 230–44.
- ¹⁸ Theodore G. Tappert, “Luther and Death,” in Ebon, *Last Days*, 9.
- ¹⁹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1988), 23. See also, Tappert, “Luther and Death,” in Ebon, *Last Days*, 9–12.
- ²⁰ Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Faith and Act: The Survival of Medieval Ceremonies in the Lutheran Reformation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 1.
- ²¹ Martin Luther, *Fourteen Consolations*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 42 (trans. Martin H. Bertram; ed. Martin O. Dietrich; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 117–66. Frederick III, or Frederick the Wise as he is often remembered, was the Duke of Saxony during Luther’s early career who famously secured asylum for the reformer following the Diet of Worms.
- ²² Luther, *Fourteen Consolations*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:119.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 42:124.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 42:141.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42:163.
- ²⁶ Jane E. Strohl, “Luther’s Fourteen Consolations,” in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology* (ed. Timothy J. Weingert; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 321.
- ²⁷ Luther, *Fourteen Consolations*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:143.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.* When a second edition of this work appeared in 1535, Luther intentionally left the original edition intact, even though he acknowledged that he no longer agreed with some of its language. It is likely that his Roman Catholic use of the term “merits” would have been among the statements he would have later stated differently if he had rewritten it.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Martin Luther, *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 42 (trans. Martin H. Bertram; ed. Martin O. Dietrich; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 95–116.
- ³¹ Reinis argues that this sermon became the model for a new version of Reformation *ars moriendi* aimed at instilling assurance of salvation in the dying believer. See Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 1–16.
- ³² Luther, *On Preparing to Die*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:100.
- ³³ Here, Reinis argues that Luther is turning tradition on its head. The *ars moriendi* literature taught that a person must confess all their sins in order to properly to receive the sacrament a final time. This often led to anxiety over whether or not a dying person had properly prepared themselves. By contrast, Luther focused the attention not on the dying person’s readiness but on the efficacy of the sacrament itself. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 66–67.
- ³⁴ “Many books have been written . . . on how we are to prepare for death: nothing but error, and people have only become more downcast.” Cited in Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 1.
- ³⁵ Luther, *On Preparing to Die*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:105.
- ³⁶ Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 53.
- ³⁷ Luther, *On Preparing to Die*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:100.
- ³⁸ Besides baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and penance, Luther regarded “none of the others as a sacrament, for there is no sacrament except where there is a direct divine promise, exercising our faith.” Preserved Smith, ed., *Luther’s Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), No. 206.
- ³⁹ Luther, *On Preparing to Die*, in *Luther’s Works*, 42:108.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42:110.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42:115.
- ⁴² Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36 (trans. A. T. W. Steinhauser; rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz; ed. Abdul Ross Wentz; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).
- ⁴³ This specific enumeration, which recognized baptism, confirmation, the Lord’s Supper, marriage, orders, penance, and extreme unction as sacraments, was first established by Peter Lombard and was eventually codified by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.
- ⁴⁴ Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther’s Works*, 36:118.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Luther’s skepticism toward the book of James is well-known. Here, he pointed out its disputed

- authorship but did not build his case on that concern. For more, see Martin Luther, *Prefaces to the New Testament*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (trans. Charles M. Jacobs; rev. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 395–98.
- ⁴⁶ See Elizabeth Frances Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Oakland: University of California Libraries, 1917), 221; via Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 14.
- ⁴⁷ Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther's Works*, 36:119.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36:120.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ⁵⁰ Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 150.
- ⁵¹ Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther's Works*, 36:122.
- ⁵² See also, Martin Luther, *Against the Thirty-two Articles of the Lowain Theologians, 1545*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 34 (trans. Lewis W. Spitz; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 349, 357.
- ⁵³ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 18 (ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 13.
- ⁵⁴ For more on this aspect of Luther's ministry, see Dennis Ngien, *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007); Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
- ⁵⁵ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 31.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* This is a favorite phrase of Luther's to refer to life in this world. See also pp. 41, 70 of the same volume.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁵⁹ See, for example, Martin Luther, *Two Funeral Sermons, 1532*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 51 (trans. John W. Doberstein; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 229–56.
- ⁶⁰ See Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 69.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 54. See also, Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs, eds., *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1918), No. 577.
- ⁶³ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 54.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 33. Indeed, Hans Luther's pastor would be summoned within three months and is said to have read this letter to the dying man in his final hours. When asked if he affirmed its contents, the elder Luther replied, "Of course! If I didn't believe it, I'd be a knave!"
- ⁶⁷ Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:312.
- ⁶⁸ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 232.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.* See also, Luther, *Two Funeral Sermons*, in *Luther's Works*, 51:242.
- ⁷² Luther despaired of his own life on several specific occasions. For a brief summary of these experiences and their impact on his psyche, see Tappert, "Luther and Death," in *Last Days of Luther*, 9–12.
- ⁷³ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 47. Upon receiving the letter, Frederick Myconius (1490–1546) revived and subsequently lived for five more years, crediting Luther's encouragement for his recovery.
- ⁷⁴ See, for example, his funeral sermon for Duke John of Saxony (1468–1532). Luther, *Two Funeral Sermons*, in *Luther's Works*, 51:237–42.
- ⁷⁵ See, for example, Luther's cheeky response to false rumors about his own death. Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:238.
- ⁷⁶ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 46.
- ⁷⁷ "The greatest thing in death is fear of death." Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:430.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 54:65.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 54:190.
- ⁸⁰ Luther, *Two Funeral Sermons*, in *Luther's Works*, 51:241–42. See also, Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:146.
- ⁸¹ He concluded, "According to the flesh I would gladly have had her, but since God has taken her away I am thankful to him." Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:434. See also Luther's reaction to the death of a friend and fellow pastor in Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:319.
- ⁸² Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther's Works*, 54:431. This was a favorite pun of Luther's rooted in the ambiguity of

the Latin phrase *Domini sumus*, which could mean either “we are the Lord’s” (taking *Domini* as a genitive singular) or “we are the lords” (if *Domini* is a nominative plural). See also, Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 38.

⁸³ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 59.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65. Luther further promised to make sure that some of the young man’s final words would be written down and sent to his grieving parents.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁹⁰ Brewer explains that in 1540 Luther permitted the practice of extreme unction provided that the gospel was clearly proclaimed, that it was not referred to as a sacrament and that it was completed without superstition. Brewer, *Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 150.

⁹¹ This line is taken from Luther’s most famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*.

⁹² For the full account of Magdalene’s death, see Luther, *Table Talk*, in *Luther’s Works*, 54:428–33.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 54:430.

⁹⁴ Tappert, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 76.

“The Glorious Work of the Reformation”: Andrew Fuller and the Imitation of Martin Luther¹

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It is ironic that Martin Luther’s memory in English-speaking circles in the two centuries or so after his death was cherished largely by men and women whom the German Reformer would have regarded probably as “fanatics.” As J. Wayne Baker has noted, it was high Calvinists like John Saltmarsh (died 1647), Henry Denne (died ca. 1660), and John Bunyan (1628–1688), the latter two figures also Baptists to boot, who especially admired Luther as the herald of justification by grace alone.² During the 1640s, at the height of what should be regarded as the first Antinomian controversy—the second being in the 1690s—Saltmarsh noted that he could have cited Luther in favor of his position on God’s grace, but he observed, “He is now lookt [*sic*] on by some as one that is both over-quoted, and over-writ Free-grace.”³ Two decades later, however, Bunyan was not afraid of going public in his autobiographical *Grace*

Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (1666), about the utterly central role that Luther and his commentary on Galatians had played in enabling him to find a stable faith: “Methinks I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this book of Mr Luther upon the Galatians (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”⁴ By the bicentennial of Luther’s death in 1683, though, such admiration of Luther was increasingly that of an embattled minority. Moralism not only dominated Anglican pulpits, but even among Dissenting authors like Richard Baxter (1615–1691) there was the opinion that Luther had sometimes expressed himself carelessly when it came to justification by faith.⁵

The Evangelical revival, which broke thunderously upon the British Isles in the 1730s and 1740s, changed this whole situation. Justification by grace and faith alone once more became central themes in preaching and worship, and Luther cited as an example to be emulated. Luther’s commentaries on Galatians and Romans were crucial influences in the 1738 conversions of both John (1703–1791) and Charles Wesley (1707–1788), for example, and the Reformer’s doctrine of justification by faith alone central in their subsequent preaching and hymnic arsenal.⁶ In the mid-1750s their friend and fellow Evangelical George Whitefield (1714–1770) specifically prayed for men of Luther’s caliber to be raised up to preach the gospel: “What a spirit must Martin Luther, and the first Reformers be endued with, that dared to appear as they did for God! Lord, hasten that blessed time, when others, excited by the same spirit, shall perform like wonders.”⁷ Again, nearly twenty years later, at the time of the conversion of Thomas Charles (1755–1814) of Bala in January of 1773, the future Welsh Calvinistic Methodist leader noted that “Luther’s exposition of Galatians 1:4 was very much and particularly blessed to me.”⁸ John Newton (1725–1807), preaching in London in 1786, well summed up this new appreciation of Luther and his doctrine of justification:

The justification of a sinner before God, by faith in the obedience and atonement of Christ, is considered by many persons, in these days of refinement, in no better light than as a branch of a scholastic theology, which is now exploded as uncouth and obsolete. At the Reformation, it was the turning point between the Protestants and Papists. Luther deemed it the criterion of a flourishing, or a falling Church; that is, he judged that the Church would always be in a thriving or a declining state, in proportion as the importance of this doctrine was attended to.⁹

INTRODUCING ANDREW FULLER

Another fan of Luther was the Particular Baptist theologian Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), who was an heir of both the seventeenth-century high Calvinists and the eighteenth-century Evangelicals. As the most important Baptist theologian of his era¹⁰ and one who was deeply respected by men like William Wilberforce (1759–1833), Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), and Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847),¹¹ his various references to Luther, scattered throughout his works, carried significant clout in elevating the respect in which Luther was held in the British Isles by the tercentennial of his birth and well into the nineteenth century.

Fuller was born in Wicken, a small agricultural village in Cambridgeshire.¹² His parents, Robert Fuller (1723–1781) and Philippa Gunton (1726–1816), were farmers who rented a succession of dairy farms. In 1761 his parents moved a short distance to Soham, where he and his family began to regularly attend the local Particular Baptist church, and where Fuller was converted in November, 1769. After being baptized the following spring, he became a member of the Soham church. In 1774 Fuller was called to the pastorate of this work. He stayed until 1782, when he became the pastor of the Particular Baptist congregation at Kettering, Northamptonshire. His time as a pastor in Soham was a decisive period for the shaping of Fuller’s theological perspective. It was during these years that he began a life-long study of the works of the American divine Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758),¹³ which, along with his knowledge of the Scriptures,¹⁴ gave him the theological resources to pen definitive responses to hyper-Calvinism—a by-product of seventeenth-century high Calvinism—and Sandemanianism, as well as impressive rebuttals of Socinianism and Deism.¹⁵

Fuller was also deeply involved in the emergence of the modern missionary movement. He served as the first secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society from its inception in 1792 till his death in 1815. Moreover, it was his theology that lay at the heart of the missional vision of his close friend William Carey (1761–1834), the Baptist Missionary Society’s first missionary appointment. As Harry R. Boer has noted, “Fuller’s insistence on the duty of all men everywhere to believe the gospel ... played a determinative role in the crystallization of Carey’s missionary vision.”¹⁶

A CHAMPION OF THE REFORMATION

The earliest references by Fuller to Luther are entries in his diary for June 26 and 28, 1781, when he noted that he had been reading *An Ecclesiastical History* by the Lutheran historian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755). On June 26, the Baptist pastor observed that he was “sick in reading so much about monks [and] mendicant friars,” and added, “I could have wished the history had more answered to its title—a history of the church; but it seems little else than a history of locusts”! Two days later, though, he was in a better frame of mind after reading Mosheim:

Some sacred delight in reading more of Mosheim on the coming forth of those champions of the Reformation—Luther, Melancthon [*sic*], Zuinglius, Calvin, &c., into the field. I think I feel their generous fervour in the cause of God and truth. How were the arms of their hands made strong by the mighty God of Jacob!¹⁷

“The cause of God and truth” was a favorite expression of Fuller that summarized what he saw as the calling of every minister: they ought to be zealous for God’s glory and his truth. It was thus a high compliment to describe Luther as such.

At the very close of his ministry, in 1814 and 1815, when Fuller came to preach on the book of Revelation, he went so far as to think that the slaying of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 might possibly refer to “the times immediately preceding the Reformation.” If this were so, Fuller reasoned, then the resurrection of the witnesses has to do with the raising up of the Reformers:

Whether the “three days and a half” during which the witnesses should lie unburied, denote three years and a half, and refer to a particular period of that duration, or only to a short space of oppression, in allusion to the “three times and a half,” as being a kind of 1260 years in miniature, I am not able to determine; nor have I seen anything on the subject relating to a particular period which afforded me satisfaction. However this may be, if the slaying of the witnesses refer to the times immediately preceding the Reformation, their resurrection and ascension to heaven must denote the Reformation itself, and the placing, by divine providence, of the parties concerned in it out of the reach of their

enemies. The resurrection, as it were, of the Waldenses, the Wickliffites, and other reputed heretics, in the persons of Luther and his contemporaries, with the rapid progress made by them in various nations nearly at the same time, would cause great fear to fall upon their adversaries; and the security in which they were placed by the secession of those nations from the see of Rome was equal to their being taken up to heaven in a cloud, where those who thirsted for their blood could only look after them with malignity and envy.¹⁸

Here Fuller admitted his inability to find any convincing interpretation of certain elements of Revelation 11, especially the meaning of the “three days and a half” after the two witnesses have been slain and during which they lie unburied (see Rev 11:7–9).¹⁹ He was willing, however, to go on record publicly as saying that the passage might have reference to the opposition to the medieval Church of Rome by the Waldensians, the followers of Pierre Valdes (ca. 1140–ca. 1205), and the “Wickliffites,” or Lollards, who adhered to the teaching of John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–1384), and then the “resurrection” of this opposition at the time of the Reformation “in the persons of Luther and his contemporaries.” It is noteworthy that Luther’s teaching was likened to that of Wycliffe in the early days of the English Reformation. Henry VIII (1491–1547), for example, described Luther’s teaching as “pure Wyclifism.”²⁰

This understanding of the continuity of teaching between Luther and such forerunners of the Reformation as the Waldensians and Wycliffe meant that Fuller was not nonplussed by the query—presumably made by Roman Catholics—“Where was your church before Luther?”²¹ During what Fuller called the “long period of ... domination” of Western Europe by the papacy,²² the true church was existent, albeit in hiding, only to emerge in full force during the Reformation era, which, for Fuller, like other British Evangelicals of his day, was thus a key event in the history of the church.²³

IMITATING LUTHER

Fuller also considered Luther’s method of preaching as worthy of emulation. In 1802, he cited a general statement by his fellow Baptist Robert Robinson (1735–1790) about the type of preaching that has produced profound moral change in the history of Christianity:

Presumption and despair are the two dangerous extremes to which mankind are prone in religious concerns. Charging home sin precludes the first, proclaiming redemption prevents the last. This has been the method which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to seal and succeed in the hands of his ministers. Wickliffe, Luther, Knox, Latimer, Gilpin, Bunyan, Livingstone, Franck, Blair, Elliot, Edwards, Whitefield, Tennant, and all who have been eminently blessed to the revival of practical godliness, have constantly availed themselves of this method; and, prejudice apart, it is impossible to deny that great and excellent moral effects have followed.²⁴

Fuller had long considered Luther's preaching a worthy model. In a sermon that he delivered on October 31, 1787, at the installation of Robert Fawcner as the pastor of Thorn Baptist Church, Bedfordshire—later entitled *The Qualifications and Encouragement of a faithful Minister illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas*²⁵—Fuller noted a key principle: "Eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness."²⁶ After giving a number of biblical examples of men of eminent piety who were instrumental in "great reformation"—men such as Hezekiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah—Fuller commented,

Time would fail me to speak of all the great souls, both inspired and uninspired, whom the King of kings has delighted to honour: of Paul, and Peter, and their companions; of Wickliff, and Luther, and Calvin, and many others at the Reformation; of Elliot, and Edwards, and Brainerd, and Whitefield, and hundreds more whose names are held in deserved esteem in the church of God. These were men of God; men who had great grace, as well as gifts; whose hearts burned in love to Christ and the souls of men. They looked upon their hearers as their Lord had done upon Jerusalem, and wept over them. In this manner they delivered their messages; "and much people were added unto the Lord."²⁷

Here, Fuller urged Fawcner to see Luther, as well as the others that he mentioned, as a man of "great grace," whose love for Christ and whose longing for the conversion of sinners shaped the message he preached. Such a man was akin to "Paul and Peter," and as such a great role model for preaching.

Four years after this sermon at Thorn Baptist Church, Fuller again cited Luther as an example to follow, this time with regard to his courage in the

promotion of reform in the sixteenth century. Fuller was preaching on Haggai 1:2 (“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time the Lord’s house should be built,” KJV) at a meeting of the pastors of the Northamptonshire Association on April 27, 1791, in the Baptist church at Clipston, Northamptonshire, and was seeking to encourage his fellow Baptists to think about the possibility of undertaking cross-cultural missions.²⁸ This sermon was, in fact, a key step on the road to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society and the sending of Fuller’s close friend William Carey to India.²⁹

After sketching the historical context of the verse from Haggai, namely, the refusal of the Israelites to get to work on the rebuilding of the temple after their return from the Babylonian exile, Fuller noted that the main problem which afflicted the Israelites was a “procrastinating spirit.” It was not, however, a problem unique to them, but hampered both unbelievers and believers in his own day. With regard to the latter, it prevented them from “undertaking any great or good work for the cause of Christ, or the good of mankind.”³⁰ Thankfully, Fuller declared in an illustration of his point, Luther was free from this tendency:

Had Luther and his contemporaries acted upon this principle [of delay], they had never gone about the glorious work of the Reformation. When he saw the abominations of popery, he might have said, These things ought not to be; but what can I do? If the chief priests and rulers in different nations would but unite, something might be effected; but what can I do, an individual, and a poor man? I may render myself an object of persecution, or, which is worse, of universal contempt; and what good end will be answered by it? Had Luther reasoned thus—had he fancied that, because princes and prelates were not the first to engage in the good work, therefore the time was not come to build the house of the Lord—the house of the Lord, for anything he had done, might have lain waste to this day.³¹

Fuller was convinced that the ministry of the Reformers in word and print had been honored by the Spirit of God for the blessing of many in the sixteenth and later centuries. The example of Luther was thus an appropriate one to bring forward to encourage his hearers to break out of the grip of a “procrastinating spirit.” As this text reveals, Fuller clearly considered the

Reformation as a watershed in the history of Christianity—it was a “glorious work.” The rise of what has been termed the modern missionary movement at the end of the eighteenth century—in which Fuller, Carey, and their friends played a critical role—was certainly another. It is fascinating to see these two events linked together in this admonition to take Luther’s courage as a model to imitate.

