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LUTHER ON UNION WITH CHRIST

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INTRODUCTION

Repeat something often enough and whether true or not, people will begin to believe it. This oft said cliché is certainly true regarding the relationship between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions on the doctrines of justification and union with Christ. There is a growing chorus of those who claim that there is a unique Reformed approach to the doctrine of justification by faith in comparison to the Lutheran tradition. Richard Gaffin has been one of the chief proponents of this thesis. He argues that he has found a tendency in the Reformation tradition to conceive of justification as a stand-alone imputative act without any reference to the doctrine of union with Christ. Gaffin argues that a union-less doctrine of justification is characteristic of the Lutheran tradition where union with Christ follows as a consequence of justification in the *ordo salutis*. By contrast, the Reformed tradition, particularly as it comes in the Westminster Standards, places justification among the realities that manifest union with Christ.¹ This essay will argue that the Gaffin thesis does not correctly describe Lutheran views of the relationship between the doctrines of justification and union with Christ.² In fact, the evidence will show that there are significant similarities between Luther and Calvin on the relationship between justification, sanctification, and union with Christ to the point that a line of division cannot be easily drawn between Luther and Calvin on these doctrines. To prove this thesis there are a number of necessary steps to be taken.

First, we will explore the specific claims of Gaffin and others in order to understand the nature of their argument. Second, we will then set forth the parameters of proving the thesis by delimiting the scope of the study to Martin Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary. Delimiting the scope

¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes: 2006), p. 50.

² This essay represents a retraction, as I mistakenly followed Gaffin's argument; see J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), pp. 89, 273.

of the study to this one work will make the task of proving the thesis a manageable one. But what some might not know is that Luther's Galatians commentary has a normative confessional status within Lutheranism. Therefore, to establish Luther's view on justification and union also sets forth the normative view of confessional Lutheranism. Third, we will explore Luther's doctrines of union with Christ and justification and sanctification. And fourth, the paper will make some concluding observations about the harmony and compatibility between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions on the relationship between justification and union with Christ.

THE CLAIMED LUTHERAN-REFORMED DIVIDE

In order to understand Gaffin's claims regarding the Lutheran-Reformed divide, it is important first to understand what he argues regarding the Reformed tradition on justification and union with Christ. Gaffin claims that for John Calvin (1509-64), a 'first generation' Reformed theologian and 'fountainhead figure' for the tradition, there is no priority between justification or sanctification because both are simultaneously received through union with Christ.³ Gaffin expounds the superiority of Calvin's view with respect to the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic view when he writes concerning the common charge of antinomianism:

Calvin destroys Rome's charge by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification, a concern for godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification. Calvin proceeds as he does, and is *free* to do so, because for him the relative 'ordo' or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically. Rather, what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority to both (spiritual, 'existential', faith-) union with Christ.⁴

Gaffin's argument boils down to this: union with Christ is the ground from which flow two distinct but un-prioritized benefits: justification and sanctification. In comparison with later Reformed expressions with

³ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 'Justification and Union with Christ', in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), p. 248.

⁴ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 'Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards', *WTJ* 65/2 (2003), 176-7.

the *ordo salutis*, Gaffin argues: 'This, in a nutshell, is Calvin's *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by (Spirit-worked) faith.'⁵

Gaffin's overall intent is not only to show the dominant position of union with Christ in Calvin's theology, but also to contrast it with Lutheran expressions. Gaffin contends that in contrast to Calvin's view, and more broadly the Reformed view of justification and union with Christ, Lutherans believe that justification causes union with Christ.⁶ Gaffin makes this point more explicitly elsewhere when he writes:

Here is a consideration that has sometimes been eclipsed in the Reformation tradition, where a tendency is observable to conceive of justification as a stand-alone imputative act, without particular reference to union with Christ. Unless I need to be corrected, this is more the case in the Lutheran tradition, where, in the *ordo salutis*, union is regularly sequenced following justification, as a fruit of consequence of justification. The Reformed tradition has recognized better and more clearly that, as answer 69 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* puts it, justification is among the realities that 'manifest' that union.⁷

Gaffin's conclusions have not been ignored but have been carried forth by others.

Making similar claims is a former student and now colleague of Gaffin's, Lane G. Tipton. Tipton argues that the Reformed view conceives of union with Christ and imputation as distinct but nonetheless simultaneous realities, whereas Lutherans hold that they are distinct and separable. Calvin, argues Tipton, offers 'a classic formulation'.⁸ Like Gaffin, Tipton cites J. T. Mueller and Francis Pieper as examples with which to contrast the Reformed view and argues that the Lutheran view contends that justification causes union with Christ and sanctification.⁹ However, in addi-

⁵ Gaffin, 'Biblical Theology', p. 172.

⁶ Gaffin, 'Biblical Theology', p. 173. Gaffin appeals to three Lutheran works to support his contention: J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 320, 381; F. A. O. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951-53), vol. 2, pp. 410, 434 n. 65; vol. 3, pp. 8 n. 9, 398; and Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd edn (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), pp. 481-2.

⁷ Gaffin, *By Faith*, p. 50. One should note that Gaffin reproduces the exact same footnote as found in 'Biblical Theology', p. 173 n. 19 to support his claim here in the work cited in this footnote.

⁸ Lane G. Tipton, 'Union with Christ and Justification', in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us In Justification*, ed. by K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), p. 39.

⁹ Tipton, 'Union with Christ', pp. 42-3.

tion to the same Lutheran references to which Gaffin appeals, Tipton also draws upon the analysis of Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949). Tipton quotes a passage from Vos, who analyzes the differences between Reformed and Lutheran soteriologies.¹⁰ Vos explains that, by faith, Christians become members of the covenant of grace and receive all of the benefits that are in Christ; in other words, believers are in union with him. Vos claims that with the Lutheran view, 'The Holy Spirit first generates faith in the sinner who temporarily still remains outside of union with Christ; then justification follows faith and only then, in turn, does the mystical union with the Mediator take place.' By contrast, Vos argues the Reformed view is the opposite: 'One is first united to Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, by a mystical union, which finds its conscious recognition by faith. By this union with Christ all that is in Christ is simultaneously given.'¹¹ Vos draws these conclusions from the work of Lutheran theologian Matthias Scheckenburger (1804-48) to substantiate his claim.¹²

DELIMITING THE INVESTIGATION

There are several problems with the claims of Vos, Gaffin, and Tipton as it pertains to their arguments regarding the dissonance between the Reformed and Lutheran traditions on justification and union with Christ. We can begin with the idea that Calvin was a first generation Reformer and fountainhead figure for the Reformed tradition; this claim does not accord with the historical record. Calvin was a second-generation Reformer who began his work well after Martin Luther (1483-1546), Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531), or Guillaume Farel (1489-1565), to name but a few.¹³ On the other hand, Luther truly has fountainhead status for

¹⁰ Tipton, 'Union with Christ', p. 44.

¹¹ Geerhardus Vos, 'The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology', in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980), p. 256.

¹² Of interest and relevance are B. B. Warfield's comments regarding Schneck-enburger's methodology and what characterizes the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. He comes to different conclusions than Vos; see B. B. Warfield, 'Calvinism', in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols., ed. by E. D. Warfield, William Park Armstrong, and C. W. Hodge (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), vol. 5, pp. 535-60.

¹³ Richard A. Muller, 'Was Calvin a Calvinist? Or, Did Calvin (or Anyone Else in the Early Modern Era) Plant the "TULIP,"' Lecture delivered on 15 Oct 2009 at the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Grand Rapids, MI. Available at <http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/lectures/>

the Lutheran tradition. Unlike Calvin, Luther's writings are a part of the Lutheran confessional corpus. Confessions such as the Formula of Concord (1577) were written to establish who in the Lutheran tradition was true to Luther's theology, the Osiandrians, the Phillipists, or the Gnesio-Lutherans. By contrast, the Reformed tradition has not been historically defined by appeal to any one individual theologian but to confessional documents such as the Helvetic Confessions, the Consensus Tigurinus, the Three Forms of Unity, and the Westminster Standards.¹⁴ As Carl Trueman argues: 'Scholarship cannot treat Reformed theology as a discrete entity that flows from the writings of one individual, John Calvin. It represents a movement which is pluriform in origin and eclectic with regard to its sources.'¹⁵ Recognizing the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions on this point is key for the present debate. To establish Calvin's doctrine on any one particular point likely only establishes the view of one man, not an entire tradition. The opposite holds true for the Lutheran tradition. To establish Luther's view on a doctrine much more likely does establish the view of a confessional tradition.