Although it is obvious from these references to Luther that Fuller knew the German Reformer did not accomplish the Reformation by himself, and also that he was not the first to protest against the doctrinal and moral problems of the Church of Rome—Fuller was well aware of medieval forerunners—yet Fuller can use Luther’s example to highlight the importance of individual action on the scene of history. In a 1785 tract designed to encourage revival of the Calvinistic Baptist cause in England, which was greatly needed in the late eighteenth century,³² Fuller again cited Luther as a model:

We may think the efforts of an individual to be trifling; but, dear brethren, let not this atheistical spirit prevail over us. It is the same spawn with that cast forth in the days of Job, when they asked concerning the Almighty, “What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” [Job 21:15b]. At this rate Abraham might have forborne interceding for Sodom, and Daniel for his brethren of the captivity. James also must be mistaken in saying that the prayer of a single, individual righteous man availeth much. Ah, brethren, this spirit is not from above, but cometh of an evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God! Have done with that bastard humility, that teaches you such a sort of thinking low of your own prayers and exertions for God as to make you decline them, or at least to be slack or indifferent in them! Great things frequently rise from small beginnings. Some of the greatest good that has ever been done in the world has been set a going by the efforts of an individual. Witness the Christianizing of a great part of the heathen world by the labours of a Paul, and the glorious reformation from popery began by the struggles of a Luther.³³

Although the bulk of examples cited in this text have to do with prayer—Abraham praying for Sodom (in Gen 18), Daniel for the Jewish people in exile (in Dan 9), James’s comment about the impact of the prayers of a righteous person (Jas 5:16)—Fuller does not seem to be thinking so much of Luther as a model of prayer as an example of the impact of an individual Christian for good.

THE MATTER OF JUSTIFICATION

From what we know of Fuller’s library, there is no indication that he actually owned a book by Luther,³⁴ and so it is not surprising that his references to Luther do not include an actual citation from any of the Reformer’s works. What is fascinating, though, is that while the doctrine of justification had been a central part of the way Luther was remembered in the English Puritan and Evangelical traditions, Fuller refers to Luther only once with regard to justification.

That citation occurs at the close of an undated piece that Fuller wrote on justification and imputed righteousness, probably for one of the theological magazines to which he regularly contributed.³⁵ Fuller has been arguing that the picture of the church throughout the New Testament is uniformly one that is “composed of such characters as, renouncing all dependence upon their own righteousness, rely only upon the righteousness of Christ for acceptance with God.”³⁶ But what of the letter of James, “which appears to affirm that a man is justified ‘by works, and not by faith only’”? Fuller argued that James is actually using the term “justification” to refer to God’s approval of an individual as being a genuine believer:

Paul discourses on the justification of the ungodly, or of sinners being accepted of God, which is by faith in the righteousness of Christ, without works; James on the justification of the godly, or of a saint being approved of God, and which is by works. Abraham is said to have been justified by faith, when he first believed the promise, prior to his circumcision; but by works, many years after it, his faith was made manifest, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar. The one therefore relates to his acceptance with God as a sinner, the other to his being approved of God as a saint. Both together completed his character. “He believed, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness” [Romans 4:3]; he obeyed, and was “called the friend of God” [James 2:23].³⁷

Seemingly oblivious to Luther’s questions about the canonicity of James, Fuller then noted regarding justification,

We... see the justice with which divines have insisted on the importance of this great article of faith. It was with good reason that Luther, in particular, considered

it as a kind of corner-stone in the Reformation. Those reformed communities, whether national or congregational, which have relinquished this principle in their confessions of faith, or which, retaining it in their confessions, yet renounce or neglect it in their ordinary ministrations, have with it lost the spirit and power of true religion.³⁸

Here Fuller rightly recalls the centrality of justification for Luther, though, as noted, the Baptist author does not appear to have learned it directly from the German Reformer. When Fuller does cite authorities for his Reformation understanding of justification, it is Puritan authors like John Owen (1616–1683),³⁹ or Evangelical pioneers like his main theological mentor, Jonathan Edwards.⁴⁰ But Fuller’s enormous respect for the Reformer ensured that the Baptist’s heirs in the nineteenth century, and they were many and on both sides of the Atlantic, would continue to keep Luther in their pantheon of heroes. And this, in turn, entailed the distinct possibility that these Fullerite Baptists would take up his key books and read him.

¹ This article was previously published in *Unio cum Christo* 3, no. 1 (April 2017): 127–37, and reproduced here with permission from the publisher.

² J. Wayne Baker, “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*: The Battle of Luther in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16.1 (Spring 1985): 115–33. More generally, see Preserved Smith, “English Opinion of Luther,” *Harvard Theological Review* 10.2 (April 1917): 129–58. See also Brilliana Harley, Letter to Edward Harley, May 10, 1639, in *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, ed. Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1854), 52–53, for aspects of the debate about Luther. In this letter, Brilliana also observed that Luther “had great fears till he had thoroughly learned the doctrine of justification by Christ alone.”

³ John Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace: or, The Flowings of Christ’s Blood Free to Sinners* (2nd ed.; London: Giles Calvert, 1646), 210.

⁴ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (ed. W. R. Owens; London: Penguin, 1987), 35. On Bunyan’s indebtedness to Luther in this work, see especially Vera J. Camden, “Most Fit for a Wounded Conscience: The Place of Luther’s ‘Commentary on Galatians’ in *Grace Abounding*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.3 (Autumn 1997): 819–49. See also Dayton Haskin, “Bunyan, Luther, and the Struggle with Belatedness in *Grace Abounding*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 50.3 (Spring 1981): 300–313; and Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 157–60. Of Galatians, Luther once remarked in his *Table Talk*, “The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. I have betrothed myself to it” (cited in Alfred Williams Anthony, “Criticism of the Epistle to the Galatians,” *The Old and New Testament Student* 12.2 [February 1891]: 96).

⁵ Baker, “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*,” 129–30.

⁶ John Munsey Turner, *John Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and the Rise of Methodism in England* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2002), 27–29; Gary Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), 91.

⁷ George Whitefield, Letter to Mr. C—, March 26, 1754, in *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 3:68.

⁸ Cited Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 331–32.

- ⁹ John Newton, Sermon XLVI in his *Messiah: Fifty Expository Discourses* (1786) in *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (London: George Virtue, [1839]), 711.
- ¹⁰ In his funeral sermon for Fuller, John Ryland Jr. (1753–1825) described him as “perhaps the most judicious and able theological writer that ever belonged to our denomination” (*The Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ No Security against Corporeal Death, but the Source of Spiritual and Eternal Life* [London, 1815], 2–3). The Victorian Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) similarly described Fuller as the “greatest theologian” of his century (cited in Gilbert Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Rope-holder* [London: Carey, 1942], 127). More recently, the English Evangelical historian David Bebbington has spoken of Fuller’s “extraordinary importance in the history of theology” (email to the author, March 11, 2009).
- ¹¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: Murray, 1839), 3:388–89; Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 8 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 98–99.
- ¹² For Fuller’s life, the classic study is that of John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (2nd ed.; London: Button & Son, 1818). The two best recent biographies are those of Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010) and Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller, 1754–1815* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015). For brief studies, see Phil Roberts, “Andrew Fuller,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (rev. ed.; ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 34–51, and Michael A. G. Haykin, “Fuller, Andrew,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (ed. Timothy Larsen, D. W. Bebbington, and Mark Noll; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 241–44.
- ¹³ For Edwards’s influence on Fuller, see Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- ¹⁴ For example, he could state: “If any man venerate the authority of Scripture, he must receive it as being what it professes to be, and for all the purposes for which it professes to be written. If the Scriptures profess to be Divinely inspired, and assume to be the infallible standard of faith and practice, we must either receive them as such, or, if we would be consistent, disown the writers as imposters” (*The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to Their Moral Tendency*, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (ed. and rev. Joseph Belcher; 1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 2:196. Hereafter this collection of Fuller’s written corpus is simply cited as *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*.
- ¹⁵ For these apologetic treatises, see volume 2 of *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*. For studies of Fuller’s replies to these theological aberrations, see Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., “At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word”: *Andrew Fuller as an Apologist* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 24. See also John Piper, *Andrew Fuller: Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13–16.
- ¹⁷ Michael D. McMullen and Timothy D. Whelan, eds., *The Diary of Andrew Fuller, 1780–1801*, vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 31.
- ¹⁸ Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Apocalypse*, in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:251.
- ¹⁹ Fuller’s mention of “three times and a half” and the 1260 years seems to have in view Daniel 7:25; 12:7 and 11, though Daniel 12:11 speaks of “1290 days.” See Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Apocalypse*, 244.
- ²⁰ Cited Anthony Kenny, “The Accursed Memory: The Counter-Reformation Reputation of John Wyclif,” in *Wyclif in His Times* (ed. Anthony Kenny; Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 159.
- ²¹ Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Apocalypse*, 258.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 243. In his 1791 sermon “Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion” (*Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:147), Fuller referred to the Reformation as “the glorious work of the Reformation.”
- ²⁴ Andrew Fuller, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as Their Moral Tendency*, in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 2:121–122. Fuller is citing from a note by Robert Robinson in his translation of Jean Claude, *An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon* (Cambridge: Francis Hodson, 1779), 2:364.
- ²⁵ The sermon was first published in 1787: Andrew Fuller and John Ryland, *The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister, illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas. And, Paul’s Charge to the Corinthians respecting their Treatment of Timothy, applied to the Conduct of Churches toward their Pastors. Being the Substance of Two Discourses, Delivered at The Settlement of The Rev. Mr. Robert Fawcner, in the Pastoral Office, Over the Baptist Church at Thorn, in Bedfordshire, October 31, 1787* (London: Thorn Baptist Church, 1787). It can be conveniently

- found in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:135–44.
- ²⁶ Fuller, *The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister*, in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:143.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143–44.
- ²⁸ Fuller, “Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion,” in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:145–51. Fuller originally entitled this sermon, *The Pernicious Influence of Delay in Religious Concerns*.
- ²⁹ For more on the historical context and importance of this sermon, see John Sutcliff and Andrew Fuller, *The Clipston Sermons: A Key Moment in the History of Christian Missions* (introduced by Michael A. G. Haykin, and ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and G. Stephen Weaver; Louisville, KY: The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, 2016).
- ³⁰ Fuller, “Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion,” 145–46.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 147.
- ³² For details of this declension and subsequent revival of the English Calvinistic Baptist community, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends, and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), and *idem*, *Ardent love to Jesus: English Baptists and the Experience of Revival in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Bridgend: Bryntirion, 2013).
- ³³ Andrew Fuller, *Causes of Declension in Religion, and Means of Revival*, in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:322.
- ³⁴ For a list of the books in Fuller’s library ca. 1798, see Timothy D. Whelan, “Appendix A: Books in Fuller’s Library, 1798,” in *The Diary of Andrew Fuller, 1780–1801*, ed. McMullen and Whelan, 215–36.
- ³⁵ Andrew Fuller, “Justification: The Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness,” in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:709–12.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 711–12.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. Fuller’s similar argument in his sermon “Justification,” in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:288.
- ³⁸ Fuller, “Justification: The Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness,” 712.
- ³⁹ For example, see Andrew Fuller, “Defence of the Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness,” in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:713.
- ⁴⁰ See the very helpful discussion of Fuller’s indebtedness to Edwards regarding the doctrine of justification in Chun, *Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller*, 183–208. In recent days, questions have been raised regarding Edwards’s view of justification, as to whether or not it involved a departure from the Reformation understanding of this doctrine. See the helpful studies in Josh Moody, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). Also see Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ’s Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2009).

Through Another's Eyes: The Reception of Luther among Early English Baptists

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In 1682, in the midst of a substantial polemical ministry, Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), the early leader of the association of churches that formulated and signed the so-called *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677), announced to what must have been an unsurprised readership his deep respect for the work of Martin Luther.

What Darkness did *Martin Luther* (that Star of the first Magnitude) drive away!
That blessed Light which he afforded the World hath shone so gloriously, that
the Devil, the Pope, and all their Adherents, notwithstanding all their Skill, have
not been able to put out to this day.¹

That glowing language—written over a century and a half after the dawning of the Reformation and repeated in various forms throughout the late

seventeenth century, did not—at least taken in isolation—believe the intense battle over the legacy of that earliest Reformation leader. However, as J. Wayne Baker has helpfully noted, even the most basic theological foundation of that Star of the Reformation, namely “the very idea of justification *sola fide, sola gratia*,” “was [by the 1680s] in bad repute: Luther’s doctrine of justification was upheld by only a few high Calvinists, dissenting Baptists and Independents.”² Baker argued his claim by detailing the far-reaching effects of the antinomian controversies that spanned seventeenth-century dissent, with the “high Calvinists” filling one side of the aisle and their opponents the other. Caught in the middle, Luther’s legacy was pulled to and fro and shaped according to the various views of the competing sides.³ That very battle—the tug-of-war over Luther’s support—provides helpful insight into the respect with which the seventeenth-century Protestants viewed Luther. However, as will be seen in this article, the reception of Luther amongst one subsection of English Dissent—the seventeenth-century Baptists—proved to be far more complex than might appear on first glance.

DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

For his part, Benjamin Keach represented that group of theologians who wholeheartedly adopted what they viewed as Luther’s understanding of justification *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. This understanding placed Keach squarely in the midst of the antinomian debates that plagued the English theological landscape, with Keach publishing no fewer than a half dozen works directly aimed at the second rendition of those debates, making him the most vocal Baptist among those labeled variously as “Antinomians,” “solafideists,” or “Crispians” for their perceived agreement with Tobias Crisp (1600-1643), whose sermons, re-packaged and re-published in 1690, precipitated the second incarnation of the antinomian controversy. In the midst of those debates, Keach teased out his understanding of Luther’s core doctrine with a nod to Luther but also with a willingness to step beyond the mere language of his esteemed predecessor. In that vein, Keach saw fit to move the discussion away from the identifiably Lutheran concept of justification *sola fide, sola gratia*—with which he certainly agreed—to one which could better be described as justification *solo Christus*. In other words, faith, by itself, can not be said to justify; rather only “Jesus Christ that Faith takes hold of [could]

... Justifie us in the Sight of God.”⁴ Though Keach only briefly mentioned Luther in that cited work—*The Display of glorious grace*, elsewhere he credited Luther for his understanding of justification.

Benjamin Keach certainly did not stand alone among Baptists with this reading of Luther. Keach's friend and fellow London pastor, Hanserd Knollys (1599?-1691), signed the introductory letter to the 1690 publication of Tobias Crisp's sermons. The signatories of that letter purported to do nothing more than verify the authenticity of the sermons included in the publication, but the theology of those signatories closely aligned with that of Crisp and rendered many of them, including Knollys, vulnerable to the pejorative “Crispian” charge. Knollys, like Keach, however, did not buy into the full version of antinomianism as identified by Crisp's opponents.⁵ In addition, Thomas Edwards (d. 1699), another Particular Baptist divine, found himself dismissed as nothing more than an antinomian due to his views of justification by faith alone which he attributed to Luther in his 1699 attack on Baxterianism, entitled *The paraselene dismantled of her cloud*. In that work, Edwards aligned himself with Luther on numerous occasions even agreeing that he, alongside Luther, “could overlook many things in the Romanists, were they but clear and stedfast in this point of Justification.”⁶

To be fair, each of these Particular Baptist theologians identified the Lutheran concept of justification by grace alone through faith alone as being one of the “principles of divine truths, or fundamentals of Christian Faith,”⁷ but they also highlighted the ever-present corrective that the faith which justifies is not alone.⁸ The Particular Baptists even dogmatized this view in their *Second London Confession*:

Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.⁹

That corrective certainly echoed Luther's own teaching that “works are necessary for salvation, but they do not cause salvation, because faith alone gives life.”¹⁰ Evidently, the early iteration of the English antinomian controversies spurred this group of Baptists to re-consider their official stance on the necessity of works, because the updated and expanded version of the *First London Confession*, published in 1646, did not include a reciprocal statement.