Recognizing the different places of Luther and Calvin within their respective traditions produces three important corollaries for this study. First, given that Luther is the fountainhead for the Lutheran tradition, we can delimit the focus of the investigation to Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary. At the end of the Formula's article on justification the following appears: 'For any further, necessary explanation of this lofty and sublime article on justification before God, upon which the salvation of our souls depends, we wish to recommend to everyone the wonderful, magnificent exposition by Dr. Luther of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and for the sake of brevity we refer to it as this point.'¹⁶ Given this endorsement, exploring and determining Luther's view on the relationship between justification and union with Christ in his Galatians commentary will demonstrate what confessional Lutheranism saw and believed to be orthodox. Uncovering Luther's view does not mean that every rank and file Lutheran adhered to his exposition. Subscription to the Formula of Concord is not in view.¹⁷ Rather, ascertaining what was accepted as con-

¹⁴ Carl R. Trueman, 'Calvin and Calvinism', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 225.

¹⁵ Trueman, 'Calvin and Calvinism', p. 239.

¹⁶ Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, art. 3, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 573.

¹⁷ For the reception of the Formula of Concord by Lutheran Orthodoxy, see Robert D. Preus, 'The Influence of the Formula of Concord on the Later

fessional Lutheran orthodoxy is the immediate goal. Luther's Galatians commentary therefore defines and explains the doctrines of union with Christ and justification for the Formula of Concord.¹⁸

Second, there is the distinct possibility that Luther influenced Calvin particularly on the relationship between justification and union with Christ. Far from dissonance between Luther and Calvin and their respective traditions, it is quite possible that Calvin gleaned key insights from Luther's exposition. Calvin was a green theologian when his 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was first published in contrast to the mature Luther of the 1535 Galatians commentary. In fact, Franks James claims that Calvin appropriated Luther's doctrine of union with Christ.¹⁹ If this line of influence can be substantiated, then it creates significant problems for the dissonance thesis of Vos, Gaffin, and Tipton, as Calvin's doctrine of justification and union would have a Lutheran contaminant at its root. In the exposition that follows, possible lines of influence will be exposed.

Third, recognizing Luther's fountainhead status shows that it is Luther who defines the tradition, not nineteenth- or twentieth-century Lutherans such as Scheckenburger, Mueller, or Pieper. To draw upon these theologians and then make conclusions about the Lutheran tradition apart from reference to the confessional record is methodologically wanting. True, Gaffin appeals to Heinrich Schmid's compendium of Lutheran dogmatics assembled from quotations by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran scholastics, but even then, appeal to such statements apart from the broader context from which they were taken can be misleading. Recent research has shown, for example, how a parallel volume, edited by Heinrich Heppe (1820-79) and culled from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed scholastics, has skewed the understanding of Reformed orthodoxy for the better part of a generation.²⁰ Hence, direct appeal to Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary is the preferable methodological approach

Lutheran Orthodoxy', in *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord: Studies in the Lutheran Reformation's Formula of Concord*, ed. by Lewis W. Spitz and Wensel Lohff (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 86-101.

¹⁸ Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁹ Frank A. James, III, 'De Justificatione: The Evolution of Peter Martyr Vermigli's Doctrine of Justification' (unpublished doctoral dissertation; Westminster Theological Seminary, 2000), p. 27.

²⁰ See Ryan Glomsrud, 'Karl Barth as Historical Theologian: The Recovery of Reformed Theology in Barth's Early Dogmatics', in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. by David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), pp. 86-7.

because it explores a key primary source of the Lutheran tradition that is at the same time Luther's own view but also that of confessional Lutheranism.

UNION WITH CHRIST

At first glance union with Christ might not be a subject that some would associate with Luther, but it is one that Luther employs throughout his Galatians commentary.²¹ There are some statements in his commentary that illustrate the importance of the doctrine for Luther. In his explanation of Galatians 3:28, 'For you are all one in Christ Jesus', Luther writes: 'Paul always makes it a practice to add the words "in Christ Jesus"; if Christ is lost sight of, everything is over'. Luther elaborates upon this point by explaining the nature of faith:

This is the true faith of Christ and in Christ, through which we become members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones (Eph. 5:30). Therefore in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). . . . Christ and faith must be completely joined. We must simply take our place in heaven; and Christ must be, live, and work in us. But He lives and works in us, not speculatively but really, with presence and with power.²²

Luther's conception of union with Christ is inseparably connected to his doctrine of faith.

Luther believed that faith was more than a *fides historica* (historical faith), a mere intellectual assent to the data of Christ's existence and work.²³ Rather, 'Faith is nothing else but the truth of the heart, that is, the right knowledge of the heart about God'.²⁴ This right knowledge of the heart is received, not through the law or the raw power of reason, but is 'the gift and accomplishment of the Holy Spirit, who comes with

²¹ Mark A. Siefid, 'Paul, Luther, and Justification in Gal 5:15-21', *WTJ* 65 (2003), 215.

²² Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, in *Luther's Works*, vols. 26-27, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), vol. 26, p. 57 (idem, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commneatrius*, in *D. Martin Luther's Werke*, vols. 40.1-2 [Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1911], p. 546). Subsequent references to the English edition will be abbreviated as LW and the Latin as *Werke*.

²³ LW 27.28 (*Werke* 40.2: 34-35); cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Theological Greek and Latin Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 115.

²⁴ LW 26.238 (*Werke* 40.1: 376).

the preached Word'.²⁵ But this is not the only difference between Luther and the Roman Catholic doctrine of faith. According to historic expressions, such as those by Peter Lombard (ca. 1110-60) or Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74), a necessary characteristic of faith is *fides charitatae formata* ('faith informed by love'). For medieval theologians, faith rested upon a *habitus* (habit or disposition) of love that was supernaturally created in the soul by God's grace.²⁶ Lombard argues: 'The faith by which one believes, if it is joined to charity, is a virtue, because, as Ambrose says, "charity is the mother of all virtues"; it informs all of them and without it there is no true virtue. And so faith working *through love* is the virtue by which unseen things are believed.'²⁷ Aquinas similarly states: 'Now *faith worketh through charity*. The love of charity therefore is the form of faith'.²⁸ What lies at the heart of the Roman medieval conception of faith, then, is love whereas for Luther and the Protestant Reformers it was *fiducia* (trust). Luther saw *fides charitate formata* confounding faith and works in the doctrine of justification and therefore rejected the formulation. In his typically brusque and direct manner Luther believed 'faith "formed by love" is an empty dream'. Instead, he argues, 'Works or love are not the ornament or perfection of faith; but faith itself is a gift of God, a work of God in our hearts which justifies us because it takes hold of Christ as the Savior.'²⁹ This is a key difference between Luther and Roman views: for Rome faith is formed by love but for Luther faith is formed by Christ. This difference opens a window into Luther's doctrine of union with Christ.

When Luther states that faith justifies because it takes hold of Christ, he does not merely mean that the sinner intellectually takes hold of Christ. Luther means by this phrase that the person enters into mystical union with Christ through faith. The faith-union link is evident in the following statement:

Where they speak of love, we speak of faith. And while they say that faith is the mere outline but love is its living colors and completion, we say in opposition that faith takes hold of Christ and that He is the form that adorns and informs faith as color does the wall. Therefore Christian faith is not an idle

²⁵ LW 26.375 (*Werke* 40.1: 572).

²⁶ Muller, *Dictionary*, p. 116.

²⁷ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4 vols., trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007 -), 3.23.3 (idem, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, 2 vols. [Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonavenurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1981], 2.142).

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, *Faith*, trans. T. C. O'Brien (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1974), IIa IIae q. 4 art. 3.

²⁹ LW 26.88 (*Werke* 40.1:164).

quality or an empty husk in the heart, which may exist in a state of mortal sin until love comes along to make it alive. But if it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself.³⁰

Luther is clear that Christ is not merely the object of faith but that he is present in faith. He also uses other expressions to convey the same idea: 'Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness.'³¹ At this point in the investigation it is evident that Luther does not fit the Vos, Gaffin, Tipton paradigm of union with Christ following justification as Luther places union with Christ at the moment of faith. In fact, though Luther does not have a highly developed *ordo salutis* in the specialized use of the term that one finds in seventeenth-century Reformed and Lutheran dogmatics, he does prioritize faith before justification. Luther explains that two things make Christian righteousness perfect: 'The first is faith in the heart, which is a divinely granted gift and which formally believes in Christ; the second is that God reckons this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness for the sake of Christ, His Son'.³²