On that issue, the Particular Baptists may have been behind the times. As early as 1624, Richard Montagu (d. 1641), later named Bishop of Norwich, observed not only that “Faith without Charity doth not iustifie” but also that this maxim could be heard “in euery Protestants mouth.”¹¹ This ever-present maxim even crossed the well-known divide between predestinarian and anti-predestinarian baptists. Henry Denne (1606?-1660), associated from 1643 with the anti-predestinarian wing of the Baptists, came under fire for his adoption of what Richard Baxter (1615-1691) referred to as a mere accident of “the heat of [Luther’s] Spirit,” namely the “mak[ing of] Christs own personal Righteousness in it self to be every Believers own by Imputation.”¹² In his writings, Denne sought desperately to prove that the gospel is no new law. According to Denne, the true gospel did not attempt to sell Christ “unto us, upon certeine conditions, by us to be performed.”¹³ The commonly-held understanding of “Christ [being] made ours (*in the sight of God*) by Faith alone”¹⁴ did not sit well with Denne who feared that this view placed some conditions upon the receipt of Christ. Echoes of Luther could be heard loud and clear when Denne “therefore professe[d] [him] selfe openly ... that Christs righteousnesse is made ours *Coram Deo, before God*, by Gods imputation, before the act of our Faith, and therefore necessarily without it. Even as our sins were made Christs, so is his righteousnesse made ours.”¹⁵ Or, in Luther’s words,

all they [the believing soul and Christ] have becomes theirs in common, as well good things as evil things; so that whatsoever Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, that Christ claims as His.¹⁶

Faith, thus, could be said to justify only in so much as “we take Faith for the object of our Faith (that is Christ),”¹⁷ or merely “*declaratively*, speaking to our Consciences, that we are the children of God, in Christ Iesus.”¹⁸ In the end, Denne’s understanding of justification *sola fide*—or better, his understanding of justification *solo Christus*—aligned even closer to this aspect of Luther than many of his predestinarian colleagues. After all, Luther ascribed to the dreaded Papists and Anabaptists the error “that the worke of God dependeth upon the worthines of the person.”¹⁹ Ironically, this position left Denne vulnerable to attacks from both sides of the theological aisle: dismissed as

an antinomian who had no use for the work of humanity, on the one hand, and as an Arminian who left no place for the work of God, on the other.²⁰

Even Thomas Grantham (1634-1692), the prominent Messenger of the General Baptists, agreed with this rendering of Luther, arguing for an imputation of both Christ's passive and active righteousness in order for the sinner to be justified. Grantham argued, in true Lutheran fashion, the fact "[t]hat God imputes Righteousness to Men without Works, is so plain, that it can never be denied."²¹ Grantham's understanding of *iustitia dei* left him arguing that God "is more just than to impute us Righteous, if indeed there were no Righteousness to be imputed to Sinners."²² By this, Grantham meant the righteousness of Christ must become inherent in the believer or, in Grantham's words:

It is manifest that such as have Faith in *Christ*, shall not be saved unless they have the Life of Faith.²³

Grantham combined this necessity of inherent righteousness with his own understanding of human depravity and personal inability to develop an idiosyncratic Lutheran understanding of justification *sola fide, sola gratia*.

Based on that understanding, Grantham sought to correct the views of some of his fellow General Baptists whose apparent attempts to avoid (or contradict) antinomianism left their teaching of justification by faith severely lacking in Grantham's eyes. Samuel Loveday (1619-1677), the pastor of the congregation which met at Tower Hill, for instance, argued that a person could be "declared just [solely] upon the account of pardon and non-imputation of sin,"²⁴ leaving Christ's active righteousness out of the equation altogether. Loveday intended this theological move in a Baxterian sense, ostensibly allowing God to accept the imperfect righteousness of the believer rather than still requiring perfect obedience because perfect obedience could only come from God himself. For Grantham, this view of God's relaxed requirements denied essential aspects of God's being.

In a similar vein, John Griffith (1622-1700), the General Baptist elder from London, also required correction as he argued that "justification, union and salvation are conditional"²⁵ and based upon "faith [which] is an act of the creature,"²⁶ thereby undermining justification *sola gratia*. The General Baptist congregations who, in 1660, signed the confession entitled *A Brief*

Confession or Declaration of Faith but more commonly known as *The Standard Confession*, followed Grantham's "Lutheran" understanding:

... yet confident we are, that the purpose of God according to election, was not in the least arising from fore-seen faith in, or works of righteousness done by the creature, but only from the mercy, goodness, and compassion dwelling in God, and so it is of him that calleth, ... whose purity and unwordable holiness, cannot admit of any unclean person (or thing) to be in his presence.²⁷

Thus, an official position of the General Baptists could rightly be described as a Grantham-Lutheran rendering in which God remains exalted as holy and righteous, and the justified human *actually becomes* righteous only after an imputation of Christ's perfect obedience.

THE SINFUL REGENERATE: THE KEY DISTINCTION

Despite some shared views of Lutheran justification spanning the otherwise-usual doctrinal divides of the nascent Baptist world, Grantham's explication of inherent righteousness within the regenerate proved to be the key dividing line. Benjamin Keach again gave voice to the Particular Baptist view by maintaining a clear separation between justification—based solely on imputed, alien righteousness—and sanctification, the process of becoming holy. "We also infer," Keach averred, "that *new Obedience*, and holy a [sic] Conversation, tho' it be part of our Sanctification, yet it is no part of our Justification."²⁸ Keach, thus, worked hard both to avoid and to combat the error of "confound[ing] Justification with Sanctification" which left "no Believer ... compleat, or without sin in point of Justification in this life."²⁹ Keach's fellow signatories to the *Second London Confession* agreed wholeheartedly:

This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, wherefrom arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.³⁰

Significantly, this reality persists throughout the life of the "believing Sinner"—an important designation, in and of itself.³¹ For these divines,

righteousness comes alone through Christ as a completed act of justification. The process of developing an inherent holiness, the process of sanctification, is an imperfect one. “[T]here is no other way it can be said to be fulfilled in us, but by imputation.”³² In the midst of the early antinomian controversy, Hanserd Knollys concurred, extolling his audience to examine their own hearts continuously for the sin which certainly remains. Thus, Knollys prayed that his preaching would “occasion a deep Humiliation, and godly sorrow in believers for their unholinesse, carnalnesse, and sinfulness in heart or life.”³³ Knollys, like Keach, understood the saint to be a believing sinner.

Neither did Thomas Edwards neglect this Lutheran aspect of theology. Agreeing with his reading of the first generation reformer, Edwards noted “that there is some Blemish, Imperfection, and Desert, even in the best Works of the Saints.”³⁴ In Luther’s words, then, the believer remains *simul iustus et peccator*. Or, more specifically,

[s]ince the saints are always aware of their sin, and seek righteousness from God according to his mercy, they are always reckoned as righteous by God. Thus in their own eyes, and in truth, they are unrighteous. But God reckons them as righteous because of the confession of their sin. In reality, they are sinners; however, they are righteous by the reckoning of a merciful God. Unknowingly, they are righteous; knowingly, they are unrighteous. They are sinners in reality, but righteous in hope.³⁵

Edwards delved further into the ramifications of this reading of Luther, considering the role of inherent righteousness in the life of the believer. Neither Edwards nor the Particular Baptists denied the existence of that “infused Charity in the Faithful,”³⁶ but they did adamantly deny both that those works of righteousness in any way caused justification and that the believer could be, in any way, purely righteous. With most of the Particular Baptists, this understanding of the believing sinner was fortified by a concept of the new covenant whose conditions were fulfilled completely by Christ, leaving nothing dependent upon the works of the mere human participant. According to this Luther-echoing view, God must provide everything for the unregenerate, even the faith by which one apprehends Christ.³⁷

Thomas Grantham and many of the General Baptist congregations, on the other hand, presented a contrasting view, differing from the early reformer

over the issue of inherent righteousness. While Luther's understanding of human nature meant that justification was always based on alien righteousness—even for the regenerate, for Grantham and the General Baptists, God's acceptance of the believer stemmed—at least in part—from the individual's inherent righteousness. Even the moderate *Standard Confession* ended the previously-cited section by clarifying that God “cannot admit of any unclean person (or thing) to be in his presence, therefore his decree of mercy reaches only the **godly man**, whom (saith David) God hath set apart for himself,”³⁸ a concept with which the Particular Baptists had difficulty agreeing, at least arguably due to their reading of Luther. Likewise, Grantham's efforts to avoid the charges of antinomianism leveled against many of his fellow Baptists led to an emphasis on human response as the basis for continued inclusion in the covenant relationship with God. At some point, then, faith became a possible human addition to God's grace which, in his view, had “released [humanity] from the power of the fall.”³⁹ To be fair, Grantham did present contradictory views, at times—perhaps an echo of Luther's own sometimes-contradictory theological teachings. Specifically, Luther could, on the one hand, speak of the *always* alien righteousness of the believer while, at the same time, hold to a view of the inexplicable union of Christ with the believing soul which could reinforce Grantham's argument.

Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death, safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its husband Christ.⁴⁰

For a divine consciously avoiding any appearance of antinomianism, such as Grantham, that reading of Luther could only mean that the believing soul actually obtained and lived out some form of inherent righteousness.

Even on this theological locus, however, the Baptist distinctions were less than rigid. The General Baptist confession known as *The Orthodox Creed*—a confession adopted by the congregations in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Oxfordshire—emphasized the imputation of “the Active and Passive Obedience of Christ ... [by which] we have deliverance from the Guilt and Punishment of all our Sins, and are accounted Righteous before God, at the Throne of Grace, by the alone Righteousness of Christ the Mediator, imputed, or reckoned unto us through Faith.”⁴¹ That justification

necessarily leads to a union with Christ by which believers are “more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving Graces, in the practice of Holiness ... And this Sanctification is throughout the whole Man though imperfect in this Life, there abiding still in the best Saints, some remnants of Corruption.”⁴² According to this General Baptist confession of faith, the justified saint remains always a sinner.

QUOTATIONS OF LUTHER?

Despite the debates over core Lutheran issues and a healthy respect for the Reformer, himself, the Baptists as a whole did not turn to Luther as an authority with any noticeable regularity. Even those accused of antinomianism—a debate which spotlighted Luther’s theology thanks to his role in the continental version of those debates in the sixteenth century—relied far more on other theologians—usually Reformed English divines—as authorities. For instance, in his more than four dozen publications, Benjamin Keach only mentioned Luther approximately one hundred times.⁴³ In almost every instance, Luther merely served as a heroic example for the faithful, a great preacher in the vein of Waldo,⁴⁴ and only rarely as a source of authority.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Keach’s specific references of Luther—including in his 1692 work entitled *The marrow of true justification* whose formal title included, “Justificatio est Doctrina stantis & cadentis Ecclesiae, saith Luther,”⁴⁶ found Keach relying more on secondary works than on Luther’s own publications. John Troughton (1637-1681), the Oxford-based nonconformist, for instance, provided Keach a set of lenses for reading Luther through his entry in the antinomian pamphlet war entitled *Lutherus redivivus* (1677), which focused solely on reclaiming Troughton’s vision of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone. Of the direct quotations of Luther, Keach culled the vast majority from Luther’s commentary on Galatians—something of an obvious choice given this particular debate. Keach’s fellow combatant in the antinomian debates, Thomas Edwards, followed largely the same path, citing Luther as a main source occasionally but also reading Luther through the work of secondary sources, especially Troughton.

Beyond Keach and Edwards, English Baptists were far less likely even to reference Luther let alone to quote him directly. In his 485-page magnum opus, the early Baptist systematic theology entitled *Christianismus primitivus*,

Thomas Grantham referred to Luther on only three different occasions: two of them focusing on Luther's historical importance and the other on an issue in the Psalms not related to the controversial Lutheran theology—despite discussing obvious issues of Lutheran import. Earlier in the century, Henry Denne set the pace for his compatriots by idolizing Luther as something of a prophet but neglecting to interact with his works at a scholarly level. Few of his Baptist compatriots in the following generation ventured beyond those boundaries.

To be fair, the lack of direct reference to Luther could have stemmed in part from an apparent lack of available resources—especially for those cut off from the university libraries. Subscription libraries—such as the one held at the Barbican by the end of the seventeenth century—provided some access for dissenters; however, those libraries were necessarily limited by donations from booksellers and publishers who were simply not printing Martin Luther's works.⁴⁷ The seventeenth century as a whole only saw the publication of a few dozen books attributed to Martin Luther with a large number of those being separate editions of the same work—often his commentary on Galatians. While this fact is not shocking given the animated death of Lutheran England only a few decades prior, the sudden lack of available resources in the marketplace—evidently even the underground version—suggests a more thorough cleansing than is often acknowledged. The result, at least in Baptist circles, proved to be less effective in removing the apparent blot of Luther than in simply removing the ability to cite an “authentic Luther.” The Luther of the English Baptists, at least, became a helpful weapon in the hands and minds of any number of theologians who—even with integrity—could summon the Luther of their memory, complete with their own theological slants and unencumbered by the weight of original proofs.

CONCLUSION

Almost to a person, Baptists of all ilks did indeed revere Luther as a trailblazer, an important “Device” in the hand of God,⁴⁸ even while avoiding any reliance upon his pen. Baptists often hailed “holy Luther”⁴⁹ as the bold prophet of Wormes,⁵⁰ the “famous Protestant Reformer,”⁵¹ and the personification of the light of the reformation.⁵² But, for one reason or another, they simply did not view Luther as an active theological interlocutor.⁵³ Despite this neglect,

the English Baptists certainly proved themselves to be capable purveyors of their conception of Luther's *iustitia dei* and its closely-related counterpart *simul iustus et peccator*, thus demonstrating that Baker's claim that justification *sola fide, sola gratia* had been limited to the high Calvinists by the 1680s does not hold true for this significant subsection of English Dissent. Within this group, theologians on both sides of the quinquarticular divide could be classified as bearing the Lutheran torch, claiming to follow in his perceived legacy despite not fighting specifically for his name. Collectively, the Baptists consistently demonstrated an awareness of the Reformations-era debates, mining the legacy of this Reformer—and others—for theological truths which could buttress their views. No matter how closely they aligned, however, the Baptists were careful not to adopt wholesale views or uncritiqued traditions—those attached to Luther being no more (or less) of an exception to this rule than the views of Owen or Baxter or even of Calvin.

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- ¹ Benjamin Keach and Thomas De Laune, *Troposchēmologia* (London, 1682).
 - ² J. Wayne Baker, "Sola Fide, Sola Gratia: The Battle for Luther in the Seventeenth-Century England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16:1 (1985): 115-133.
 - ³ For further discussion of this issue, see especially Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53:1 (2002): 64-92. Also see H. J. Selderhuis and J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, eds., *Luther and Calvinism: Image and Reception of Martin Luther in the History and Theology of Calvinism* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).
 - ⁴ Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace* (London, 1698), 81. Cf. Jonathan W. Arnold, *The Reformed Theology of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2013), 194-96.
 - ⁵ See Barry Howson's doctoral dissertation for a full discussion of Knollys' theology of justification. Barry H. Howson, "The Question of Orthodoxy in the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599-1691): A Seventeenth-Century English Calvinistic Baptist," PhD Thesis (McGill University, 1999), esp. 119-33.
 - ⁶ Thomas Edwards, *The Paraselene Dismantled of Her Cloud* (London, 1699), 24.
 - ⁷ Benjamin Keach, *The Travels of True Godliness*, 3rd ed. (London, 1684), 3.
 - ⁸ See *Second London Confession*, Art. XI.
 - ⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 11.2.
 - ¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (WA) 39/L.96.6-8.
 - ¹¹ Richard Montagu, *A Gagg for the New Gospell?* (London, 1624), 145. For a further discussion of this issue, see Jonathan W. Arnold, "The British Antinomian Controversies," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 25 (49) (2012): 37-53.
 - ¹² Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (London, 1676), 15.
 - ¹³ Henry Denne, *The Doctrine and Conversation of Iohn Baptist* (London, 1642), 34.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36.
 - ¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty* (Lutheran Publication Society, 1903), 17.
 - ¹⁷ Denne, *The Doctrine and Conversation of Iohn Baptist*, 36.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.
 - ¹⁹ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (1588) (London, 1588), Biiiv.
 - ²⁰ Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena* (London, 1646), i.23. For a discussion of the fight

over Luther within the antinomian debates of the seventeenth century, see David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

- 21 Thomas Grantham, *Christianism Primitivus* (London, 1678), Book II, Chap. 3, Sect. VII, 67.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Thomas Grantham, *The Prisoner Against the Prelate* (London, 1662), 58.
- 24 Samuel Loveday, *Personal Reprobation Reprobated* (London, 1676), 34.
- 25 John Griffith, *A Treatise Touching Falling from Grace* (London, 1653), 8.
- 26 John Griffith, *Gods Oracle Christs Doctrine* (London, 1655), 17.
- 27 *The Standard Confession*, Art. VIII.
- 28 Benjamin Keach, *Gospel Mysteries Unveil'd* (London, 1701), Book I, 106.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 *Second London Confession*, Chapter 13.2.
- 31 Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification* (London, 1692), 16.
- 32 Benjamin Keach, *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes* (London, 1698), 47.
- 33 Hanserd Knollys, *Christ Exalted* (London, 1646), 35.
- 34 Edwards, *The Paraselene Dismantled*, 322.
- 35 WA 56.269.26-30. Luther on Romans 4:7.
- 36 Edwards, *The Paraselene Dismantled*, 326.
- 37 *Second London Confession*, Chapter 11.1. See the discussion in Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), esp. Ch. 1. Unfortunately, Bozeman's discussion of Luther far too often falls victim to a monolithic and overly-simplistic reading.
- 38 *The Standard Confession*, Art. VIII.
- 39 Clint Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633-1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, Regent's Park College, 2013), 149, 162.
- 40 Luther, *Christian Liberty*, 18.
- 41 *Orthodox Creed*, Article XXIV.
- 42 Ibid., Article XXVI.
- 43 By contrast, John Eaton's work at the center of the first incarnation of the antinomian controversy, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification* (1642) included more than a hundred citations of Luther within its 484 pages.
- 44 Benjamin Keach, *Antichrist Stormed* (London, 1689), 176.
- 45 By contrast, Keach cites John Owen some 500 times with the vast majority of those being actual quotations from Owen's works. Only approximately a dozen of Keach's references to Luther are actual citations.
- 46 Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification*, title page.
- 47 17th century records from these private libraries are scant and often disorganized. The extant records from the Barbican library list works by Matthew Henry, John Owen, Matthew Poole, Henry Ainsworth, Charles Marie de Veil, Archbishop Ussher, and Thomas Goodwin. They do not list any works by Martin Luther.
- 48 Grantham, *Christianism Primitivus*, Book IV, 87.
- 49 Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 28.
- 50 Benjamin Keach, *A Feast of Fat Things* (London, 1696), cent. II, 25.
- 51 Benjamin Keach, *Light Broke Forth in Wales* (London, 1696), 226.
- 52 Keach and De Laune, *Troposchēmologia*, 180-81.
- 53 This aligns with Theodore Dwight Bozeman's reading of the wider English theological landscape of the seventeenth century. Cf. Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, esp. 144.