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Justification. The question now undoubtedly arises, How does Luther relate union with Christ to justification and sanctification? We have begun to see how justification is related to union with Christ, in that Luther identifies imputed righteousness as the second of two things that makes Christian righteousness perfect. Even though Luther places the believer in union with Christ through faith, it would be a hasty conclusion to say that he therefore gives union theological priority over justification. One of the recurring emphases in Luther's commentary is the role of the imputed righteousness of Christ. For Luther, the question of priority in redemption is not one of temporal sequence where applied soteriology is a series of events, faith followed by justification, which in turn is followed by sanctification. Nor is priority a question of sequence where faith (and union with Christ) must logically precede justification because one cannot be justified unless he first believes. Rather, for Luther priority hinges upon the question as to why ultimately does God accept the saved sinner in his presence. Does God accept the sinner because of Christ's work for us or in us? For Luther, this is an easy question to answer.

³⁰ LW 26.129 (*Werke* 40.1:228-29).

³¹ LW 26.130; see also Siefrid, 'Paul, Luther, and Justification', p. 223.

³² LW 26.231 (*Werke* 40.1:366).

Luther believes that three things are joined together in redemption: faith, Christ, and acceptance or imputation:

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

Luther goes on to explain that among these three things, faith, Christ, and imputation, 'imputation is extremely necessary, first, because we are not yet righteous, but sin is still clinging to our flesh during this life'. Luther knew that God sanctifies his people, but that they still engage in sin and, like Peter or David, they are still sinful. 'Nevertheless, we always have recourse to this doctrine', states Luther, 'that our sins are covered and that God does not want to hold us accountable for them'.³³ For Luther the forensic aspect of redemption has priority because it is the immovable foundation that secures the sinner's place *coram Deo*. Hence, Luther not only argues for the priority of imputation, and therefore justification, but he also stipulates that the righteousness is an *iustitia aliena* ('alien righteousness'), it is *extra nos* ('outside of us').³⁴ He does this so as to place the focus exclusively upon the work of Christ to the exclusion of the believer's good works in justification.³⁵

These conclusions raise an interesting question of whether Luther was influential upon Calvin and his doctrines of union and justification.

³³ LW 26.132-33 (*Werke* 40.1: 233).

³⁴ Cf. Siefried, 'Paul, Luther, and Justification', pp. 219, 229; idem, 'Luther, Melancthon, and Paul on the Question of Imputation: Recommendations on a Current Debate', in *Justification: What's At Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. by Mark A. Hubbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), pp. 137-76; R. Scott Clark, 'Iustitia Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification?', *CTQ* 70 (2006), 273, 282; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 10-20; Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (1966; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 227-8; Heiko A. Oberman, "Iustitia Christi" and "Iustitia Dei": Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification', *HTR* 59 (1966), 19; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 260-1.

³⁵ LW 26.234 (*Werke* 40.1:370).

Gaffin argues in such a way that Calvin appears to develop his doctrinal insights all by himself.³⁶ But there are two considerations that are worthy of mention. First, there is the relationship of justification to the sanctification that Luther posits. In his comments on Galatians 5.14, Luther explains that Paul brings forth the Ten Commandments in his desire to show what it means to be a servant through love. Luther then appeals to 1 Corinthians 3.11: “No other foundation can anyone lay” than Jesus Christ or the righteousness of Christ. On this foundation he now builds good works, and truly good ones, all of which he includes in the brief commandment: “You shall love your neighbor.”³⁷ Here Luther sees the righteousness of Christ, which is received through imputation, as the foundation for good works. This is very similar to Calvin’s statement concerning the significance of justification: ‘For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.’³⁸ Calvin elsewhere writes, ‘They cannot deny that justification by faith is the beginning, foundation, cause, proof, and substance of works righteousness.’³⁹ Why does Calvin posit that justification is the foundation for works righteousness? He does so for the same reason as Luther: ‘For unless the justification of faith remains whole and unbroken, the uncleanness of works will be uncovered.’⁴⁰

A second parallel exists between Luther and Calvin particularly on the relationship between union and imputation. Luther writes:

So far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ’s: nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit.⁴¹

³⁶ See, e.g., Gaffin, ‘Biblical Theology’, pp. 169-73.

³⁷ LW 27.51 (*Werke* 40.2:64).

³⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, vols. 20-21, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.11.1 (idem, *Institutio Christianae Religionis 1559*, in *Opera Selecta*, 5 vols., eds., Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel [Münich: Christian Kaiser, 1931], 4.182; hereafter abbreviated as OS).

³⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.17.9 (OS 4.262).

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.17.9 (OS 4.262).

⁴¹ LW 26.167-68 (*Werke* 40.1:284).

This statement is very similar to one that Calvin makes to the same effect:

Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.⁴²

The nomenclature varies between the two quotations, but substantively it is difficult to find any significant differences between the two. Both Luther and Calvin argue that justification and union with Christ go hand in hand. But what makes these parallels all the more interesting is that Luther's antedates Calvin's by almost twenty-five years. The Calvin passage was an addition to the 1559 *Institutes* written in the wake of the controversy with Andreas Osiander (1498-1552), who argued that believers share in the essential righteousness of Christ—an idea that both Calvin and Luther rejected.⁴³ Nevertheless, what these parallels show is that Calvin the second-generation Reformer was not the first to articulate the relationship between a forensic justification and union with Christ. Whether there are lines of influence between Luther and Calvin at these points is beyond the scope of this study. But one thing is clear, Luther broke this ground before Calvin had even published the first edition of the *Institutes*.⁴⁴

Sanctification. Luther had a clear doctrine of justification but also discussed the importance of sanctification. Luther explains, 'It is difficult and dangerous to teach that we are justified by faith without works and yet to require works at the same time.' He notes the dangers of not striking the right balance in teaching about justification and good works: 'If

⁴² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.10 (OS 4.191).

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.8-12 (OS 4.189-97); Timothy J. Wengert, 'Review of *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*', *Theology Today* 56/3 (1999), 432-34.

⁴⁴ On Luther as the origin of the Lutheran and Reformed doctrine of justification, see: Clark, '*Iustitia Imputat Christ*', 274; W. Stanford Reid, 'Justification by Faith According to John Calvin', *WTJ* 42 (1980), 290-307; David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 117-18; Joseph Wawrykow, 'John Calvin and Condign Merit', *ARG* 83 (1992), 74-75; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), pp. 255-63.

works alone are taught, as happened under the papacy, faith is lost. If faith alone is taught, unspiritual men will immediately suppose that works are not necessary.' So how does Luther propose that ministers proceed? 'Both topics, faith and works, must be carefully taught and emphasized, but in such a way that they both remain within their limits.'⁴⁵ How does Luther discuss sanctification?

Luther is unambiguous throughout his Galatians commentary that works have no place in a person's justification. Luther rejected the medieval *fides charitate formata* and argued that Christ is the form of faith—the believer is united to Christ by faith. But faith is not idle. In contrast to the medieval *fides formata* view that cites Galatians 5:6 in support of the doctrine of justification, Luther argues that in this text the apostle Paul addresses the subject of the Christian life, or more narrowly sanctification. Inwardly faith looks upon God and outwardly it is manifest in love and works towards one's neighbor: 'Thus a man is a Christian in a total sense: inwardly through faith in the sight of God, who does not need our works; outwardly in the sight of men, who do not derive any benefit from faith but do derive benefit from works or from our love'.⁴⁶ There are two key images that Luther uses to illustrate the importance and necessity of sanctification beyond his appeal to Galatians 5:6. First, he applies the doctrine of the incarnation to the faith-works relationship. He argues that a person is justified by faith alone, but that such a faith does not remain alone, it is not idle. Rather, faith always justifies alone but does become incarnate as man—it is manifest in love.⁴⁷ Related to the idea of the incarnation of faith, Luther argues that faith is the divinity of works.⁴⁸ A second illustration that Luther employs is that of a tree and its fruit. He explains that faith is at the root of the tree and it produces fruit on account of faith.⁴⁹

Luther insists upon the necessity of good works, but the question remains as to whether he links sanctification to union with Christ. The short answer is, yes, Luther links sanctification to union. How does he connect them? For Luther the believer is united to Christ by faith. Broadly, for Luther the connection lies between faith and works. Specifically, Luther explains the consequences of laying hold of Christ by faith:

Because you have taken hold of Christ by faith, through whom you are righteous, you should now go and love God and your neighbor. Call upon God,

⁴⁵ LW 27.62-63 (*Werke* 40.2:78).

⁴⁶ LW 27.30 (*Werke* 40.2:36).

⁴⁷ LW 26.272 (*Werke* 40.1:425-27).

⁴⁸ LW 26.266 (*Werke* 40.1:416-17).