Martin Luther and John Calvin¹

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LUTHER’S ONLY STUDENT

The connection between Calvin and Luther is more intense than the centuries-long and often fierce confessional discussions between Lutherans and Calvinists might suggest. Although from Lutheran side came the statement that Calvinists were even more dangerous than Muslims² and Lutherans often saw Calvinists as synonymous with spiritualists,³ the fact that no Protestant theologian has so fundamentally absorbed Luther’s thinking as did the Genevan reformer is evident in all of his works. Peter Meinhold stated the conviction of many researchers when he said that Calvin was probably the greatest and maybe even the only pupil Luther ever had. According to him, Calvin was the only theologian who understood Luther’s theology well and developed it further in such a way that he kept standing on Luther’s shoulders.⁴ The point that Calvinists are in fact Lutherans in the true sense was already made in the sixteenth century,⁵ but this standpoint was never accepted—at least not by the majority of Lutherans or by many in the Reformed tradition.

The relationship between these two reformers includes more than just the

theological relationship between Calvin and Luther; it also involves Calvin's relations with Luther's colleagues, such as Melancthon and Bugenhagen. Furthermore, Calvin had contact with other theologians who were connected to Luther but lived outside of Wittenberg, so that Calvin's relation with the Lutherans comes up for discussion. One can distinguish the personal from the theological aspects of these contacts, though to Calvin these aspects were in fact always connected to each other. This article restricts itself to the aforementioned relations during Calvin's lifetime. It is most plausible to approach the topic of Luther and Calvin from Calvin's perspective, as there is no reception of Calvin in Luther's work, but there is certainly a reception of Luther's theology in Calvin's work.

However much Calvin may have wanted to do so,⁶ he never met Luther personally. Geographically and politically, they lived in completely different worlds. More importantly, Calvin was a man of the second generation, born 26 years later than Luther. When Calvin comes on the theological stage in 1536, with the first edition of his *Institutio*, Luther only had ten years to live, had already written his most essential works, and had been through his most essential discussions with Erasmus, Zwingli, Rome and the *Täufer*. And as travelling from Geneva to Wittenberg takes quite some time and requires several stopovers even today, in those days it certainly would have cost two months to go back and forth. Added to this is the weak physical condition both reformers were constantly in, which also might have prevented a long journey to facilitate a meeting. The literature often refers also to language as another possible reason why they did not meet or communicate, as Luther was unable to speak, read or write French, and the same conditions applied to Calvin when it came to the German language. However, as both were fluent in Latin, they could have talked and discussed as much as they would have wanted. However, the only occasion for contact that could have occurred between Calvin and Luther was prevented by Philip Melancthon, because he did not dare to forward the letter Calvin had written to Luther in January 1545. "I have not shown your letter to Pericles [that is: Luther], for he is inclined to be suspicious, and does not want his replies on such questions as you raise to be passed around."⁷ One could surmise that there had hardly been a connection between the two, since Luther and Calvin mention each other's names only a few times in their correspondence. However, those few mentions have sufficient content to give us an idea of the appreciation

each had for the other, while clarifying the influence Luther had on Calvin's theology. If one were to look only for Luther's name in Calvin's work, the conclusion could be that his influence was minimal, but anyone familiar with the content of Luther's works, will encounter him on almost every page of Calvin's books, sermons, and commentaries, not infrequently even in word-for-word quotations.

LUTHER ON CALVIN

As far as we know, Luther expressed his opinion on Calvin seven times. On October 14, 1539 Luther sent his greetings to Calvin through Martin Bucer because it was with much pleasure that he had read two of Calvin's works—namely his *Institutio*, which had recently been published in a second and extended edition, and his letter to Cardinal Sadoletus.⁸ “Farewell. And will you pay my respects to John Sturm and John Cavin. I have read their little books with singular enjoyment.”⁹ Calvin was thus impressed when he received this personal greeting from Luther, and, hearing the message that Luther had read his books with pleasure, Calvin thought it worth mentioning in the foreword to his commentary on Romans that he had written something Luther had approved of.¹⁰ In this same period, Melancthon reported that someone had tried to get Luther to start an argument against Calvin because Calvin had uttered some criticism on Luther. The reaction, however, was quite the opposite, and Luther had expressed his hope that Calvin would also have good thoughts about him. He even said that it was just to admit that a man with such intelligence was right.¹¹ Calvin was rather impressed by Luther's words, and it seems that it aroused him from this moment on to speak amicably and mildly about the Wittenberg reformer. In 1545, Calvin was informed that Luther had read his address to Emperor Charles V (*Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem*, 1543) with much pleasure.¹² And in 1545, Calvin was reminded once again how much appreciative notice Luther had taken of Calvin's letter to Sadoletus.¹³ All these reports increased Calvin's sympathy for Luther and encouraged him to defend him when others criticized him. When he heard about Luther's positive evaluation of Calvin's publication, he wrote to Farel: “We must be completely made of stone if this immense temperance would not break us.”¹⁴ These words indicate that there was tension between the Swiss and the German theologians, but they also indicate that Geneva

was, in a way, a bridge between Zurich and Wittenberg. Luther was quite open to Calvin's approach and demonstrated a certain generosity towards his young colleague in Geneva, and this resulted in an attitude of friendliness from Calvin's side.¹⁵ Luther had taken notice of Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper; it is most likely that he read this in a Latin version of Calvin's "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," as such a translation was published in 1545, a year before Luther's death. On that occasion, Luther said that if Zwingli and Oecolampadius had spoken in the same way as Calvin, there would not have been such a long dispute on the Lord's Supper.¹⁶

Luther's Person

The significance Luther had for Calvin can best be reflected in an utterance Calvin made in 1556, during the controversy with the Lutherans regarding the Lord's Supper. He says that, in the period in which he began "to free himself from the darkness of the papacy," he was so influenced by Luther that he turned away from the writings of Oecolampadius and Zwingli.¹⁷ These words express Calvin's independence as well as his position of being closer to Luther than to Zwingli. Calvin did not want to compare Luther with Elijah, as if no other prophets could have emerged after Luther, but he did suggest that "the Gospel went out from Wittenberg."¹⁸ Luther was the person who caused the papacy to falter.¹⁹ In the letter to Luther withheld by Melancthon, Calvin addresses him as "very learned father in the one Lord." He writes that he would like to fly to Luther in order to spend a few hours with him and discuss some issues with him, but if that should not be possible on earth, Calvin hopes that it will be possible soon in God's heavenly kingdom, expecting that they could discuss and communicate there.²⁰

However, Calvin also sometimes expressed his difficulty with Luther's ideas. In Calvin's letter to Bullinger of November 25, 1544, he calls Luther "immoderately passionate and audacious in character."²¹ Luther should have controlled his tempestuous temperament better and tried harder to see his own shortcomings. Calvin writes to Melancthon that Luther lacks self-control and allows himself to be aroused to anger much too easily. He is thereby a danger to the Church, and apparently there is no one who dares to resist his behavior.²² Still, the appreciation for Luther remained, and—according to Calvin himself—if Luther should call Calvin a devil, even then Calvin would honor him by describing him as a very special servant of God.

Calvin's judgment of Luther did not change, not even during the intense and troublesome discussions on the Lord's Supper. Although it seemed possible that, after Zwingli's death, the position of Bullinger could create some openness in relations with Luther, the whole situation exploded again in the 1540s. Calvin tried to admonish Bullinger to appeasement, although he did so in a humble and friendly way. It is in the letter Calvin sent to Bullinger in November 1544 that Calvin's view on Luther is best described:

I hear that Luther has at length broken forth in fierce invective, not so much against you as against the whole of us. On the present occasion, I dare venture to ask you to keep silence, because it is neither just that innocent persons should thus be harassed, nor that they should be denied the opportunity of clearing themselves; neither, on the other hand, is it easy to determine whether it would be prudent for them to do so. But of this I do earnestly desire to put you in mind, in the first place, that you would consider how eminent a man Luther is, and the excellent endowments wherewith he is gifted, with what strength of mind and resolute constancy, with how great skill, with what efficiency and power of doctrinal statement, he had hitherto devoted his whole energy to overthrow the reign of Antichrist, and at the same time to diffuse far and near the doctrine of salvation. Often have I been wont to declare, that even although he were to call me a devil, I should still not the less hold him in such honour that I must acknowledge him to be an illustrious servant of God. But while he is endued with rare and excellent virtues, he labours at the same time under serious faults. Would that he had rather studied to curb this restless, uneasy temperament which is so apt to boil over in every direction. I wish, moreover, that he had always bestowed the fruits of that vehemence of natural temperament upon the enemies of the truth, and that he had not flash his lightning sometimes also upon the servants of the Lord. Would that he had been more observant and careful in the acknowledgement of his own vices. Flatterers have done him much mischief, since he is naturally too prone to be over-indulgent to himself. It is our part, however, so to reprove whatsoever evil qualities may beset him, as that we may make some allowance for him at the same time on the score of these remarkable endowments with which he has been gifted. This, therefore, I would beseech you to consider first of all, along with your colleagues, that you have to do with a most distinguished servant of Christ, to whom we are all of us largely indebted.²³

Calvin was open to believe that what many say about Luther is true—namely, that the reformer’s steadfastness is mixed with stubbornness.²⁴ And Calvin was also honest enough to complain openly that Luther’s pride had no limits.²⁵ Even though he owed much to him, he will not shut his eyes against Luther’s mistakes, such as his uncontrolled anger, his fierceness in discussions, and his unwillingness to give in. Calvin also pointed to the fact that not all of this was due to Luther, and he blamed the negative influence some of Luther’s friends had on him, mentioning particularly Nicolaus von Amsdorf as “a fool without brains.”²⁶ Over against the Swiss, who accused him in 1554 of writing too mildly about Luther, Calvin defended Luther’s forcefulness by observing that that was just a part of his character and that, in addition, the man was being incited by malevolent persons.²⁷ In his treatise against Albertus Pighius on the bondage and liberation of the human will, (*Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii, adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*, 1543), Calvin defended Luther’s position on the issue without qualification.²⁸ He points to the difficult situation in which Luther had to act and compared it to the circumstances under which the apostles had to work, adding that for Luther it was even harder. Every political authority had declared war on Luther and his fellow reformers.²⁹ Calvin defended Luther when Pighius accused him of being influenced by the devil and said that the devil made use of Luther’s manifold spiritual afflictions. According to Calvin, quite the opposite is true, and he characterized Luther’s afflictions as a sign of his being elected by God and of his holiness. Calvin also contradicted the complaint Pighius made against Luther, that the reformer did not really appreciate the value of good works. Without hesitation, Calvin agreed with Luther’s statement that the free will of man after the fall into sin was just an empty label, since humans can do nothing other than sin.³⁰ Calvin placed Luther’s views on sin and grace in line with those of the Apostle Paul and church father Augustine.³¹ At this point, Calvin also defended Luther’s fierce manner of discussing this issue. Indeed, Calvin admitted, Luther made use of harsh words and outspoken theses, but he simply spoke the truth.³² Luther had no choice, and it was his opponents who not only triggered his anger, but also made him wiser and give him more insights through their opposition.³³ In sum, Calvin defended Luther both in his views and in the way he presented them. He wanted no one to have any doubts about this, as he stated: “Concerning Luther

there is no reason for him [that is: Pighius] to be in any doubt when now also, as we have done previously, we openly bear witness that we consider him a distinguished apostle of Christ whose labor and ministry have done most in these times to bring back the purity of the gospel.”³⁴ Pighius had attacked both Luther and Calvin, which means he had a good overview of things, as both were in line when it comes to the heart of the gospel. Calvin’s self-defense was identical to a defense of Luther. He was convinced that God himself had called Luther to rediscover the road to salvation. For that reason, Luther held up the torch.³⁵ “Through his service our churches have been founded and put in order.” With these words—in his treatise on the unity of the Church—directed at Emperor Charles V, Calvin confessed that he was heartily convinced of the unity of Protestantism, although there was indeed an internal diversity.

For Calvin, Luther remained an excellent servant of Christ, to whom all were indebted; according to Calvin, it was everyone’s duty to rebuke Luther for what was wrong in him in such a way that there was plenty of room left to appreciate his brilliant gifts.³⁶ And concerning Luther’s rough language, Calvin was convinced that “if Luther would live today, he would certainly have revised some of his harsh expressions.”³⁷

Luther’s Theology

Of greater interest than their mutual judgments of each other are Calvin’s view of Luther’s ideas and especially the influence of Luther on Calvin. This influence is undisputed and is also treated in many essays, yet an extensive study of Luther’s impact on Calvin’s theology has so far not been published. Luther’s influence can be traced back to the very beginning of Calvin’s work. Already in the *Concio academica*, the inaugural address of Nicolas Cop as rector of the University of Paris, which was written by Calvin—as proven by recent scholarship—and held on November 1, 1533, it is evident that Calvin made use of a sermon published by Luther.³⁸ The speech presents the main topics of the Reformation, such as justification by faith alone and certainty of that justification on the basis of God’s promise. The speech also refers to the importance of the assurance of faith amidst spiritual afflictions; Calvin took over all of these standpoints from Luther. This means that Luther’s direct influence on Calvin can be traced back to Calvin’s early twenties.

Calvin himself claims that, in regard to Luther, he steadfastly retained his

freedom (*me semper fuisse leberum*).³⁹ He was therefore not hesitant to make critical marginal observations on Luther's hermeneutic, because the work of every exegete would be superfluous and nonsensical if taking issue with Luther was not permitted.⁴⁰ About a sermon Luther preached in 1522, Calvin opines in 1562 that Luther at that time was not yet thoroughly at home in the Bible.⁴¹ Calvin also found that Luther's exegesis of Isaiah neglected the historical context too much.⁴²

When it comes to the Lord's Supper, Calvin as a reformer was able to survey the various points of view; thus he noted that there were shortcomings on both sides. Calvin thought that the man from Wittenberg had gone too far in his formulations and his pronouncement on others. According to Calvin, Luther was too harsh, was too un-nuanced in his judgments, and had used formulations that were too difficult and unsuitable.⁴³ At the same time, Calvin said that these mistakes had also been made on the Swiss side. Calvin had great appreciation for the fact that Luther had warned sternly against a Catholic view of the presence of Christ.⁴⁴ After his initial hesitation regarding the Wittenberg Concordance (1536), Calvin began to think more positively about the document, especially as a result of becoming acquainted with the Lutherans during the Reichstag in Worms (1539). Precisely because the Concordance professes "that in the Lord's Supper not only Christ's body and blood were represented but that in the course of the worship service they were truly offered and presented before all as present," Calvin declared that not only had he wanted this Concordance, he had also tried to strengthen it.⁴⁵ Hence it comes as no surprise that Calvin, who in 1538 had signed the *Confessio Augustana invariata* in Strasbourg, signed the *Confessio Augustana variata* during the religious dialogues in Regensburg.

In a letter of January 12, 1538, to Bucer, Calvin mentions Luther for the first time. He writes that he is convinced of his piety but is not sure what to think of him further.⁴⁶ Calvin thinks that Luther clings so tightly to his doctrine of the Lord's Supper that he thereby hinders a reformational unity. It becomes obvious here that Calvin had more trouble with Luther's character than with his ideas. That Calvin saw his own teaching of the Lord's Supper substantially in agreement with that of Luther is clear. Luther tried to incite Calvin to criticize Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as he had verbalized in his letter to Sadoletto. However, when Luther read the relevant passages, he praised Calvin for it instead.⁴⁷

Mild—but essential—was Calvin’s critique of Luther’s exegetical approach. In a letter to Pierre Viret, Calvin gave a description of the way Luther explained Scripture and compared it with the exegesis of Zwingli, which he also criticized: “Zwingli, although he is not wanting in a fit and ready exposition, yet, because he takes too much liberty, often wanders far from the meaning of the Prophet. Luther is not so particular as to propriety of expression or the historical accuracy; he is satisfied when he can draw from it some fruitful doctrine.”⁴⁸ According to Calvin, Luther made too much use of a speculative way of explaining biblical texts.⁴⁹ Too often, he just guessed as to the meaning of a word,⁵⁰ and this resulted in reflections on a passage that sometimes lacked any foundation.⁵¹ Calvin does not make the step from the text to the doctrine too quickly, and he pays more attention to the Hebrew and Greek meaning of the words, and to the historical context.

Luther in Calvin’s Institutio

Although Calvin was fundamentally influenced by Luther’s writings years before the first edition of the *Institutio* was published, Luther’s name does not appear in any of the editions of this most important of Calvin’s works. If one would focus only on his name, the conclusion could even be that Calvin had no knowledge of Luther at all.⁵² The situation, however, is completely different, and one who is familiar with Luther’s works will easily discern how Luther shows up constantly in Calvin. Already in the first edition of 1536, Luther is present even in unnoted quotations, phrases, and terms, and this presence is only expanded in later editions. Calvin’s *Institutes* demonstrate the continuity between Luther and Calvin, as the Genevan did not repeat, but rather developed Luther’s thoughts.⁵³ Calvin did not simply pass on Luther’s heritage, but shaped it into a form that could be applied in various contexts and also made it applicable to church, culture, society, politics, and education. Calvin’s *Institutes* demonstrate on every page that they are written by a student of Luther.⁵⁴

More concretely, it is Luther’s *Small Catechism* that was fundamental to Calvin’s first edition of the *Institutio*.⁵⁵ This catechism served him for the structure of his work, which he also initially intended as a catechetical tool. Next to this *Small Catechism*, there are also other publications of Luther that Calvin used as source material, such as: *De Libertate Christiana* (1520). *De Captivitate Babylonica*, (1520), *Ein Sermon von den Sakrament des Leibs*

und Blutes Christi wider die Schwärmgeister, which was translated into Latin in 1527; the *Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heyligen wahren Leichnames Christi* (1519), translated in 1524; and also the Latin edition of Luther's *Postilla*, published in 1521. From the *Small Catechism*, for example, Calvin copied the order in which he treated the various items of the Christian Faith. Luther's Catechism dealt with these in the following order: the law as the Ten Commandments, faith as laid down in the Apostle's Creed, prayer as explanation of the Lord's Prayer, and finally the sacraments.⁵⁶ Calvin's order in 1536 was completely identical: *De lege, De fide, De oratione, De sacramentis*. He did add two chapters—namely, one on the five 'false' sacraments; and one on Christian liberty, the authority of the Church, and political power. It is understandable that August Lang wrote that in the 1536 *Institutio*, Calvin shows up as a Lutheran from southwestern Germany.⁵⁷ In the introduction to the *Institutio*, in which Calvin connects *Cognitio Dei et hominis*, the direct link to Luther also becomes evident. On the doctrine of predestination, Calvin was just as much a student of Luther, although he came to know Luther's opinion on this matter mainly through Martin Bucer.⁵⁸ Calvin does not define predestination as explicitly as Luther did in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, but in essence there is no difference. Other topics in which Luther's influence can be seen include Calvin's use of the terms *foedus* and *testamentum*, which are clearly derived from Luther's *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520). The way Calvin wrote about the correlation between *promissio* and *fides* in this respect reflects Luther in every way.⁵⁹

Melanchthon

Calvin's relation to Luther's colleague Philipp Melanchthon is an essential part of his relation to Luther. The rather intense contacts between Melanchthon and Calvin are personal as well as theological. After he had met Melanchthon a few times, Calvin wrote that he was sorry that they lived such a great distance from one another. Therefore, Calvin added that he and Melanchthon could find comfort in the anticipation that someday—in heaven—they would be able to enjoy their mutual love and friendship, where they would live together forever.⁶⁰

Melanchthon's withholding of Calvin's letter to Luther is indicative of the relation between Calvin and Melanchthon, for the latter tried to prevent conflicts between the two reformers. When Calvin let him know that the

Lutherans—in their adherence to certain liturgical customs—were almost Jewish, Melanchthon responded by saying that Luther had a high respect for the liturgical sobriety in Geneva. When Luther stated vehemently that the leaders in Zürich were leading their parishioners to hell and that they had no fellowship with God’s Church,⁶¹ Calvin urged Melanchthon to calm Luther down and thus bring about a spirit of reconciliation.⁶²

Calvin himself always had great admiration for Melanchthon, despite the fact that there were points on which they differed. Calvin would have liked to have Melanchthon to be more resolute.⁶³ It troubled him that Melanchthon was too timid to involve himself in the controversy regarding the Lord’s Supper, which emerged after Luther’s death, and to clearly show his colors there. It would be better to extricate Melanchthon from his all-too-Lutheran surroundings.⁶⁴ Should Melanchthon live nearer, Calvin would be able to consult him more often, for “in a conversation of three hours I would get further than in a hundred letters.”⁶⁵ According to Calvin, Melanchthon was among the best exegetes of Scripture.⁶⁶

Likewise, there was appreciation for Calvin from Melanchthon’s side, as was apparent in his efforts to keep Calvin in Worms when he wanted to leave because he no longer expected anything from the religious dialogues.⁶⁷ According to Beza, from that time onward, Melanchthon would speak of “the theologian” when he meant Calvin.⁶⁸

Calvin also differed with Melanchthon on the so-called *adiaphora*. After Melanchthon had accepted the Leipzig Interim (December 21, 1548), in which the ceremonies were regarded as *adiaphora*, Calvin indicated his difference with him and his greater agreement with Magdeburg—where Falcus Illyricus vigorously resisted this Interim—than with Wittenberg.⁶⁹

There was also disagreement on the subject of free will and predestination. Calvin dedicated his writing about this material—directed against Pighius—to Melanchthon, who appreciated the gesture very much. Melanchthon accordingly was quite positive about this work, but he rejected Calvin’s “determinism.”⁷⁰ Calvin, from his side, cited the cause of his difference with Melanchthon as the man from Wittenberg accommodating himself too much to human understanding and therefore speaking about these things more as a philosopher than as a theologian. However, according to Calvin, it was a mistake to place them in opposition to each other on account of this difference. Their friendship was sincere, and this also had to do with the fact that

they were both humanists. Along with their great mutual appreciation, this provided room for airing their differences publicly,⁷¹ but Calvin nevertheless saw himself as standing right next to Melancthon,⁷² as he makes clear in a salutation in one of his letters to his colleague in Wittenberg: “Greetings, therefore, O man of most eminent accomplishments, and ever to be remembered by me and honored in the Lord! May the Lord long preserve you in safety to the glory of his name and the edification of the Church.”⁷³

Lutherans

Calvin had some correspondence with various Lutheran theologians, such as Jacob Andreae, Veit Dietrich, Johann Marbach, and Johann Brenz. Characteristic of Calvin’s attitude toward the Lutherans is that he saw himself in line with Luther, while he accused the Lutherans of having distanced themselves from Luther.

The Lutherans refused unity because they kept discussing the how of Christ’s presence, while Luther himself, according to Calvin, had in fact regarded this question as secondary. For that reason, he called those who argued under Luther’s name “fanatics.”⁷⁴ In the summer of 1554, Calvin dedicated his commentary on Genesis to the three sons of the elector of Saxony, Johann Friedrich, who had died in March of that year. However, the dedication was rejected because Calvin had allegedly deviated from Luther’s doctrine on the Lord’s Supper and repeatedly insulted Luther’s exegesis of Genesis.⁷⁵ In 1555, Calvin sighed, “Oh, if only Luther was still alive. He was vehement, to be sure, but he never went as far as his followers, who should not be called disciples but merely mimics, indeed monkeys.”⁷⁶ It was Calvin’s opinion that Luther, had he lived, would not have chosen the side of the Lutherans.

Calvin’s most intensive discussion was with Joachim Westphal (1510/11-1574), preacher in Hamburg. When the Swiss rejected the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper in their *Consensus Tigurinus*, Calvin hoped in vain that the Lutherans would be more prepared for unity. In 1552, Westphal reacted strongly to the publication of the *Consensus Tigurinus*—in 1551, despite Calvin’s urging, more than a year and a half after its completion in 1549—with his *Farrago confuseanarum et inter se dissidentium opinionum de Coena Domini ex Sacramentarium libris congesta per M. Joachimum Westphalum pastorem Hamburgensem*. In this work, he introduces for the first time the concept of

“Calvinism” in order to stamp Calvin’s view of the Lord’s Supper negatively as a human invention. When Westphal published *Recta fides*—a similar work—a year later, Calvin wrote in 1555—at Bullinger’s insistence—his *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de sacramentis*.⁷⁷ He reminded Westphal that it was Luther who had first helped Calvin to a better understanding of the Lord’s Supper,⁷⁸ and he also reported to Westphal what Luther had thought about him: “It would not be hard for me to proof through reliable witnesses what judgment Luther had made about me, after he had seen into my writings. But I think Philipp Melanchthon is for me enough as representing the many others.”⁷⁹

After a *Defensio* on the part of Westphal, Calvin wrote a *Secunda Defensio*,⁸⁰ in which he once again complained that the so-called Lutherans do not follow in Luther’s steps: “Ah, Luther! How few imitators of your excellence have you left behind you and how many apes of your belligerence.”⁸¹ For the pastor in Hamburg, this work was an occasion to direct a number of writings against Calvin. Other Lutheran theologians entered this discussion as well, directing their attack especially against the Swiss. Calvin reacted in 1557 with *Ultima admonitio ad Ioachim Westphalum*,⁸² indeed the last separate piece in the polemics with Westphal, whose later writings Calvin responded to only in the final edition of the *Institutes*.⁸³

Westphal was also responsible for Calvin coming into contact with the Lutherans in Frankfurt am Main, for it was there in 1555 that Westphal incited the Lutheran clergy against the Dutch-speaking, Reformed refugee congregation that had existed there for a few years and been allowed to use their own church building. In the introduction to his commentary on Acts, Calvin praised the Council of Frankfurt for helping the refugees.⁸⁴ He told the Lutheran clergy that he wondered how Westphal’s book could appear in Frankfurt and cause so much discord, while Reformed and Lutherans were in so much agreement.⁸⁵ When the situation worsened through quarrels within the refugee congregation, Calvin himself traveled to Frankfurt in September 1556. The trip was in fact for naught, for the discord persisted and the Lutheran ministers refused to talk with Calvin. In 1561, the authorities decided to close the church to the refugee congregation because they did not agree with the liturgy and doctrine of the Lutherans.

The question then arose if these Reformed people should let their children be baptized by a Lutheran minister and whether they should celebrate

communion with the Lutherans. Calvin's answer is that the administration of the sacraments did not depend on who administered them and that, though the Lutheran ceremonies were not unimportant, neither are they essential. As long as one is not forced to profess the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper, one should feel free to participate, according to the judgment of the clergy in Geneva.⁸⁶ Here Calvin gave essentially the same advice that he had given to the refugee congregation in Wesel, which in 1553 was forced by the city council to conform to the Lutheran confession. Accommodation and preservation of church unity—in this case unity with the Lutherans—was better than the departure of the Reformed congregation. In 1563, however, when the remaining Reformed people were forced to sign the Lutheran confession, Calvin proposed that in that case a number of corrections regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper must be effected first.⁸⁷

The notion that Calvin's interaction with Lutherans was limited to such discussions is one-sided. The contacts were, to be sure, strongly dominated by the controversies over the Lord's Supper, but Calvin also had many friendly contacts with Lutherans.⁸⁸ There was contact, for example, with Justus Jonas (1493-1555), who offered to translate Calvin's second treatise against Westphal,⁸⁹ an offer that Calvin accepted.⁹⁰

Luther's Influence on Calvinist Countries

The result of the argument that Calvin took up the core of Luther's theology and developed it further is that, in areas in which Calvinism became the dominant confessional position, Luther is present as well. One example is the Netherlands, a nation characterized by the overall presence of Calvinism.

CONCLUSION

In 1540, Calvin wrote that he had no greater wish or greater concern than to proclaim the gospel of Christ together with all German churches and to preserve in any way possible the utmost harmony.⁹¹ He maintained this attitude during Luther's lifetime as well as after Luther's death. And it is this stance that also indicates that Calvin's polemic with Luther's successors was not broken off by him, as it was Calvin who wanted to safeguard Luther's theology. He was convinced of the need to build on the foundation Luther had laid down, not to imitate Luther or simply to repeat what he had said,

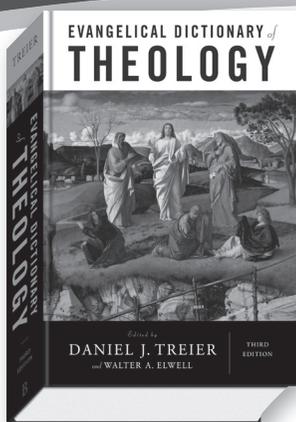
but to further develop Luther's theology without changing it. The influence of Luther on Calvin means that the *Nachwirkung* of Luther can be found in a much wider tradition than just the Lutheran tradition. It is also due to international Calvinism that Luther can be found worldwide, as his spirituality, his liturgical insights, his views on preaching and teaching, and much more of his work has shaped endless numbers of Calvinists all over the world and through the ages, up until today.

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- ¹ This article was previously published in *Martin Luther: A Christian between Reforms and Modernity (1517-2017)* (ed. Alberto Melloni; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 401-416, with permission from the publisher.
- ² See H. Zschoch, "Das Bild des Calvinisten, Zur polemischen Publizistik im konfessionellen Zeitalter," in *Reformierter Protestantismus vor den Herausforderungen der Neuzeit* (eds. Thomas K. Kuhn and Hans-Georg Ulrichs; Wuppertal: Foedus, 2008), 19-46.
- ³ In 1618, a disputation is held in Wittenberg under the title "De communione nostri cum Christo, opposita tum Calvinianorum tum Fanaticorum quorundam erroribus."
- ⁴ "Calvin ist der grösste und wohl auch einzige 'Schüler,' den Luther wirklich gehabt hat, d.h. der ihn zutiefst verstanden, und von ihm ausgehend, das Werk der Reformation mit einer eigenen Durchdringung der Botschaft des Evangeliums fortgesetzt und zu einer eigenen kirchlichen Gestalt gebracht hat." (Peter Meinhold, "Calvin und Luther" in *Lutherische Monatshefte* 3 (1964): 67-96.
- ⁵ Herman J. Selderhuis, "Luther totus noster est. The reception of Luther's thought at the Heidelberg theological faculty 1583-1622," in *Reformation und Mönchtum* (eds. Athina Lexutt, Volker Mantey und Volkmar Ortman; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 173-188.
- ⁶ CO 12:7.
- ⁷ CO 12:61.
- ⁸ Herminjard 6:73.
- ⁹ WA.B 8:569; CO 10.2:432.
- ¹⁰ Herminjard 6:130, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 20, 1539.
- ¹¹ "Spero quidem ipsum olim de nobis melino sensurum. Sed aequum est a bono ingenio nos aliquid ferre," Herminjard 6:130, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 20, 1539.
- ¹² CO 12:127.
- ¹³ "Profectio reverendo patri Luthero tua epistola qua Sadoleto respondes ita modis omnibus perplacet ac praedicatur ut nihil supra;" CO 12:40, letter from Crodelius to Calvin, March 6, 1545.
- ¹⁴ Herminjard 6:131.
- ¹⁵ Mention must be made of two remarks in Luther's *Tabletalks (Tischreden)*, WA.TR 5:461, 6050 and WA.TR 5:51, 5303, in which Luther expresses a certain distrust towards Calvin. There is also a remark from theologian Christoph Pezel (1559-1604), in which he refers to a remark of Melancthon on the relation between Luther and Calvin, but the tradition on this is quite uncertain. See Erwin Mühlhaupt, "Luther und Calvin," in *Luther im 20. Jahrhundert. Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 175-89.
- ¹⁶ Mühlhaupt, "Luther und Calvin," 176; see also Brian A. Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther. Essays in honor of Wilhelm Pauck* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New. Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 27-48.
- ¹⁷ CO 9:51.
- ¹⁸ Herminjard 9.223, letter from Calvin to ministers Montbéliard, May 8 1544.
- ¹⁹ CO 14:31, letter from Calvin to Edward VI, February 5, 1551.
- ²⁰ CO 12:7ff.
- ²¹ Herminjard 9:313.
- ²² CO 12:99.
- ²³ Translation taken from *Tracts and Letters of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 4:432ff =

- Herminjard 9:374; CO 11:774.
- ²⁴ “esse ejus constantiae nonnihil pertinaciae admixtum;” Herminjard, 342.
- ²⁵ “quis tamen non eam excuset prae insolenti, quam narrant, Martini ferocitate?” Herminjard, 343.
- ²⁶ CO 11:774.
- ²⁷ CO 15:305, letter from Calvin to the clergy of Zürich.
- ²⁸ L. F. Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1971); G. Melles, *Albertus Pighius en zijn strijd met Calvin over het liberum arbitrium* (Kampen: Kok, 1973). The treatise is in CO 6:225-404. For a recent translation, see John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will. A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius* (ed. A. N. S. Lane; trans. G. I. Davies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).
- ²⁹ CO 6:239.
- ³⁰ CO 6:248f. Thesis 13 in Luther's disputation at Heidelberg reads: “Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit quod in se est peccat mortaliter;” WA 1:354. On the judgment of the University of Paris on this thesis, see: F. T. Bos, *Luther in het oordeel van de Sorbonne* (Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam, 1974), 96ff and 223ff.
- ³¹ CO 6:264.
- ³² CO 6:249.
- ³³ CO 6:241.
- ³⁴ CO 6:250. Translation by Lane, *Bondage and Liberation*, 28.
- ³⁵ “We maintain, then, that at the commencement, when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches, those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the pure and legitimate sonship of God, and those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete;” CO 6:459; cf. CO 6:473.
- ³⁶ Herminjard 9:313.
- ³⁷ CO 9:442; cf. CO 15:501 and CO 11:705.
- ³⁸ *Concio academica nomine rectoris universitatis Parisiensis scripta*; CO 10b.30-36.
- ³⁹ CO 13:165, letter from Calvin to Bullinger, January 21, 1549.
- ⁴⁰ CO 15:454, letter from Calvin to Burckhard, July 10, 1554.
- ⁴¹ CO 19:368, letter from Calvin to Desprez, March 29, 1562.
- ⁴² Herminjard 6, letter from Calvin to Viret, May 19, 1540.
- ⁴³ CO 5:458.
- ⁴⁴ CO 5:458.
- ⁴⁵ Herminjard 4:338.
- ⁴⁶ Herminjard 4:338.
- ⁴⁷ CO 10.2:432, letter from Melancthon to Bucer, October 14, 1539.
- ⁴⁸ CO 11:36.
- ⁴⁹ CO 23:113.
- ⁵⁰ CO 23:170.
- ⁵¹ CO 23:193.
- ⁵² “The casual reader of the *Institutes*, who is not skilled in identifying unacknowledged debts or anonymous opponents, could certainly be pardoned for concluding that Calvin had never heard of Luther;” Gerrish, “John Calvin on Luther,” 67. For Luther's influence on Calvin's *Institutio*, see W. van't Spijker, “The influence of Luther on Calvin according to the *Institutes*,” in *John Calvin's Institutes. His Opus Magnum. Proceedings of the Second South African Congress for Calvin Research* (ed. B. J. van der Walt; Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1986), 83-105.
- ⁵³ Van't Spijker, “The influence of Luther on Calvin,” 86.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. A. Lang: “Ja, man darf sagen, er hat die Kernlehre Luthers von der Glaubensgerechtigkeit und der Wiedergeburt aus dem Glauben treuer bewahrt und theologischer schärfer zum Ausdruck gebracht als irgendein Dogmatiker der Reformation;” *Zwingli und Calvin* (Bielefeld/Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1913). See also A. Lang, *Johannes Calvin, Ein Lebensbild zu seinem 400. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909), 70f.
- ⁵⁵ Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le jeune Calvin. Genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Franz Verlag, 1966), 139-150; J. Köstlin, “Calvins Institutio nach Form und Inhalt in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1868): 7-62, 410-486; A. Lang, “Die Quellen der Institutio von 1536,” *Evangelische Theologie* 3 (1936): 100-12; Wilhelm Niesel, *Calvins Lehre vom Abendmahl* (München: Kaiser, 1935), 21-28; Francois Wendel, *Calvin. Ursprung und Entwicklung seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 109-113.

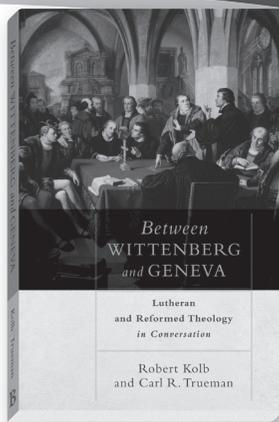
- ⁵⁶ The text of the *Smaller Catechismus* can be found in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, rev. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 852-910.
- ⁵⁷ "Zumal in der ersten Ausgabe der Institutie erscheint er daher fast wie ein oberdeutscher Lutheraner;" Lang, *Zwingli und Calvin*, 106.
- ⁵⁸ Van't Spijker, *Prädestination bei Bucer und Calvin*, in *Calvinus Theologus* (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1976), 85-111.
- ⁵⁹ Niesel, *Calvins Lehre*, 23.
- ⁶⁰ Letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, February 16, 1539.
- ⁶¹ WA.B 10:387.
- ⁶² Herminjard 9:201, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, April 1544.
- ⁶³ CO 12:99, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, June 28, 1545.
- ⁶⁴ CO 15:388, letter from Calvin to Vermigli, January 18, 1555.
- ⁶⁵ CO 15:321, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 27, 1554.
- ⁶⁶ Herminjard 6:414, letter from Calvin to Farel, December 1540.
- ⁶⁷ Herminjard 7:8, letter from Calvin to Farel, January 31, 1541.
- ⁶⁸ CO 21:62.
- ⁶⁹ CO 13:593-96, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, June 1550.
- ⁷⁰ Herminjard 8:451, letter from Melanchthon to Calvin, July 12, 1543.
- ⁷¹ CO 12:381, letter from Calvin to the Council of Geneva, October 6, 1552.
- ⁷² CO 6:250.
- ⁷³ CO 11:516.
- ⁷⁴ CO 15:141, letter from Calvin to Farel, May 25, 1554.
- ⁷⁵ CO 15:260.
- ⁷⁶ CO 15:502, letter from Calvin to Seidemann, March 14, 1555.
- ⁷⁷ CO 9:15-36.
- ⁷⁸ CO 9:51.
- ⁷⁹ "Quin etiam Lutherus ipse, quum scripta mea inspexisset, quale de me iudicium fecerit, mihi per testes idoneos probare non difficile erit. Sed mihi unus pro multis erit Philippus Melanchthon;" CO 9:52. Calvin also defends himself against Westphal by reminding him that Luther sent greetings to Calvin, which makes clear enough that Luther did not see Calvin as an enemy (see CO 9:92).
- ⁸⁰ CO 9:41-120.
- ⁸¹ CO 9:105.
- ⁸² CO 9:137-252.
- ⁸³ 4.17.20-34.
- ⁸⁴ CO 15:710ff.
- ⁸⁵ CO 16:53ff.
- ⁸⁶ CO 15:78ff.
- ⁸⁷ CO 19:619ff., letter from Calvin to the Walloon congregation in Wesel, **January 11, 1563.**
- ⁸⁸ Willem Nijenhuis, *Calvinus Oecumenicus. Calvijn en de eenheid der kerk in het licht van zijn briefwisseling* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1959), 160f.
- ⁸⁹ CO 16:137, letter from Jonas to Calvin, May 8, 1556.
- ⁹⁰ CO 16:283, letter from Calvin to Jonas, September 17, 1556.
- ⁹¹ Herminjard 6:132, letter from Calvin to Farel, February 27, 1540.

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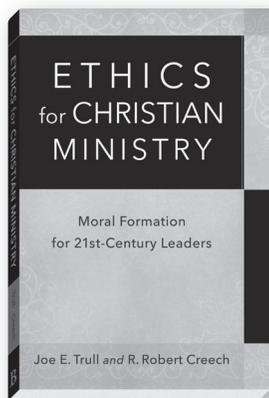
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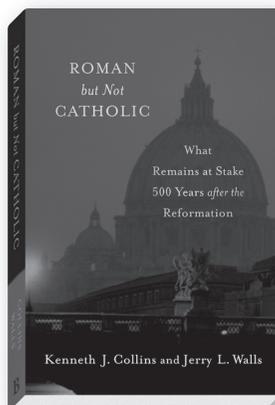
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“Faith is Never Without Fight” (1 Tim 5:12-14): A John Calvin Sermon

RAY VAN NESTE

Ray Van Neste is Professor of Biblical Studies and Director of the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies at Union University, Jackson, TN. He earned his PhD in New Testament from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Most recently he is the co-editor of an updated English version of John Calvin’s sermons on 1 Timothy, co-editor of *REF500: How the Greatest Revival Since Pentecost Continues to Shape the World Today*, (B&H Academic, 2017), and author of “The Mangled Narrative of Evangelism and Missions in the Reformation,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 8:2 (Fall 2017): 3-27. He and his wife, Tammie, have six children and are members of FBC Jackson, TN.

INTRODUCTION

Many people know John Calvin only as a systematic theologian and then sometimes only in a caricature. What is too often forgotten is that Calvin was first and foremost a pastor seeking to shepherd the church of God.¹ This misunderstanding has been helped by the general neglect of his sermons in favor of his *Institutes* and his commentaries. Those works are of great value, but in his sermons you get to see the pastor in his day to day labors, pleading with his people, rebuking and consoling. Yet, the sermons have not been as widely available in accessible translations. This is changing with a number of fresh new translations coming particularly from Banner of Truth. I have spent the past couple of years reading Calvin’s sermons on 1 Timothy, deciphering the English translation of 1579 and updating the language to make these powerful sermons more accessible to readers today.²

The series of sermons on 1 Timothy was preached from September 1554 to April 1555, Sunday mornings and afternoons. This was a little more than a decade after Calvin's return to Geneva after being run out of town. These sermons were preached during another difficult time. In the midst of this series Calvin told friends by letter that he anticipated being run out of town. He was engaged with challenges in Geneva and was travelling often on behalf of the city negotiating peace and arrangements with other cities. So, in these sermons we find a very busy pastor—no ivory-tower academician, but a shepherd knee deep in the messy work of caring for sheep.

The sermon below, an exposition of 1 Timothy 5:12-14 is a powerful call to endurance for the sake of and empowered by the gospel.³ It is an example of why T. H. L. Parker said of this series, "Such preaching as this pursued so regularly and applied so stringently to the people, was the central explosive point of the church's work in Geneva."⁴

SERMON

12. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast made a good confession before many witnesses.
13. I charge thee in the sight of God who quickens all things, and before Jesus Christ, who witnessed a good confession under Pontius Pilate,
14. that thou keep this commandment, etc.

St. Paul showing us this morning the remedies to flee covetousness and the evils that come from it, exhorted us precisely to patience, and that not without cause. For we are pricked forward to monetary gain because every man wants to live at ease. And when we are so intent on our profit, it is impossible but Satan will have in his foot in among us, and deceive us, and cause us to go far out of the way. And so we shall be often tormented; we shall have many wrongs and injuries done to us; we shall be chased by one and robbed by another, and if we be not armed with patience, how shall we stand? And how can we have such a modesty and moderation in us, so as not to covet unlawful gain, whatsoever comes of it? But because the patience of the faithful stretches very far, and has in it many parts, St. Paul expressed his mind better in flat terms, by adding, *Let us fight*, as if he had said that **faith cannot be without fighting. Whosoever wants God to approve of his**

service, he must dispose himself to battle, for we have an enemy that never gives up. Thus we see what St. Paul aims at, that we should not think it strange when he previously called us to patience. Let every man make his account, since God has called us to his service, that he will also exercise us in fight. For he could easily hold Satan bridled and prevent us from having any temptations, so that we would go on our way undisturbed.

But we see that Satan has many ways to trouble us, and God gives him enough rein and permission to do it. **It follows then that we must be good soldiers, or else we cannot be good believers.** Truly it should be enough for him to have spoken this in one word, but because it is so hard a matter to practice this doctrine, it needs to be examined better, so that everyone may have occasion to think better about it, and commit it often to memory. We say that **faith is never without fight.** And why so? For if a man dispose himself to do well, and to submit himself to God, the devil will cast many difficulties to debauch him. The world is full of deceits, and we cannot take one step without encountering trouble. We walk here among thorns. They who should help us forward draw us back, for the devil uses the malice of those around us to fight against us. And when any man does us hurt, he gives us occasion to answer him with the same. Or we might lose heart, or be angry but we must proceed with simplicity, seeking nothing but to do our duty. And again, even within himself a Christian must fight to stand steadfast in the faith. That is so. There is nothing more contrary to our nature than to forgo these earthly things and not be given to them and to seek with all our heart and with all our soul that which we see not, which is completely hidden from our eyes, and such as our senses can in no way attain to. A faithful Christian man must look higher than himself when there is any question of thinking upon the kingdom of God and everlasting life. And yet we know how our minds are bent to the things we have in our hands. How then is it possible for us to stand fast in the faith, unless we mightily resist and strive stoutly against all our nature? And therefore, when we meet with these temptations and are stirred up to fight, let us make this doctrine of St. Paul our shield, namely, that **faith is never without fight, that we can never serve God without being soldiers.** And why so? For **we have enemies before us, we are compassed about on every side. And therefore it is requisite for us to be used to fighting, or else we must be fain to yield.**

Since it is so that no man can serve God without exercising himself in

patience, and that in the middle of afflictions wherewith the children of God are tormented, let us beware we renounce not our faith, but march on still. I would to God I could employ myself wholly to praise God joyfully and to be at rest and contentment; that I were not troubled by men but all my senses were given to do well. This is to be desired, but yet God will try me and my chief battle must be against my own affections. And then when the devil moves many combats against me, I must beware I am not overcome when temptations come on all sides. I must stand fast. I must be strong and constant. Therefore, I must not be weak in this case lest I renounce my faith. And what a thing were it to forsake my faith whereunto God has called me? Therefore **let us go on and not think it strange that this life is full of many assaults and that we must withstand many enemies and that we must from day to day get more strength to bring ourselves under this condition whereunto God will have us to be subject.**

This is one point. But yet St. Paul sweetens the sorrow that the faithful might conceive when he tells them that they must fight all the days of their lives, he sweetens it I say, by adding that *this combat is good*, as if he said: our war is not doubtful. As he says in another place, we fight not at random (1 Cor. 9:26). We see how Princes will for their ambition hazard all they have. They will endanger themselves to be spoiled of all their might and power. We see soldiers, which to have wages of those who travail in their vineyards and in the fields, will put their lives in danger. And what is it that leads them to it? A doubtful hope, for there is no certainty. Yes, and oftentimes, though they have all, and have overcome their enemies, what profit comes to them from it? But when God calls us to the combat, and wants us to be soldiers as it were under his sign, it is not upon any such condition, but we are assured that the war shall be good. And thus St. Paul comforts the faithful in exhorting them, as God also applies himself to us when he shows us what our duty is, and shows us also that if we do as he commands us, the whole shall redound to our profit and salvation. Truly, if we were wise, it would be sufficient for us to know the will of our God. This is the point we must be resolved in, since God appoints the matter so, we must pass that way. We may not stand disputing upon it. But because we are so hard to be ruled, and on the other side more delicate and dainty than need be—so that a very small thing is enough to kill our hearts, so brittle we are, as is pitiful to behold—so our Lord shows us that he proves our patience, that he lays

a hard law upon us, if he suffers us to be grieved and tormented with many temptations, he does it for our good, and the issue shall always be happy and blessed. Though for a season things are sharp and we disdain them, and if it were possible for us, we would pull back and stand aside, nevertheless God shows in the end that he orders this evil in such sort that he causes it to turn to our profit and advantage.

And therefore we ought to weigh this word well which St. Paul sets down here, *that the war of the children of God is good to those who fight*. For when they fight they do not waste their time, because they do nothing haphazardly. And he adds moreover, for better confirmation of his matter, that the reward which God sets before our eyes is no wage of gold or silver but is everlasting life. And if men through vain ambition are so set on fire that they spare not their very lives, what shall we do? What cowardliness is it and how can it be excused if any may spare himself, when God sets not before us any temporal wages, any piece of silver, and fleeting and brittle possession, but gives us everlasting life, and shows that he seeks nothing but to have us to be his heirs, to be partakers of his glory and immortality, to enjoy all his blessings, yes, and him himself? Where God lifts us up so high, are we not worse than stocks and blocks, if all the sinews we have strive not to follow this fight, the reward whereof is so great and inestimable?

Therefore we must have these three degrees which St. Paul sets down here. The first is, that faith cannot be without many assaults, and that the life of God's children is a warfare in this world. The second is that we must not be grieved if God tries us, for we do not fight at random. We are in no danger to lose our lives without recovery, nor to be spoiled of our goods and honors, but the result of our warfare is blessed because God rules us. It is he who calls us and will not allow us to waste our time. And third, that God contents not himself to recompense us in this world, but sets before us a thing far more excellent, namely, the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, because he wants us to pass through this world to come to him and enjoy forever his glory and everlasting bliss, which he purchased so dearly for us by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is it not reasonable that every one of us apply himself wholly to this? And are we then held back in this world, and in those things which we see when we compare the heavenly life with whatsoever can be desired in this world through honors, riches, commodities, pleasures, and whatever else men give themselves unto? Please, are they not,

I ask you, as dung and filth in comparison to God's glory? For the matter stands not only in this, that God shows himself a Father unto us in this world, and makes us feel his grace by giving us some fleeting blessings; but to say that we are of his nature, (as St. Peter says, 2 Peter 1:4) that we are joined to him, that he is one with us. Is not this a privilege which surmounts all?

Now for the fourth St. Paul adds, *whereunto also thou art called*. This imports first of all a confirmation of that which he said, *lay hold upon everlasting life*. For it is not in men to get the kingdom of heaven, nor to conquer it. Are we valiant enough to do it if we should run wholly that way? All our force and counsel would serve to no purpose. But when our God calls us to it we may go on, for we have a good warrant. We are not grounded upon any hope which we have foolishly imagined in our own brains, or upon any promise that any mortal man has made to us, or upon any appearance that we see before our eyes. For all these things may deceive us, and we see what becomes of those who rest upon them. But when our Lord has reached out his hand to us, we may walk on boldly; for we shall know that we have not run in vain. This may fully comfort us so that we in no way turn aside, whatsoever becomes of us. When we see all the world in a hurly burly, let us look to the calling of our God. Thus we see St. Paul's meaning was to confirm this doctrine, when he said that Timothy is called to everlasting life.

Now that which he says to one man pertains generally to all. And again we see hereby that men get not their salvation by their own industry, but from the free goodness of God. And therefore, that no man may take occasion hereby, to magnify himself, and to say, that we can do something, that it is our part to put forward ourselves, to the obtaining of everlasting life, St. Paul sets a bar against all these foolish dreams, saying, that we lay hold upon everlasting life because God has called us to it. Truly we must take pains and strive, yes as much as we can or rather more if it were possible; but yet, it is neither in him who wills, neither in him who runs, as St. Paul says, but in him who shows mercy (Rom 9:16). For it is not for our good will or for our running that we obtain everlasting life. For we are not only slothful and unprofitable to all goodness, but we go completely contrary until God has disposed us to run and set us in the right way. If men follow their nature, what will they do? They are mad to wickedness, and as seething pots, in so much as there is not one thought in them but that thought fights against God. As for any goodness, I warrant you we will never think of it. For we cannot have so much

as one thought to do well, as St. Paul says (2 Cor 3:5). And therefore it is God who sets us in order. He disposes us to run. He shows us the way. Has he done so much? Yet this is not enough, for we shall halt in the midway and fall down often. Indeed, we shall go out of the way. Therefore God must supply all these faults and make his calling sure in us, and strengthen it by the selfsame grace, from whence it sprung and arose.

Therefore as God was not moved to give us hope of our salvation for any goodness that he saw in us, but because it pleased him, and pleased him of his mere mercy, so when he goes on still to guide us until we come to the haven of salvation, he does it because it pleases him. Thus God will not have us idle, nevertheless it must be with fear and trembling. And why so? For it is God who works in us, giving us the will, giving us the effect, and all whatsoever according to his good pleasure (Phil 2:12). Let us do the best we can, but without presumption, without pride. Let us not think here to do well, in order to earn something nor because man is worthy to be exalted against God; for by this means the grace of God should be darkened, yes and made nothing. Therefore let us beware of this dreaming, and let us not do as the Papists, that when there is any speech of doing well, straightway out comes their free will, out comes claims of what they deserve. But when we are commanded to do and to strive, let us know that our strength comes from another way, that is to say, from the Spirit of God. Let us know that there is neither wisdom nor discretion in us, but God must guide us to it, and when he has begun, he must perfect it and supply all our infirmities. If we know this, let us always be in hatred with sin, let us walk warily, let us call upon him who called us once unto pity, that he would continue, for otherwise we will fall every minute of an hour. *When there is such humility, God shall be glorified as he is worthy.* So the faithful shall so work that they shall always know it is the Lord who works in them. They shall do their best, but they shall know that their strength comes from heaven and not from of themselves. And in the end they shall know that in laying hold upon everlasting life they have neither strength nor industry to brag of, but that they hold all the goodness of God which has had a continual course with them.

This is it in few words we have to mark in this place. And now we have to mark moreover that our thanklessness is too shameful if we forsake God's calling. For to say that our Lord has regarded us, us I say, who are miserable worms of the earth, to choose us into the number of his children, that he

has prepared an heavenly inheritance for us, that he has given us hope and assurance and we in the meantime despise it and are held back with the world, and are led away with these fleeting things, and are turned away from and deprived of such a blessing by our brutish blockishness, how can we excuse ourselves? For **we cannot come to where God appoints us without fighting.** And therefore when men shall see that we are held back with these fleeting things, and that the least thing in the world will turn us aside, that there is nothing so brittle as we, that so soon as Satan whispers in our ear, we are carried away very far, and instead of turning back to the right way, the world sees that everyone of us gives himself to these things of naught, what shall a man say? Does not the world see that we make no account of everlasting life, of such a treasure, and of the very immortality of our God itself? Let us see therefore that we awake ourselves and not be so sluggish. Moreover, because men are grieved by succession of time, and though they have had some zeal, yet when they must still begin again, they become slack and cold, therefore St. Paul says flatly, lay hold. In another place he sets himself for an example and says, my brothers though I have taken great pains yet am I not yet come to my mark. I must therefore take more pains, I must still go on and not look at what is behind me (Phil 3:12).

Now if St. Paul had need to stir himself after this sort, what must we do, I ask you? Must not a man, when he has hardly gone on one foot, look to the rest of his way? Seeing that St. Paul, who had dispatched a good piece of his way, and run so valiantly, still has to stir up himself and strive, must not he who has no more but come out of the doors, and has not gone very far, take a great deal more heed to himself and bestow all his labor and pains to obtain that which God has set before him? And he says precisely, *that we must not look on that which is behind.* Why so? For we would always reckon with God. As how? I have done this, I have done that; and is it not enough? Yes, upon what condition has God called us to his service? Is it for one deed or two, and then give us leave every man to rest? No, no; but that we should dedicate ourselves to him, both to live and to die, and to be his, for good and all. And therefore let us beware we take not this excuse upon anything that we have done, to say, "I have fought, I have taken great pains, and is it not enough? And must not others have their turn." We must not think on these things which may make us slack but see what remains and go on to do that which is commanded us. Otherwise let us think we have done

nothing. For it were better for us if we had never begun, than so to faint in the midst of our way.

And moreover, St. Paul adds, going on with his matter, that Timothy had made a good confession before many witnesses. By these words he meant to encourage him the more to stand fast in this combat of faith which he spoke of. For (as he said) it is great shame for a man to begin well and afterwards to fall away, and turn the bridle, and that the world should see him completely changed. For men will not marvel to see one who never gave any hope, to continue in doing evil. They will say, “Ho, the poor man knew not God, nor everlasting life. He never knew either what virtue or honesty meant. He is a miserable beast.” Thus will the world say; thus will they speak. “He is a drunkard. He is a whoremonger. He is a wicked man. He has always been such a one. He is made of nothing but dishonesty.” But when a man has made a show to serve God, and has employed himself faithfully and has been a mirror of honesty, has given good example and edified much people—if afterwards he change his ways, and become wicked and profane himself, and the world see him to be completely another man than he was before, they will take him as a monster. Every man will abhor him.

And for this cause St. Paul says to Timothy, *that he had given a good confession before many witnesses*. Hereby we are warned, when God has been good unto us, to make us walk uprightly as we ought, that is so much a straighter bond and obligation for us, to the end we should know that it is not lawful for us to swerve to the side. There are a great number who think they have bought out their offenses which they commit, when they can allege how valiantly they have been in times past; as we see that even those men who never did anything worthy in their lives, but only put on a show, have had a certain countenance of goodness. And thereupon they give themselves to lewdness, they play the devils, and yet notwithstanding want to be thought of as angels. What? I have done this, I have done that, will they say. To be short, they will make chronicles of their doings which, nevertheless, are worth nothing. But even if they were as angels of paradise, it would be the more shame for them, and so much the less shall they be able to excuse themselves, and so much the greater will their confusion be before God, and before all his children. And why so? For is not that what they did before a witness that they knew they ought to fear God? And if it grieved them to do it, and if they are become lewd, shall they need any

other reason to condemn them? Shall not their former life answer that they sin not anymore by ignorance, that they can have no cloak, but that they have malice, as having become devils, fallen away from God, and cast away his yoke that had called them to obedience? And therefore let us mark well this warning which is given us here, namely, that when God has set us in a good estate and we have led our neighbors to goodness, that we are bound so much the more to stand fast and continue. For if we fall, the offence will be double, and because God has shown himself to us, we may not pretend ignorance, since he has so examined us all kinds of ways. Therefore our fault will be so much the greater if we go not on in our course after that God has once reached us out his hand.

And we must mark here that when St. Paul speaks here of the good confession which Timothy made, he means not only the confession of the mouth, but of the life; for indeed it is the proof and witness that we must give of our faith, and of the hope that we have of everlasting salvation. If we do but speak it will be very slander. But when a man behaves himself so that the world may know it is sure that he serves God, and bears the doctrine, this is a good matter and very sure. Therefore is Timothy praised here by St. Paul, because he behaved himself well in his office and calling that men might see he served God not like a hypocrite, but that he preached the gospel as being sure, that it was the pure and undoubted truth wherein stands men's salvation. And because he made such a confession he is commended, but upon this condition that he must continue still.

And he says precisely, *before many witnesses*, as if he said that God had set him as it were upon a scaffold. For, if a man were not known and his life had been as it were hidden and then it so come to pass that he does amiss, it will not do so much harm as if he had been greatly accounted of among the faithful and had been taken as a pillar of the Church. Therefore if he becomes naught, his fall is great. If a piece of the house falls down, that is of no importance. The house will remain and stand well enough. But if any of the principal members fall, all will come down. Even so fares it with those whom God has set aloft and which are set for all men to look upon. If they play lewd parts, they cause a great number to be naught, and therefore is their condemnation more grievous. Therefore let us join this with the rest, namely, that if God has bestowed upon us the favor to enable us to give others light, let us know also that we shall be enlightened. That is to say, that if we

have done evil by going out of the right way, we shall have more witnesses to cry out to God for vengeance against us. Look how many we have edified before. We shall have so many voices to convince us and condemn us. And therefore since it is so, when any of us has a good beginning, and has walked as became him, let him be so much the more careful to go on his race even to the end. For the end is so far off that, if we have done well for a while and this tends to cool us, our former lives should be as good as a spur to us to prick us forward to acknowledge daily the graces that God has bestowed upon us. And when we have employed them well, this ought to stir us up to well doing, knowing that God framed us for himself, and having framed us so well, we must be an example to others—especially those who are of any name in the Church, and have many eyes upon them. It is to the end that they should not overthrow that which they have built, otherwise they shall have a horrible vengeance of God fall upon them, if they turn away from the goodness that God had done them and make the grace of no effect which they had received. Everyman for his part ought to apply this doctrine to his use, for it pertains generally to us all. For it is said on the one side that the ministers of the word of God are as burning lamps, the light of the world (Matt 5:14). But generally St. Paul says also to all Christians that they bear a burning lamp when they have the knowledge of the Gospel. Therefore we must walk through the darkness of the world, knowing that God has set us upon a scaffold as it were, so that we will be seen afar off. And therefore let us beware we go no out of the way when we have the way beaten before us, and God guides and governs us. Let us, I say, be so much the more aware that we be not a cause to mislead others who by our example might be framed to well doing.

And because men's confession is not sufficient, unless it be better grounded, St. Paul, to conclude the matter, brings Timothy, and in his person all the faithful, to cast their eyes upon our Lord Jesus Christ and upon the confession that he made under Pontius Pilate. The son of God has begun, and we do but follow, and we are partakers of the confession that he made before Pontius Pilate. This is what may give us a great deal better courage. And therefore St. Paul says that he enjoined Timothy before God, who quickens all things, and before Jesus Christ, who made a good confession before Pontius Pilate, that he go on.

But to make this doctrine more profitable to us we must mark that it is

not without cause that St. Paul used this great vehemence, for he knew how hard a matter it was. Truly he speaks here to all the faithful. But howsoever it be, Timothy is also comprehended in it, even he who before God witnessed the zeal and constancy that had done his duty as well as possible might be. Nevertheless he needs still to be exhorted, as St. Paul besides the warning he gives him calls him to appear before God, sets Jesus Christ before his eyes and gives him a straight charge. And why so? It is certain that if it had been an easy matter, and such as needed not much to be stood upon, St. Paul would have been content to have said in one word, look to your office, you know whom you serve, and therefore be of good courage. But when he says to him, God is your judge, you must make an account before his throne and before the seat of his majesty, I summon you to appear before our Lord Jesus Christ who is appointed as our judge, that if you do not do your duty to stand constantly, I may protest that I showed you what was required and you passed not for it. Let us mark well, I say, that **if we will employ ourselves to God's service, we must not do it slightly nor think we have done with it, when we have done our best.**

And therefore we have to pray to God that it would please him to strengthen us and so dispose us to do what we should do, being held and aided by him. Thus are the faithful first of all warned to fly to him who is able to make them capable, since of our own nature we cannot be. And if this is requisite in all Christians without exception, what shall we say of the ministers of the word of God, who have a higher charge by a great deal, and so consequently a great deal more hard? Have they not to take very good heed to themselves? Nevertheless we may not be troubled with the hardness of it. As we see a great number who when they consider what they have to do, their hearts fail them if it be weightier than they are able to perform and go through with. "Is it possible that I can do this? I feel myself weak, I see that this is a great burden, and a burden that I am not able to bear." **No, no, only let us take pains. Although the things be hard for us, God will work for us.** And since we see that St. Paul, naming things that surmount the strength of men, still does not cease to exhort men to do them, we know that it will be no excuse for us to allege that we were astonished and amazed when he saw that we were not able and fit for that charge which God laid upon our shoulders. For he knows what we can do—which is nothing at all. And moreover, he will not be lacking to us, nor ever fail us, so long as we

walk humbly and learn to submit ourselves to him, and commit ourselves wholly into his hands.

And because these things might discourage us if we should look further than the world, let us mark well also the circumstance which St. Paul adds. And let this conclude the matter when he says, *That God quickens all things*, for he shows us hereby, though it seem that we are poor and miserable wretches, that our condition is accursed, that as touching the world we are despised and reviled, that men mock at us, that they put out their tongues at us, that others torment us, that we are taken as castaways, that nevertheless we must not faint, for God gives life. Therefore let us cast our eyes upon that life which God keeps hidden with himself, and which he opened when he revealed it by the Holy Spirit and gave good witness of it in his Gospel. So then, when the world has conspired our death a hundred thousand times, and we are taken for condemned persons, and reviled, let us go on, for our lives stand not here below. It hangs not upon men, neither upon their reputation, nor upon their credit. Let us not think so, but let us surmount all grief that the devil casts in our way to make us faint-hearted, considering that it is God who quickens all things. He holds our life in his hand. He will keep it safely and securely, and it is his pleasure that we should bend to him and content ourselves therewith, knowing that he will not deceive us in that which he has promised us. This is it which St. Paul aimed at here.

Paul will say more on this later, but we must bear this away in few words, so that whenever we shall be tossed up and down with the temptations of this world, and with all the troubles that may befall us, we may know that God has not called us to him in vain, and therefore we must be always his. Yes, and if we feel many infirmities that move us to behave ourselves sinfully, and if we see the thanklessness and malice of men on the one side, and it seems that we profit nothing by doing good, and it is but lost labor on the other side, yet must we strive and endeavor to cast our eyes upon God. And then, are we held fast and stayed here as it were? Let us still climb over such barriers; though there seem to be great mountains. Yet must we have wings as it were to fly when we cannot go. And the faith and hope that we have in God will serve us for that, so that we comprehend the virtue that is in him, and which he reserves as his proper office, which is to make alive. Now God does not quicken anything but that which seems to be dead. Therefore when we walk as we ought, and as we are called, it cannot be but we must be as

it were cast away in the sight of the world, and that death itself threatens us and compasses us about on every side. And why so? Otherwise God would not do that which he challenges to himself in this place, namely, to quicken us; but **in the midst of death we may hope for life, knowing that no man can molest us when the invincible power of God is for us**; and that they who now trouble us shall abide confounded, and God will cause us in the end to triumph with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us fall down before the face of our good God, confessing our faults, and asking him that it would please him to give us a better feeling of them than we have had, that we may displease ourselves in them and draw near to him from day to day. And if there has been any show of good in us, as of his grace he has brought us into the hope, etc.

¹ See further, "John Calvin: Preacher of the Gospel," *Preaching Magazine* 31:6 (Summer 65-63):(2016).

² Ray Van Neste and Brian Denker, eds. *John Calvin's Sermons on 1 Timothy* (Amazon Digital Services, 2016).

³ In the published version, the sermons on 1 Timothy were simply numbered rather than given names. I have taken a name for this sermon from a recurring phrase which I think captures a key point of the sermon.

⁴ T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 89.

SBJT Forum

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SBJT: Martin Luther is famous for his understanding of two kingdoms. What is Luther's two kingdoms view and why is it important for us today?

David VanDrunen: While issues of Scripture, faith, and justification will probably always remain of chief interest for students of Martin Luther's theology, understanding the reformer's historical influence requires wrestling with his doctrine of the two kingdoms. This doctrine grounded Luther's reflections on civil government, its relation to the church, and Christians' ordinary vocations. Luther set forth a striking vision of what we today might call "Christianity and culture," a vision rooted in centuries of earlier Christian thought—and yet without any exact precedent. While I do not believe Luther's vision got everything right, I suggest that its basic features are compelling and remain surprisingly relevant for contemporary Christians.

Luther's famous treatise, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" (1523), captures the main ideas and implications of the vision. At least four perennially important themes emerge from this treatise.

First, Luther asserts that civil government claims *legitimate* authority. Magistrates bear the sword and enforce the law by God's ordinance. Luther finds evidence for this already in Genesis 4:14-15 and 9:6, and claims that the Mosaic law, John the Baptist, and Christ himself confirmed it. Second, Luther describes civil authority as *distinct*: the *temporal* authority magistrates wield is distinct from the *spiritual* authority by which Christ governs believers. Here Luther introduces the categories of "two kingdoms" and "two governments." In this treatise, Luther speaks of the "two kingdoms" in a way similar to Augustine's "two cities." The kingdom of God consists of true Christians, and the rest of humanity belongs to the kingdom of the world.

The “two governments” refer to the distinct ways by which God rules these two kingdoms. True Christians do not need to be ruled by law or sword, so God establishes a spiritual government over them, by which the Holy Spirit makes them righteous. In contrast, unbelievers need to be constrained by force. Thus, God appoints temporal authority (civil government) to rule them by law and sword, in order to secure “external peace and prevent evil deeds.”

The third important theme requires the most nuanced discussion: Luther believed that believers and unbelievers could wield civil authority in *common*. Luther at first appears to say just the opposite. He describes the Sermon on the Mount as an ethic for all Christians under the spiritual government of Christ. Christ forbids believers from using violence, for the physical sword has no place in his kingdom. This would seem to prevent Christians from assuming civil office. But Luther then encourages them to do just this. If their community needs “hangmen, constables, judges, lords, or princes,” Christians should offer their services. If they do not, they act “contrary to love.” To reconcile this apparent contradiction, Luther explains that believers should never seek such positions to gain vengeance for themselves, but only to advance the peace and safety of their neighbors. In their own affairs, Christians gladly turn the other cheek, as Christ’s spiritual government requires. In this way, Christians serve the purposes of both governments and advance the welfare of both kingdoms.

The fourth and final theme—which Luther calls his main concern in this treatise—is that civil authority is *accountable*. Luther puts the question in terms of how far temporal authority extends. In short, civil authority is legitimate, but only for certain tasks. Magistrates rightly take up the sword, but they are responsible for how they use it. This point is worth emphasizing, since it corrects all-too-common caricatures of the two-kingdoms doctrine. A stereotypical complaint is that the two-kingdoms doctrine makes Christians quietistic and content to submit to civil magistrates no matter how terribly they act. Yet Luther is more concerned here to demonstrate *what kind* of authority magistrates hold than to show *that* they have authority. In fact, Luther laments that the German people “make the mistake of believing that they ... are bound to obey their rulers in everything.” What is the extent of civil authority? Magistrates have authority only over “life and property and external affairs on earth.” But God alone has authority “over the soul.” When heresy emerges, “God’s word must do the fighting,” for “heresy can

never be restrained by force.”

Whatever tweaks and qualifications Luther’s treatise may demand, each of these four themes is compelling, and Christians today forget them at their peril. Most Christians agree theoretically with Luther that civil authority is *legitimate*—texts like Romans 13:1-7 hardly permit otherwise. But confronted with the daily scandals and abuses of politicians, believers often think and speak in ways that fall far short of Paul’s exhortation to respect our civil officials (Rom 13:7). Paul probably wrote Romans when Nero was emperor, and Luther obviously thought most of the German princes were knaves. Corrupt politicians are nothing remotely new, and the reminder to respect their authority remains timely.

Most Christians today probably also affirm theoretically that civil authority is *distinct* from the spiritual authority Christ gives his church. But have Christians digested just how radically different the church’s spiritual sword is from the state’s physical sword? Luther’s interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, controversial thought it is, helpfully exposes this radical difference. The church persuades by God’s word and Spirit; the state coerces through physical force. The church disciplines through pleas for repentance and gentle restoration (Matt 18:15-17; Gal 6:1-2); the state punishes by fines, imprisonment, and execution. Yet even in the modern West, where Christians have supposedly learned the difference between church and state, churches and pastors often strive to become political players (or let themselves be played). And many Christians remain nostalgic for the days when friendly governments suppressed distasteful religious voices. Luther’s emphasis on the distinction between temporal and spiritual government remains urgently relevant.

So too does Luther’s emphasis that Christians and non-Christians can hold civil authority in *common*. Government work is not for everyone, but God permits Christians to hold civil offices and uses their efforts for good purposes. In the present, many Western believers, facing cultures increasingly hostile to Christianity, are becoming attracted to neo-Anabaptist voices that forbid Christians from taking up the sword at all or simply call them to withdraw from broader political society into their own smaller communities. Of course, how Christians should respond to a hostile culture is a difficult question, and worth serious debate, but Luther properly reminds us that Christians have a rightful place within government.

Luther's insistence that civil officials are *accountable* also remains welcome. Christians who hold government office must be on guard against the perennial corruptions of power. And although the church should never become a political player, Christians, as responsible citizens, should promote just use of civil authority in whatever way proper to their stations in life. Although called to endure much evil in the present age, Christians must never become indifferent to injustice or forget that governments are the greatest source of injustice in the world.

What is most remarkable about Luther's treatise after five hundred years is perhaps not the enduring relevance of its main themes so much as the balanced nature of its claims and exhortations.

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SBJT: What does Martin Luther have to teach us today about the Christian life?

Carl R. Trueman: One of the dangers of celebrating the Reformation is that perennial human tendency to remake the past in our own image. In doing so, of course, we celebrate not so much the past but ourselves. We also miss an important benefit that proper historical reflection provides: learning from that which is different rather than merely reinforcing our own ideas and

even prejudices by reassuring ourselves that our heroes were really just like us.

Luther is a great case in point. Familiar to many Protestants as the man who started the theological dimension of the Reformation, many of us assume that he was really an embryonic Presbyterian, Evangelical or even Baptist and that, were he alive today, he would be one of us. While that might be a source of reassurance and even encouragement, it also means we miss many of the most important and richest aspects of Luther's theology. His approach to the Christian life is one such aspect—instructive precisely because it is different from so much of our contemporary approaches to the same.

The first thing we might note is that the material conditions of Luther's time inevitably meant that the Christian would have been lived with different emphases. Given low literacy rates and the fact that many books would have been preclusively expensive, the whole idea of a Christian life built on the foundation of private devotions would have been virtually impossible. Christians in Luther's day had one major place where they could have access to the word of God: the corporate worship services of the church. To live the Christian life in any meaningful way meant that church attendance—consistent, regular church attendance—was vital.

This corporate emphasis was not simply a practical response to material conditions, however. It was also the practical outworking of Luther's own theological insights. What is a Christian for Luther? A Christian is one who grasps Christ by faith. That then points to a second question: Where does the Christian find Christ in order to grasp him thus? Luther's answer is simple and straightforward: in the Word preached and in the sacraments duly administered. In short, the Christian needs to be baptized, to hear sermons, and to take communion. Where do those things occur? In the public assembly of God's church.

Baptism was for Luther the gateway into the Christian life. This is not, as is often claimed, because Luther believed in some form of baptismal regeneration. Time and again in his writings he makes it clear that it is not the administering of the water which makes a person a Christian. Rather it is because baptism is the first moment when an individual is confronted with Christ. Granted, Luther had more confidence than I would have that a tiny baby can grasp the promise of baptism by faith but it does not change the fact that he did not believe in baptismal regeneration as taught by, say, the Roman Catholic Church.

And baptism continues to be the foundation of the Christian life throughout the believer's earthly sojourn. When the Devil comes and tempts Luther, his typical response is "I have been baptized!"—shorthand for "I have been offered Christ in my baptism and now cling to him by faith!" Baptism thus remains of immediate practical relevance every day. In addition, Luther sees it as the perfect picture of the Christian life: every moment of every day the Christian is dying to self and rising to new life in Christ.

The word preached is probably where today's Evangelicals feel more at home with Dr. Martin. But again for Luther the public proclamation of the

Word is always more effective than private reading. Though he would not have expressed his thoughts in this way, we might say that he saw private reading as always vulnerable to our innate prejudices and filters, and that these would blunt its effect on our souls. To sit in church and here the Word proclaimed is to be confronted by a Christ that we cannot conform to the dimensions of our own tastes. This “Word from outside,” as Luther’s phrase would have it, is powerful, breaking our self-righteousness and bringing us to Christ in a way that our own reading strategies are unlikely ever to do. The preacher points to Christ. Our own hearts, left to their own devices, will never do so. It is thus vital for Christian health that we are in church.

Finally, there is the Lord’s Supper. This is the point where most modern Protestants will decisively repudiate Luther, most being default memorialists when it comes to the Supper’s significance. I suspect that is unlikely to change but it is worth remembering that the young John Calvin favored Luther over Zwingli precisely because the latter turned communion into a mere memorial. Luther may have been wrong in the way he constructed his understanding of communion, but we need to remember the importance Paul gives to such. Some of those who have eaten the Supper casually have died, so he tells the Corinthians. Does mere memorialism allow us to do justice to such a passage which seems to give tremendous importance to the Lord’s Supper? I am no Lutheran but communion is nonetheless a very important part of my own Christian life. Eating with friends always brings a degree of intimacy which might otherwise be lacking. Eating with brothers and sisters in Christ at the Lord’s Supper draw us closer to them and indeed to the Lord who is himself there present.

There is much more to Luther on the Christian life. He did consider private devotions to be important. He also regarded confessing sins to a priest as being helpful—not for Roman sacramental reasons—but simply because it was useful at times to have that “Word from outside” applied in a very personal manner by one Christian to another. Yet in our age of individualism and personal autonomy we need to remember first and foremost that Luther’s view of the Christian life was ultimately inimical to such. It was at its most basic level corporate because it was in the corporate gathering of God’s people that Christ was to be found: in Word and in sacrament.

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SBJT: What impact did Martin Luther have on the English Reformation?

Brian L. Hanson: In the quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation, it is appropriate that much of the focus has been on Martin Luther who posted the Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. However, it is also instructive to consider the marked influence that Luther had outside of Germany. Due to both the burgeoning printing industry in Europe during the early sixteenth century and the anti-ecclesiastical and anti-establishment nature of the Ninety-Five Theses, Luther's name and writings rapidly became widespread across the Continent. The Reformation in

England, in particular, demonstrates close ties with the German Reformation in theological development. While influence is not always cut-and-dry to determine from a point of historical scholarship, I would still argue that the English Reformation felt the influence of Luther in at least three distinct ways: 1) Luther's mentorship of and relationship with the English reformer, Robert Barnes, 2) the English evangelicals' theological development and own assessment of the genesis of the English Reformation in terms of Luther's influence, and 3) the increasing demand for Luther's writings in the English print market. These three aspects directly shaped the early stages of the English Reformation.

The primary catalyst in disseminating Luther's theology across the English Channel was the Cambridge humanist and reformer, Robert Barnes (c. 1495–1540). Three years after his conversion to the evangelical faith in 1525, Barnes dodged the religious authorities in Cambridge and fled to Wittenberg, where he became a close friend and mentee of Luther. Luther invested much time into Barnes' life, and his influence upon the young man was pronounced.

Under Luther's guidance, Barnes began composing pamphlets in both Latin and English that echoed his mentor. Through Barnes' writings and ministry in England, the doctrine of justification by faith that Luther rediscovered in Romans became the center of attention in English evangelical print. Barnes' *Supplicatyon* of 1531, printed in Antwerp, was a comprehensive exposé on solifidian justification and an apology of Lutheran doctrine. Luther's teachings in English arrived in London in the form of Barnes' second edition of *Supplicatyon*, published in London in 1534. In it Barnes promoted Luther's understanding of *imputatio* and reconciliation: Christ "is al[1] oure iustice ... al[1] only the peace maker bytwene god and man."¹

Barnes' activities and writings made a profound impact on the religious scene in England, leading to an initial Lutheran slant in England's Reformation. Barnes returned to England in the summer of 1531 and gained the favor of Henry VIII. While Henry rejected the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he still appointed Barnes as his royal chaplain in 1535. Henry commissioned Barnes to negotiate agreements with the Wittenberg delegation, including Philipp Melanchthon, eagerly seeking Luther's and Melanchthon's approval of his divorce with Catherine of Aragon. While Henry never secured what he desired, Barnes continued to write religious tracts, among them a Latin polemical work in 1536, with a preface by Luther himself, that condemned the papacy in obvious Lutheran overtones. After Barnes was condemned and burned as a "heretic" in London on July 30, 1540, Luther and the Wittenberg evangelicals were so moved by his death that they printed his final profession of faith in German in honor of Barnes' relationship with the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

Second, Luther's doctrine of justification through the tracts of Barnes made a significant mark on the next generation of English evangelicals, including Richard Tracy (d. 1569) and Thomas Becon (c. 1512–1567), both of whom were known for their commitment to Luther's theology of justification.² For instance, Tracy defended Luther's view of justification as a "covering" and "clothing" of Christ's justice so that sinners "appere in the syght of god iuste, and righteous."³ Becon, London cleric and author of popular bestsellers, argued as Luther that *imputatio* involved a double exchange. Not only was there an imputation of righteousness from Christ to sinners, he contended, but there was a transfer of sin from sinners to Christ. Through Christ, "all your synnes shal be layd on his backe."⁴ Christ's perfect, sinless life also

secured one's justification by the imputation of His own righteousness upon sinners: "All that ever he [Christ] shal[1] do, shal[1] be done for your sake. All hys good deeds shal[1] be yours. His ryghteousnes, holynes and godly lyfe shall be yours."⁵

As the Reformation in England flourished, the evangelicals began to assess the roots of the English Reformation, and they acknowledged Luther as the "light" and "instrument" of their own conversions as well as the impetus for the Reformation in England. Besides Barnes, William Tyndale adamantly defended Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. He took Thomas More, lord chancellor of Henry VIII, to task by arguing that the Lutherans were not "heretics." Included in his response to More in 1531 was a point-by-point defense of Luther's teachings on doctrine. Hugh Latimer, bishop of Worcester and martyr, called Luther "that wonderful instrument of god, through whom god hath opened the light of his holy word unto the world."⁶ John Jewel, bishop of Salisbury, wrote with gratitude that Luther was "sente of God to give light unto the world."⁷

Third, the English evangelicals also propagated Luther's works in England by translating them into English and encouraging them to be in print. The 1530s and 1540s saw a steady growth in the print of Luther's polemical pieces in England, indicating a high demand for his works. Though there was a sharp decline in Luther's works in England during the 1550s, due to Edward VI's close ties with John Calvin and Martin Bucer, his writings, particularly his commentaries on the Psalms and Galatians, returned to the English printing presses with full force after 1570, some titles undergoing several editions. Furthermore, the tracts of Luther's friend and colleague, Melancthon, who became the scholarly voice of the Lutheran Church, flooded the printing presses in London with some of his titles becoming popular bestsellers in England. Melancthon's writings made a substantial impression upon the English to the extent that the University of Cambridge made his *Loci communes* of 1521 mandatory reading for theology students.

Luther's legacy in England is often underestimated and misunderstood. However, the early English evangelicals realized that he was a "goodly instrument," and acknowledged their debt to him for the Gospel that "beganne first to rise and to shyne" in England through Luther's writings.⁸ Luther's direct contribution to the English Reformation was through his mentoring of Robert Barnes, who in turn popularized the doctrine of justification by faith

in England through print. In this five-hundredth year of remembrance, let us reflect upon the power of Christian friendship and mentorship. And, more importantly, may we never underestimate God's justification of sinners, an act that "by [Christ's] passions and suffrynges we are perfectly made whole."⁹

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- ¹ Robert Barnes, *A supplicatyon made by Robert Barnes* (Antwerp: S. Cock, 1531) STC 1470, sig. E6r.
 - ² Thomas Becon, *Flour of godly praiers*, (London: John Day, 1550) STC 1719.5, Preface, sig. A4v. Becon called Barnes a "prophet" whom God used "to cal[1] us [the people of England] unto repentaunce."
 - ³ Richard Tracy, *The profe and declaration of thys proposition: fayth only iustifieth* (London: E Whitchurch, 1543) STC 24164, sigs. B4r, B5r-v.
 - ⁴ Thomas Becon, *Newes out of heaven* (London: J. Mayler for J. Gough, 1541) STC 1739, sig. F8r.
 - ⁵ Becon, *Newes out of heaven*, sig. F6r; Becon, *Newes out of heaven*, sig. G2r.
 - ⁶ Hugh Latimer, *27 sermons preached by the ryght Reverende father in God and constant matir [sic] of Iesus Christe, Maister Hugh Latimer* (London: John Day, 1562) STC 15276, sig. S4v.
 - ⁷ John Jewel, *An apologie, or aunswer in defence of the Church of England* (London: Reginald Wolf, 1562) STC 14590, sig. G2v.
 - ⁸ Jewel, *Apology*, sig. G2v.
 - ⁹ Becon, *A newe pathway unto praiier* (London: J. Mayler for J. Gough, 1542) STC 1734. sig. Q3v.

Book Review

Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice. By Alan Mugridge.
WUNT 362. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. 558 pp., \$239.00. cloth

Blame the scribes! That has been a refrain for quite some time in the field of New Testament Textual Criticism. Now, Alan Mugridge, Senior Lecturer of New Testament at Sydney Missionary and Bible College, attempts to find out what we can actually know about those who penned the manuscripts.

The purpose of the volume, according to Mugridge, “is to examine the extant Christian papyri, along with a number of allied papyri as a control set, in order to ascertain what kinds of writers actually copied or wrote them” (2). By “Christian papyri,” he means the ones bearing Christian texts: Old Testament, New Testament, apocryphal, patristic, hagiographic, liturgical, gnostic, Manichaeian, and unidentified texts. By “allied papyri,” he means those addressing a deity or deities for help in life: amulets, magical texts, Jewish texts (OT and other), and school texts.

To non-experts, there is still much to consider in this work beyond the papyrological particulars provided in the catalogue of 548 papyri that dominate the book (155–410). Mugridge eagerly contests widely held beliefs about the copying of early Christian texts—the idea that early Christians had their texts copied “in house” (i.e., by themselves without much scribal expertise)—and he refutes the persistent suspicion that the copyists of some NT papyri deliberately changed the text to comply with their theology because they were Christians. The reality, he argues, is that the copyists of early Christian texts were *not* typically Christians. Rather, the majority of them were trained, professional scribes, who probably had a variety of religious convictions.

These arguments will no doubt elicit howls of protest from other specialists, but touches upon one of the book’s greatest strengths. Mugridge offers a remarkably rich discussion of scribal features and of how the copying of Christian texts took shape over time (1–154). He shows how complex of a topic it really is, and presents his case through a closer reading of more manuscripts than most can claim. He hopes that readers will come away with

a better understanding about how Christians had their texts copied during the second to fourth centuries AD, as well as the kinds of people who would have had the ability and opportunity to copy them.

In this work, we also learn that “there are so few examples of Christian or Jewish papyri [at least up to the end of the fourth century AD] with regular and clear spacing between words” (71). While that news is not especially fresh, it certainly helps actualize the importance of what a growing number of scholars are saying about the alleged difficulties of reading a manuscript written in *scriptio continua* (i.e., without spacing between words): it was the norm of the day and we should essentially drop the line of argument that says a “professional” reader was required. In fact, the author’s treatment of various “reading aids” is necessarily brief but useful for that very reason: readers’ aids “cannot serve to confirm or indicate the professionalism of the copyist of the Christian papyri reviewed here, since writers on the spectrum from highly professional scribes down to the very unskilled writers made the same kind of intermittent and inconsistent use of them” (91).

Some major overstatements, however, detract from the volume’s overall effect. In attempting to counteract the dominant view that early Christian texts were reproduced by Christians, who were mostly nonprofessional scribes, Mugridge exaggerates the evidence. For instance, to say that professional writers required writing implements that “must have been unusual for anyone to possess, except trained scribes and members of the elite” is to overreach (13). It is also bold to give so much credit to the *assumption* that over 80-90% of the population was illiterate because some scholars have argued that a certain type of formal schooling “was available only to a few” (12), and therefore risky to base an entire book on this premise. Valid objections can be made to refute this latter claim, and ample evidence exists contrary to the former one. For example, see several counter arguments and evidence in my article on ancient literacy (*TrinJ* 36.4 [2015]: 161–89) and forthcoming book on early Christian reading practices (*Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus* [Minneapolis, MN; Fortress Press, 2017]).

He then goes on to state that “there is no reason to use the word [‘scriptorium’ as a setting in which the copying of texts involved more than a single scribe] for this early period in general, [and] it would be better not to use it at all when discussing Christian papyri from the first four centuries” (16). This assertion, however, remains unsubstantiated, especially because there is

evidence that can be used to suggest that scriptoria were well-established by the end of the second century AD. The utilization of *nomina sacra*, preference for the codex form, and a host of other common characteristics among early Christian texts, such as uniformity in manuscript size, range of handwriting, and particular readers' aids, are all indications of organization and standardization of practice that cannot so easily be swept aside in just a few sentences or paragraphs. Some type of controlled production (i.e., quality control) for the public usage of the following second-century Christian manuscripts, for example, seems probable: 155, 171, 172, and 201 (according to Murgidge's catalogue numbering system; or more popularly known among readers of this journal as P64/67, P104, P77, and P90 respectively).

He also seems to assume throughout the work that there exists a directly proportional relationship between scribal professionalism and textual purity. Yet scribal hands do not necessarily dictate scribal accuracy (among studies not noted in this volume, see Colin Roberts, *The Antinoopolis Papyri* [1950]; Susan Stephens, *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library II* [1985]). Granted, he does note that trained scribes could and did make errors (e.g., see 142). But he still concludes with such strong language to the contrary: "By drawing on the services of trained copyists to have their texts reproduced, the Christians were *guaranteed* prompt and *accurate* work ... the *accuracy embedded in the copying* of texts served as *the* basis for generally *very consistent* texts being dispersed ... To have *ensured accurate copying* from the start, rather than leaving that task to amateur 'insiders,' laid a foundation for *thoroughgoing reliability*" (153; most italics added).

Last but not least, because there are so few surviving papyri with signs that a professional scribe had done the copying (i.e., "stichometric counts") in the archaeological record, much of the research Murgidge discusses in this regard is speculative, some extremely so. That is not necessarily a bar to his project; the speculations are thought-provoking, and the process by which scholars try to piece together the past from many different perspectives is an interesting story in its own right. In other words, the lack of sharp conclusions comes with the territory.

In sum, I highly recommend this book and believe that every theological library should own a copy. Murgidge's reliable, wealth-of-details approach demands a reflective read. While I do not think he succeeds in proving that the majority of early Christian texts were copied by non-Christians, he does

effectively show how most copyists of early Christian texts had skill and an interest in doing their work well and accurately. Or to put this yet another way, whereas Mugridge argues that “there is no firm evidence that the copyists were generally Christians” (2), I would contend with equal conviction that there is no firm evidence that the copyists were *not* generally Christians.

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