⁴⁹ LW 26.210 (*Werke* 40.1:338-40).

give thanks to Him, preach Him, praise Him, confess Him. Do good to your neighbor, and serve him; do your duty. These are truly good works, which flow from this faith and joy conceived in the heart because we have the forgiveness of sins freely through Christ.⁵⁰

Noteworthy in Luther's statement is that the good works flow from faith, and it is by faith that believer's lay hold of Christ. Christ is the source of the sanctity. In another passage he draws out the relationship between union with Christ and sanctification more explicitly: 'By faith we are in Him and He is in us (John 6:56). This Bridegroom, Christ, must be alone with His bride in His private chamber, and all the family and household must be shunted away. But later on, when the Bridegroom opens the door and comes out, then let the servants return to take care of them and serve them food and drink. Then let works and love begin.'⁵¹

Luther believes sanctification is not a matter of the imitation of Christ but rather new birth and new creation: 'I put on Christ Himself, that is, His innocence, righteousness, wisdom, power, salvation, life, and Spirit.'⁵² For Luther justification and sanctification are equally connected to union with Christ. But Luther consistently distinguishes between justification and sanctification so the two are not confused. He does not confuse the forensic and the transformative but nevertheless recognizes that both come wrapped in union with Christ—like the ring that envelops the gem.⁵³

CONCLUSION

This essay began with mapping out the claims of Vos, Gaffin, and Tipton concerning the perceived differences between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions regarding the relationship between justification and union with Christ. The uncovered evidence from Luther's Galatians commentary, one that has confessional status within historic Lutheranism, presents a significant challenge to the Vos, Gaffin, and Tipton discontinuity thesis. To claim that significant difference exists on the doctrines of justification and union with Christ does not appear to accord with the historical record.⁵⁴ To be sure, the Lutheran and Reformed camps have

⁵⁰ LW 26.133 (*Werke* 40.1:234).

⁵¹ LW 26.137-38 (*Werke* 40.1:241).

⁵² LW 26.352 (*Werke* 40.1:540).

⁵³ LW 26.131-32 (*Werke* 40.1:232); see also Clark, 'Iustitia Imputa Christi', p. 295.

⁵⁴ Tipton, e.g., writes of the 'radical differences turned up between the Calvinist and post-Reformation Lutheran positions'. He also argues that the 'reformed

most certainly debated many issues such as predestination, the Lord's Supper and related christological issues, to name but a few.⁵⁵ But given what Luther writes in his Galatians commentary, it is difficult to say that

conception of union with Christ and justification is not (a) the Lutheran option, nor (b) the [New Perspective on Paul] version advocated by N. T. Wright. The reformed position is a *tertium quid*, a third thing, which stands out as a unique and clearly defined option that avoids the problematic aspects of both Lutheranism and N. T. Wright' ("Union with Christ and Justification," 46 fn. 52, 48-49).

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his formulations are much different from Calvin in particular, or other Reformed theologians in general. True, Luther lacks the terminological precision that develops later in Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. And unlike other first- and second-generation Reformers who wrote theological systems like Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* or Calvin's *Institutes*, Luther was an occasional theologian who wrote treatises based upon the exigencies of the day. Perhaps this explains why some in the Reformed community have not explored Luther's theology—it is not as easily accessed in comparison with others such as Melanchthon.

Regardless of the reasons as to why Luther has been unexplored, one thing this essay has demonstrated is that union with Christ is not unique to Calvin or the Reformed tradition but is found quite prominently in Luther and even in Lutheranism with the assumption of Luther's Galatians commentary into the Lutheran confessional corpus. Making a few references to contemporary Lutherans and to a few isolated quotations from Schmid's compendium are insufficient to establish the views of an entire tradition. Perhaps thinly supported claims facilitate the categorization of views as being Lutheran or Reformed, but such labels are ultimately imprecise and lack much-needed nuance. It is one thing to say that some contemporary Lutherans have formulated the relationship between justification and union with Christ in a particular manner, but such claims do not establish a Lutheran norm. To establish what a tradition has historically espoused, appeal must be made to its confessional documents, and in this case to the Formula of Concord and its commendation of Luther's Galatians commentary. For Luther and the Lutheran confessional corpus, the believer is united to Christ by faith, for Christ is present in faith, but union with Christ does not swallow the distinctions between justification and sanctification. The thesis that Lutheranism holds that union with Christ as one step in the order of salvation that follows faith and justification cannot stand in the face of the gathered evidence from Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary.