

Divided by Faith:  
The Protestant Doctrine of Justification and the  
Confessionalization of Biblical Exegesis

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Graduate Program in  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation lays the groundwork for a reevaluation of early Protestant understandings of salvation in the sixteenth century by tracing the emergence of the confessional formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith from the perspective of the history of biblical interpretation. In the Introduction, the author argues that the diversity of first-generation evangelical and Protestant teaching on justification has been widely underestimated. Through a close comparison of first- and second-generation confessional statements in the Reformation period, the author seeks to establish that consensus on this issue developed slowly over the course over a period of roughly thirty years, from the adoption of a common rhetoric of dissent aimed at critiquing the regnant Catholic orthodoxy of salvation in the 1520's and 1530's, to the emergence of a common theological culture in the 1540's and beyond. With the emergence of this new theological culture, an increasingly precise set of definitions were employed, not only to explicate the new Protestant gospel more fully, but also to highlight areas of divergence with traditional Catholic teaching.

With this groundwork in place, the author then examines the development of several key concepts in the emergence of the confessional doctrine of justification through the lens of biblical interpretation. Focusing on two highly contested chapters in Paul's epistle to the Romans, the author demonstrates that early

evangelical and Protestant biblical exegesis varied widely in its aims, motivations, and in its appropriation of patristic and medieval interpretations. Chapter 1 consists of a survey of pre-Reformation exegesis of the first half of Rom 2, and the author demonstrates that this text had traditionally been interpreted as pointing to an eschatological final judgment in which the Christian would be declared righteous (i.e., “justified”) in accord with, but not directly on the basis of, a life of good deeds. In Chapter 2, the author demonstrates that early evangelical exegetes broke away from this consensus, but did so slowly. Several early Protestant interpreters continued, throughout the 1520’s and 1530’s, to view this text within a traditional frame of interpretation supplied by Origen and Augustine, and only with Philipp Melancthon’s development of a rhetorical-critical approach to the text were Protestants able to overcome the traditional reading and so neutralize the first half of Rom 2 as a barrier to the emerging doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 all deal with the reception history of what is arguably the central text in the Reformation debates concerning justification by faith, Rom 3. Chapter 3 turns once more to patristic and medieval interpretation, and here it is argued that that two major strands of interpretation dominated pre-Reformation exegesis. A “minority view” contrasted justification with works of the ceremonial law, arguing that Paul’s assertion of justification “apart from works of the law” was aimed at highlighting the insufficiency of the Jewish ceremonial law in contrast with the sacraments of the Catholic church. In contrast with this view, the “majority view” (arising again from Origen and Augustine) argued that the contrast was

properly viewed as one between justification and works of the moral law, thus throwing into sharp relief the problem of justification in relation to good works. This tradition generally followed Augustine in drawing a contrast between works of the law performed prior to, and following upon, the initiation of justification as a life-long process of transformation by grace, but at the same time insisted that this process ultimately issued in the believer fulfilling the demands of the moral law. In Chapter 4, I turn to Luther's early exegesis of Rom 3, as seen in his lectures from 1515. In contrast with Luther's own description of his "Reformation breakthrough" later in life, I argue that Luther did not arrive at his new understanding of justification in a flash of inspiration inspired by Augustine; rather, his early treatment of Romans is unimpeachably Catholic and unmistakably Augustinian, although there are indications even in this early work that Luther is not entirely satisfied with Augustine's view. In Chapter 5, I consider the ways in which Luther's followers develop his critique of the Augustinian reading of justification in the first generation of the Reformation. Throughout this period, it was unclear whether Protestant exegesis of Paul would resolve itself into a repristinization of patristic theology, inspired in large part by Augustine, or whether it would develop into something genuinely new. The key turning point, I argue, came in the early 1530's with Melancthon's rejection of Augustine's transformative model of justification, and his adoption in its place of a strictly forensic construal of Paul's key terms. Many of Melancthon's fellow reformers continued to operate within an Augustinian framework, however as Melancthon's terms passed into wider

acceptance in Protestant exegesis, it became increasingly apparent that the Protestant reading of Paul could not ultimately be reconciled with patristic accounts of justification.

To my Sarah, who now can laugh at the days to come.



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## Abbreviations

<i>ARC</i>	<i>Acta Reformationis Catholicae</i> , 6 vols. (Regensburg, 1959-74)
<i>ASD</i>	Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Rotterodami (Amsterdam, 1969- )
<i>BC</i>	<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> , ed., Kolb and Wengert (Minneapolis, 2000)
<i>BCor</i>	Correspondance de Martin Bucer (Leiden, 1979- )
<i>BDS</i>	Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften (Gütersloh, 1960- )
<i>BSLK</i>	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i> , 12 <sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen, 1998)
<i>BSRK</i>	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche</i> , ed. Müller (Leipzig, 1903)
<i>BuK</i>	<i>Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen: der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche</i> , ed. Niesel (Zürich, 1938)
<i>CC</i>	Corpus Catholicorum (Münster, 1919- )
<i>CCCM</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis (Brepolis, 1971- )
<i>CCER</i>	<i>Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicarum</i> , ed. H. A. Niemeyer (Leipzig, 1840)
<i>CCFC</i>	<i>Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition</i> , ed. Pelikan and Hotchkiss (New Haven 2003)
<i>CCFR</i>	<i>Confessions et catéchismes de la foi réformée</i> , ed. Fatio (Genève, 1986)
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Brepols, 1981- )

<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CO	Ioannis Calvinii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia, 59 vols. (Brunswick, Berlin, 1863-1900)
COE	Ioannis Calvinii Opera Exegetica (Geneva, 1992- )
COS	Ioannis Calvinii Opera Selecta, 5 vols. (Munich, 1926-1936)
CR	Corpus Reformationum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia, 28 vols. (Halle, 1834-60)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866- )
CTS	Calvin's Commentaries, 22 vols. (Edinburgh, 1844-51; Reprint, Grand Rapids, 2001)
CWE	Collected Works of Erasmus, 86 vols. (Toronto, 1969- )
DCO	D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia, 42 vols. (Montreuil-sur-Mer, 1896-1913)
<i>DThC</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i> , ed. Vacant, Mangenot, Amann (Paris, 1903-67)
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FotC	The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C., 1947- )
<i>Gl. ord.</i>	<i>Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria</i> , 4 vols. (Strassburg, 1480/81)
HBW	Heinrich Bullinger Werke (Zürich, 1972- )
<i>HDTG</i>	<i>Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte</i> , 3 vols., ed., Andresen, et al (Göttingen, 1980-84)
<i>HEH</i>	<i>Handbook of European History, 1400-1600</i> , 2 vols., ed., Brady, Oberman, Tracy (Grand Rapids, 1996)
<i>HPE</i>	<i>Handbook of Patristic Exegesis</i> , 2 vols., Kannengieser, et al (Leiden, 2004)

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JBW	Johannes Brenz Werke: Ein Studienausgabe (Tübingen, 1970- )
<i>KuD</i>	<i>Kirche und Dogma</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, 1953- )
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1911- )
<i>LQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LW	Luther's Works, 55 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1955-86)
MBOL	Martini Bucerii opera latina, 7 vols. (Leiden, 1954- )
MBW T	Melanchthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Texte (Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt, 1991- )
MSA	Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe], 7 vols. (Gütersloh, 1951-75)
NPNF 1	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, 14 vols. (Edinburgh, 1886-90)
NPNF 2	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, 14 vols. (New York, 1890-1900)
<i>OER</i>	<i>Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation</i> , 4 vols., ed. Hillerbrand (New York, 1996)
ORM	Oeuvres de Robert de Melun, 4 vols. (Louvain: 1932- )
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca, (Paris:1857-1866)
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, (Paris: 1862-1865)
<i>Quell.</i>	<i>Quellenbelege: Die abendländischen Schriftausleger bis Luther über Justitia Dei (Rom. 1, 17) und Jusitificatio</i> , vol. 1 of Denifle, <i>Luther und Luthertum</i> (Mainz, 1905)



<i>SCBC</i>	<i>Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord</i> , ed. Kolb, Nestingen (Minneapolis, 2001)
Schaff	<i>Creeds of Christendom</i> , ed. Schaff, 6 <sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, 1983)
SChr	Sources Chrétiennes (Paris, 1942- )
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden, 1966- )
SMRT	Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought (Leiden, 1966- )
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> , 38 vols. (Berlin, 1977-2004)
<i>ThS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TToday</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>VD16</i>	<i>Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> , 25 vols. (Stuttgart: 1983- ).
WA	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 65 vols. (Weimar, 1883- )
WABr	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel, 18 vols. (Weimar, 1930-78)
WADB	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bible, 12 vols. (Weimar, 1906-61)
WATr	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden, 6 vols., (Weimar, 1912-21)
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZO	Huldrici Zuinglii Opera, Completa Editio Prima, 8 vols. ed. Schuler, Schulthess (Zurich, 1828-42)
ZSW	Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke, Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 88-101 (Berlin, 1905- )
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

All citations of biblical commentaries in the footnotes will reference the editions listed in the bibliography in the following format: Author, *Liber biblicus* (Year), pp., except for patristic and medieval texts, where the year is unavailable or unimportant. Book and chapter numbers will also be supplied when such do not correspond precisely to the biblical reference, which will then be given in parentheses, if applicable. References to critical editions and English translations will also be supplied, when available, by citing editor or series abbreviation. E.g., Bucer, *Romans* (1536), 1 (*Praef.*); Origen, *Romans*, 2.5.2 (Rom 2:7); Hammond Bammel 1:23; FotC 103:113.

All translations are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

*Note on the use of primary sources in electronic form:* When citing from standard critical editions which also appear online in electronic form (e.g., Patrologia Latina, the Weimar Edition of Luther's Works, etc.), I have not supplied the URL in either the footnotes or the bibliography, as these editions provide consistent reference to the printed editions, which most readers still consult. Moreover, since these are secure databases, accessible only with a university-affiliated password, a standard web address is useless as a means of enabling direct access. In the case of electronic databases referring not to modern critical editions, but to early modern printed sources, however, I have indicated the source where I found the materials in the bibliography by means of the following abbreviations:

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|-------|--|
| DLCPT | Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts (Alexander Street Press, 2005- ) < <a href="http://solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com/">http://solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com/</a> >   |
| DLCR  | Digital Library of the Catholic Reformation (Alexander Street Press, 2005- ) < <a href="http://solomon.dlcr.alexanderstreet.com./">http://solomon.dlcr.alexanderstreet.com./</a> > |
| EEBO  | Early English Books Online (ProQuest, 2003- ) < <a href="http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home">http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home</a> >  |

## Introduction

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was many things to many people, but it was first and foremost a fight about salvation.<sup>1</sup> How can human beings obtain pardon for sin and be restored to a right relationship with God? Does this happen through the moral transformation of the penitent sinner or through the act of faith alone? Are the sacraments of the institutional church instrumental in this process, or do they merely signify what has already been granted through faith? These and many other related questions were the subject of fierce debate in academic treatises, civic disputations, broadsheet propaganda, devotional literature, and pulpit

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the tendency among many social historians in the last generation to treat religious (and especially theological) concerns as epiphenomenal to the “real” dynamics of historical change, the best scholarship on this period has consistently recognized the irreducibly religious motivation driving the violent upheavals in European culture in the first half of the sixteenth century. Nor was this the case only among members of the intellectual class, admittedly the sole focus of the present study. For illuminating reflections on how what was essentially “a dispute over the path to Christian salvation” could destabilize institutions and communities at every social level, see Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 1-2. Readers familiar with current trends in the historiography of early modern Europe will note my use of the singular and my capitalization of the term “Reformation.” Some historians writing in the 1980’s and 90’s insisted that there was not one Reformation but many reformations, polygenetic in origin, geographically discreet, and often conflicting in aims. This point has been well taken, but more recent work seems to have recognized this proliferation of plurals in nomenclature as a passing fad, and returned to a more circumspect use of the singular as a broad term referring to the constellation of interrelated and overlapping movements which reconfigured (or “re-formed”) the social, theological, and institutional matrices of Western Christendom in the first half of the sixteenth century. For a judicious and well-informed assessment of these trends, see Hans J. Hillerbrand, “Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?” *CH* 72, no. 3 (2003): 525-52, esp. 546-47.

proclamation for at least a generation after the “Luther Affair” began to attract international attention late in the year 1517.<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of these debates was a theological concept which had already been in wide use in the Western theological tradition since the time of Augustine: justification.<sup>3</sup> Though the language of justification (*iustificatio* in Latin, δικαίωσις and its cognates in Greek) had featured prominently in the writings of St. Paul, especially in the epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians,<sup>4</sup> justification became a

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<sup>2</sup> On the dissemination of these debates, see R. W. Scribner, “Oral Culture and the Transmission of Reformation Ideas,” in *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation*, ed. Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 83-104.

<sup>3</sup> The standard diachronic survey of the doctrine of justification in English is that of Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: a History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Though in what follows I will have occasion to criticize certain of McGrath’s conclusions and his organization of the material, this work remains an important point of departure for any serious consideration of the subject. Also of continuing interest is the epochal treatment of Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1870); ET, Albrecht Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. John S. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872). Though few will now find Ritschl’s thinly-disguised dogmatic aims compelling, his wide reading in the primary literature, his trenchant critiques of nineteenth-century German scholarship, and his superlative critical judgment assure that this work will continue to be read as much more than a period piece.

<sup>4</sup> The degree to which this is so has been hotly contested by biblical scholars throughout much of the past century. Protestant interpreters had traditionally held that Paul’s language of justification by faith (e.g., Rom 3:28, Gal 3:11) expresses the heart of his gospel. Beginning with Albert Schweitzer, who in 1930 famously described the notion of justification as “a subsidiary crater” in Paul’s description of mystical union with Christ, many scholars have called into question the supposed centrality of justification in Paul’s thought. Anglo-American scholars such as E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, and N. T. Wright have reinterpreted Paul’s language of justification in light of Second Temple Jewish literature, concluding that justification by faith in Christ represents Paul’s solution to the problem of how Gentiles, who do not have the law, can yet be incorporated into the covenant people of God. The seminal text in this discussion is E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). Since the publication of this volume, literature both for and against this “New Perspective on Paul” has multiplied to the point of comprising a virtual sub-discipline in the guild of New Testament studies, such that any generalizations of the sort here offered on the place of justification in Paul’s thought by a non-specialist would be foolhardy. For a recent defense of the priority accorded by Protestant exegesis to the place of justification in Paul’s thought, see Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004). For a spirited

central term in Western discussions of salvation only with the writings of Augustine early in the fifth century. By the high medieval period, this concept had risen to first-order significance as an organizing principle in many of the most important scholastic authors, and it seems to have been widely used both as a theological *terminus technicus* and as a broadly-inclusive term more or less synonymous with salvation.<sup>5</sup> What is more, in the centuries prior to the Reformation debates, the concept of justification became increasingly intertwined with sacramental theology, such that most treatments of justification in late medieval scholastic theology were firmly embedded in the context of discussions about the sacrament of penance.<sup>6</sup> In

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assault on this view, see Douglas Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas is an example of a medieval writer who deploys the term *iustificatio* in several different ways depending on context and genre. His basic understanding of *iustificatio* in the *Summa Theologiae* involves two basic senses. First, “in its passive sense justification implies a movement towards justice, just as heating implies a movement towards heat.” This sense of justification makes no reference *per se* to sin, but rather to the source of justice, God: “in this sense justification might be appropriate even for someone who was not in sin, so long as he received this kind of justice from God; thus Adam is said to have received original justice.” The second sense of the term, however, applies more properly to a redemptive context: “There is a second way in which this kind of justice can come about in man, and this is by that kind of movement or transition which is from contrary to contrary. And in this sense justification implies a kind of transformation from the state of injustice to the state of justice in the sense defined. It is in this sense that we speak here of the justification of the unrighteous, according to the text from Paul, ‘To the one who does not work but who believes in him who justifies the unrighteous,’ etc.” *ST* 1a2ae, q. 113, a. 1. Daniel Keating notes that Thomas’s use of the term in his biblical commentaries is often more expansive and can be used to clarify texts which speak broadly of salvation even where the language of justification is not used. For example, in his comments on Eph 2:8, “by grace you are saved through faith,” Thomas points out that “to be saved is the same as to be justified” (*Idem enim est salvari et iustificari*). Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: a Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 142.

<sup>6</sup> As David Steinmetz explains, “Justifying grace is, of course, first infused into the *viator* through baptism. No one can become a Christian without experiencing the purifying effect of the waters of baptism. But since, on the one hand, every adult Christian can be presumed to fall from time to time back into mortal sin and since, on the other hand, the sacrament of baptism cannot be repeatedly administered, it is necessary for the Christian to receive through another sacrament a renewal of the grace first granted him in baptism. To this end the sacrament of penance has been divinely

the centuries prior to the Reformation, the language of justification was widely regarded as addressing the heart of the Christian Gospel at the very point where the saving work of Christ was made accessible to the believer through the sacramental mediation of the church.<sup>7</sup>

Yet for all the importance which clearly attached to the concept of justification in late medieval theology, remarkably little could be regarded as “settled” with regard to official church teaching. The Pelagian controversy, centering on contested notions of grace and free will, was ended decisively at the Council of Carthage in 418, and the content of Catholic teaching concerning grace was given a more precise formulation in 529 at the Second Council of Orange. Between that time and the sixth session of the Council of Trent in 1546, however, the Western Church made no magisterial pronouncements on the doctrine of justification.<sup>8</sup> With regard to discussions of salvation more broadly, the middle ages witnessed the development of a remarkable diversity of theological opinion. On

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instituted.” David C. Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 97. Cf. E. Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Justification in Late Medieval Preaching: a Study of John Geiler of Keisersberg*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 147-61.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Lombard cites Ambrose of Milan to summarize a host of biblical and patristic authorities to this effect: *Non potest quisquam iustificari a peccato, nisi peccatum ipsum antea fuerit confessus* (IV Sent 17.4; PL 192:880). Though the Eucharist is generally regarded to have held pride of place in medieval sacramental practice, baptism and penance were distinguished as *sacramenta mortuorum*—that is, they were the only sacraments which could give life to the spiritual dead. The remaining five sacraments, the *sacramenta vivorum*, depended for their full efficacy on the prior forgiveness of sins and the gift of grace mediated through baptism and, subsequently, through penance.

<sup>8</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 26. Moreover, the canons of Orange II—as well as the very existence of the council, seems to have been unknown in the West from the tenth century on. Cf., Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez St. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 99-122.

questions such as the nature and extent of the atonement, the distinction between nature and grace, and the mode and efficacy of the Church's sacraments, heated debate continued well into the Reformation period and beyond, with battle lines being drawn between rival schools, regions, and religious orders. Indeed, as many historians have observed, the views of the Reformers themselves initially appear to have attracted little attention as being far outside the pale of acceptable Catholic teaching; it was only when the revolutionary and schismatic implications of those doctrines became fully apparent that decisive steps were taken to subdue the new "heresy."<sup>9</sup> The Catholic reaction against the new evangelical theology, in other words, like so many other disputes in the history of Christian doctrine, "was not a history of the defense of an agreed and settled orthodoxy against the assaults of open heresy. On the subject which was primarily under discussion there was not as yet an orthodox doctrine."<sup>10</sup>

During the course of the next several decades following the *initia Lutheri*, however, an "orthodox" doctrine of justification quickly emerged—several of them, in fact. The Catholic church and the emerging Protestant confessions, Lutheran and Reformed, quickly found it necessary to formulate their teachings in increasingly precise terms, so as both to integrate their central soteriological affirmations within a wider body of contested doctrines and practices and to demarcate clearly the

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<sup>9</sup> McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> I have adapted this characterization for the present context from R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 13.

boundaries of confessional orthodoxy against its competitors. As with earlier periods of intense theological controversy within the Christian tradition, this conflict represented “a search for orthodoxy, a search conducted by the method of trial and error.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike earlier debates, however, what emerged in the aftermath of the Reformation was not a single, dominant orthodoxy which carried the field, but rather multiple, competing orthodoxies, each one with its own Gospel.

This dissertation will focus on the emergence of one of those orthodoxies, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. My aim is to historicize the development of this doctrine by demonstrating that orthodoxy has a history; it does not—even in so central a matter as justification—spring fully-formed from the genius of one “great thinker.” On the contrary, the break with the Catholic church occasioned by Luther’s theological protest resulted in what I shall describe as an invention of orthodoxy—understood here in the usefully ambiguous sense of the Latin term *invenio*, as both discovery and contrivance. But Protestant theologians were adamant that they were not presenting the world with novel teaching. Rather, they insisted that in confessing the faith in their distinctive way they were simply carrying forward Luther’s “rediscovery of the Gospel”—which was, after all, simply a more accurate reading of St. Paul.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the rise of confessional

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>12</sup> As Steinmetz points out, “Both Luther and Calvin reject the notion that Protestant reformers are theological innovators who have disrupted a 1500-year-old consensus in Christian doctrine. Innovations have been introduced by the Catholic church during the Middle Ages which were not found in the earliest Church. . . . The defenders of the old church have in the opinion of Luther and Calvin too restricted a vision of Christian history and invest the customs and doctrines of the



conflict in the years following this “rediscovery” demanded a coordinated response. Protestant leaders had to craft a new theological grammar which would not only preserve and defend a set of common commitments but also clarify those insights for the catechetical task and allow for their ready defense against Catholic and radical polemicists. They had to articulate an “ancient” Gospel in an unprecedented new context in which opposing conceptions of the Gospel itself were rapidly hardening into what would become a permanently factionalized state of intra-Christian conflict: the confessional era.

## **I.1 Confession, Confessionalization, and Post-Confessional History**

The emergence of this permanently factionalized state of intra-Christian conflict in Western Christendom has been described by historians in the last generation as one of *Konfessionsbildung*, or “confession-formation,” a process running parallel in Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic contexts. One of its earliest theorists, Ernst Walter Zeeden, describes this as a process affecting not only the ecclesiastical, but also the political and social spheres of life, both public and private. Each confessional church quickly came to view itself as a universal *confessio catholica*, vested with divine authority as the exclusive mouthpiece of revealed truth and entrusted with the task safeguarding the doctrine, ritual, and discipline of its

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relatively recent past with the dignity and authority which belongs to the ancient apostolic tradition alone. All with the result that what is truly ancient, like the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, seems to them to be a theological novelty.” David C. Steinmetz, “Luther and Calvin on Church and Tradition,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* 10 (1984): 108.

members.<sup>13</sup> This task involved not only specifying the content of Christian teaching with ever increasing precision, but doing so as to highlight theological differences with rival confessions.

More recently, this notion of *Konfessionsbildung* has been incorporated into a broader category, that of *Konfessionalisierung*, or “confessionalization,” a concept including not only the formation of distinct and opposing ecclesiastical identities, but also describing the symbiotic relationships which developed between these confessional churches and the emerging nation-states of early modern Europe. Confessionalization is thus presented as a fundamental social process running parallel to the rise of the modern state and the formation in early modern society of disciplined subjects, beginning as a symbiotic relationship between church and state, but ending with the monopolization of religious life by the latter.<sup>14</sup> Heinz Schilling,

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<sup>13</sup> Zeeden describes this concept of *Konfessionsbildung* as a “Prozeß der nicht nur das Kirchliche berührte, sondern auch die Lebensbereiche des Politischen und Kulturellen, überhauptalles Öffentliche und Private, in Mitleidenschaft riß. Das bekenntnismäße Moment umgriff für einige Generationen das geschichtliche Leben nach seiner Breite und nach seiner Tiefe hin, und zwar gewissermaßen legitim: denn *jede* Konfession war, ihrer Intentionen nach, universal und verstand sich als „confessio catholica“; als exklusives Sprachrohr der *einen* geoffenbarten Wahrheit; und wußte sich deshalb in Lehre, Kult und Disziplin mit einer Autorität ausgestattet, die Herzen und Gewissen bindet.” Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Konfessionsbildung: Studien zur Reformation, Gegenreformation und katholischen Reform* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985), 67 (emphasis original). It is one of the virtues of Diarmaid MacCulloch’s recent history of the Reformation that it frames the basic conflict between those who remained loyal to Rome and those who did not as a battle over catholicity itself. MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> The literature on the so-called *Konfessionalisierungsthese* is immense, but it is limited, for the most part, to scholarship originating in Germany. Significant contributions include Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung: eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1981); Wolfgang Reinhard, “Konfession und Konfessionalisierung in Europa,” in *Bekenntnis und Geschichte: die Confessio Augustana im historischen Zusammenhang*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard (Munich: Verlag Ernst Vögel, 1981), 165-89; Heinz Schilling, *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland: das Problem der “Zweiten Reformation”*: Wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1985 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1986); *Religion*,

perhaps the most prolific proponent of this thesis, argues that confessionalization is the defining impulse of the period, a *Kardinalprozess* without which the emergence of modern Europe would be unthinkable.<sup>15</sup>

The “confessionalization thesis” has generated an impressive body of scholarship aimed at reevaluating, among other things, the place of religion in macro-historical descriptions of the social, political, and cultural development of early modern Europe. Not all historians are convinced that this paradigm has quite the explanatory power urged by some of its most vocal proponents;<sup>16</sup> nevertheless, it

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*Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Stefan Ehrenpreis and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002); Wolfgang Reinhard, *Glaube und Macht: Kirche und Politik im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004). See also the essays from the following symposia on confessionalization by the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, in Hans-Christoph Rublack, ed., *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland: Wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1988* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1992); Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, eds., *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995). For recent historiographical overviews of the scholarship on confessionalization, see Susan R. Boettcher, “Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity,” *History Compass* 2, no. 1 (2004); Thomas A. Brady Jr., “Confessionalization: The Career of a Concept,” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555-1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, ed. John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), 1-20.

<sup>15</sup> Heinz Schilling, “Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft: Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaftlichen Paradigmas,” in *Katholische Konfessionalisierung*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling (Münster: Aschendorff, 1995), 41.

<sup>16</sup> Winfried Schulze, for example, focuses on the growth of skepticism and “free-thinking” during this period, as well as with the emerging ideals of tolerance and religious freedom to argue that confessionalization paved the way the *real* main event of early modernity, secularization. Winfried Schulze, “Konfessionalisierung als Paradigma zur Erforschung des konfessionellen Zeitalters,” in *Drei Konfessionen in einer Region: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Konfessionalisierung im Herzogtum Berg vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Burkhardt Dietz and Stefan Ehrenpreis (Cologne: Rheinland-Verlag, 1999), 15-30. Legal historians have also pointed out that it was during the supposed peak of confessionalization that the secularization of imperial law first got underway. See, for example, Michael Stolleis, “‘Konfessionalisierung’ oder ‘Säkularisierung’ bei der Entstehung des frühmodernen Staates,” *Ius Commune* 20 (1993): 1-24. For more on the critical reaction to the

seems clear that this trend has at the very least secured a prominent place for the role of religion in early modern European history, even as it has challenged the privileged place of the Reformation in accounting for the origins of European modernity. As Schilling explains:

In light of the insights of scholarship on confessionalization during the last decade, we will not be able in the long run to avoid the recognition that the societal changes effected by confessionalization were more profound than the changes directly effected by the Reformation. Of course, we must not fail to notice that confessionalization is unthinkable without the Reformation, even as the Reformation itself is unthinkable without the preceding late medieval reform. . . . The late Middle Ages were the boarding, the Reformation was the runway, and confessionalization was the take-off of European modernization.<sup>17</sup>

This renewed focus on religion has not come without certain ironies, however. With all the attention given to *Konfessionsbildung*, *Konfessionalisierung*, and *Konfessionalismus*, the metonymic term in relation to which all these concepts stand is often overlooked: confession. While it is now almost universally acknowledged that confessionalism—“salvation within, perdition without,” in one critic’s snappy phrase<sup>18</sup>—played an immensely important role in the social and political history of early modern Europe, relatively little heed has been paid in recent

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confessionalization paradigm, see Ute Lotz-Heumann and Michael Pohlig, “Confessionalization and Literature in the Empire, 1555–1700,” *Central European History* 40 (2007): 35-61.

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Schilling, “Reformation: Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Temps des Réformes?” in *Die frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch: wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1996*, ed. Stephen D. Buckwalter and Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 24. Cited in Hillerbrand, “Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?” 549.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Desroche, *Sociologies religieuses* (Paris: Presse universitaires de France, 1968), 83. Cf. the not-incompatible *Begriff* given in *TRE* 19:426, s.v., “Konfessionalismus”: “die betonte und sich in der Regel gegen andere Ausprägungen des Christlichen bewußt abgrenzende Wahrnehmung der eigenen Konfession.”

scholarship either to the intellectual history of the confessions themselves or to the effects of this process on theology and exegesis. This ought not to be viewed as a failing of the confessionalization thesis itself, a paradigm which has, from the beginning, been presented as a conceptual model for understanding the social and cultural history of early modern Europe.<sup>19</sup> Yet the implications of this approach for intellectual history—and for the history of Christian doctrine in particular—have yet to be fully explored.

At one level, of course, it might seem strange to suggest that the intellectual history of the confessions themselves has not been sufficiently examined. After all, the confessional theology of none of the three major traditions in question has ever wanted for careful—even loving—historical attention. Each of the three *Großkonfessionen* took significant pains to document and to narrate its respective history with the goal of justifying its very existence and discrediting that of its opponents.<sup>20</sup> Central to this endeavor was the claim that pure Christian doctrine was

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<sup>19</sup> On this point, see the retrospective remarks in Schilling, “Confessionalization: Historical and Scholarly Perspectives of a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Program,” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555-1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, ed. John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), 21-36. If the confessionalization paradigm is open to criticism on this point, it may arise from an overly functionalist account of its phenomena, a tendency which, as one critic points out, the more recent historiography shares with earlier, more ideological accounts of confessional history: “Ein zentrales Postulat der Konfessionalisierungsthese ist die weitgehende sachliche und zeitliche Parallelität und funktionale Äquivalenz des Prozessverlaufs in allen drei Großkonfessionen”—without much regard for the concrete particularities of “diskurs-, text-, ritual- oder praxisinterpretativen Ansätzen.” Cornel Zwierlein, “‘(Ent)konfessionalisierung’ (1935) und ‘Konfessionalisierung’ (1981),” *ARG* 98 (2007): 220, 22.

<sup>20</sup> The historiographical efforts of early Protestant writers has recently been receiving a good deal of critical attention. See, for example, the essays collected in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Bruce Gordon (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1998).

uniquely embodied in a particular church's confessional documents.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of this sort of historical writing is the *Magdeburg Centuries*, composed between 1559 and 1574 by a team of historians in Saxony led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus. The aim of this work was simple: "to demonstrate that the followers of Luther held to the Catholic faith and that the papacy was, indeed, the Antichrist."<sup>22</sup> In doing so, Flacius and his fellow "centuriators" focused on the history of Christian doctrine. The traditional *historia ecclesiae* was reconfigured as a tale of theological decline from the pristine splendor of the early church, while at the same time continuity was established with that past via an unbroken chain of "witnesses," culminating in the emergence of the *theologia vera* with Luther's Reformation in Wittenberg.<sup>23</sup> The *Centuries*, described by Anthony Grafton as "the first expensive, grant-supported historical enterprise in modern times," joined a rising flood of confessionalized church historiography in the latter half of the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Much of this work maintained exceedingly high standards of

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<sup>21</sup> As Jaroslav Pelikan notes, this is particularly true of the Lutheran churches, where a "comparative indifference . . . to the issues of a normative church order and polity or of a fixed and prescribed liturgy, moreover, placed all the weight on the confession of doctrine." The same held true for the Reformed and Catholic confessions as well, however. In the case of the Roman Catholic church, Pelikan notes, the rise of competing confessions heightened "the persistent and long-deferred need to sort out and clarify the unresolved state of the patristic and medieval tradition." In *CCFC* 4:467, 470.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kolb, *For all the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 97. Cf. Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century," in *Protestant History and Identity*, 14-15.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Brecht, "Luther und die Probleme seiner Zeit," in *Martin Luther: Probleme seiner Zeit*, ed. Volker Press and Dieter Stievermann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1986), 58-74.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107-12.

documentation and evidence—the fruit, no doubt, of an awareness on the part of these historians that their labors would be scrutinized in agonizing detail by unfriendly eyes—and for this they remain indispensable for our knowledge of the period. Yet for better *and* for worse, this historiographic tradition has played a central role in the formation of the modern historical consciousness.

Indeed, one might even say that the confessional historians of the late-sixteenth century did their work *too* well. Perhaps more than any other field in the discipline of church history, Reformation studies remains the most closely tied to this confessional historiographic tradition.<sup>25</sup> “This is not to say,” one critic explains, “that modern scholars are apologists for particular Christian confessions as they often were in the past, but rather that the confessional dynamics of the Reformation continue to structure the questions we ask and the sorts of answers we find satisfactory.”<sup>26</sup> This problem is particularly acute in the present inquiry, not only because the doctrine of justification lies so close to the heart of confessional identity—in the sixteenth century as well as today—but also because when studying the phenomenon of confessionalization, confessionalism itself is the object of our study. It thus cannot serve as the lens through which we approach the material. This

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<sup>25</sup> At the October 2004 meeting of the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference, a roundtable was held on the topic of “Post-Confessional Reformation History.” Revised versions of the four major papers were published in the 2006 volume of the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* with an introduction by Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Anne Jacobson Schutte, the North American editors of the journal. The editors observe that the transition from confessional to post-confessional history in Reformation studies has only come about within the last generation in North America (*ARG* 97 [2006]: 276).

<sup>26</sup> Ethan H. Shagan, “Can Historians End the Reformation?” *ARG* 97 (2006): 298.

is not to suggest, of course, that confessionally-committed historians cannot do good work on this question—they have and continue to do so.<sup>27</sup> What I do mean to suggest, however, is that historical approaches aimed at advancing the confessionally-specific truth claims of a particular tradition cannot be relied upon to explain how those truth claims themselves were shaped by confessional pressures. An approach to intellectual history which takes seriously the confessionalization of theological discourse will, in other words, inevitably relativize its subject matter in certain ways, insofar as it moves beyond simply describing the views of individual figures and attempts to explain why certain discursive patterns take the shapes they do. This sort of inquiry need not foreclose on the ultimate truth or legitimacy of any of the discourses in view—indeed, it must not. As Brad Gregory has so forcefully argued, “The point is precisely *not* to relativize competing faith claims themselves, but to let each resonate fully, creating a formal relativism of competing absolutisms.”<sup>28</sup> I prefer to think of such an approach as a useful heuristic discipline, rather than as an act of final, metaphysical closure on the questions in view. After all, if one is going to resurrect the dead and let them speak, one cannot always just tell them to sit down and shut up when one is finished with them. But rather than defend this assertion at length, it will perhaps be more helpful to explain what precisely the sort of “post-confessional” approach I have in mind might look like.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. the reflections on this issue by Scott H. Hendrix, “Post-Confessional Research and Confessional Commitment,” *ARG* 97 (2006): 284-88.

<sup>28</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.



Since I cannot improve on the description recently offered by Philip Benedict, I will reproduce it here in full:

Two features define [post-confessional Reformation history]. The first is a strong sense of the historical contingency of the various post-Reformation confessions: the recognition that their essential features were not fixed from the start, but instead both their core beliefs and their boundaries came to be defined over time in dialogue and dispute with rival confessions. The second defining feature is the recognition that few components and impulses found within any given confession were unique to it. On the contrary, many values and practices were shared widely across the churches that emerged from the Reformation. As a result, strong claims for the uniquely progressive role of any one confession can be advanced only with the utmost caution.<sup>29</sup>

The burden of this dissertation will be to argue, contrary to widely held opinion, that not all of the essential features of the Protestant doctrine of justification were “fixed from the start,” but rather that they “came to be defined over time in dialogue and dispute” with opponents both within and without the Protestant confessions themselves. This process I describe as the confessionalization of faith, and I argue that it was attended by a corresponding confessionalization of biblical exegesis. But before laying out my methodological approach for the remainder of this study, however, it is necessary to give consideration to what the best recent confessional scholarship has to say on the matter.

## ***I.2 Status Quaestionis:*** **Was There a “Reformation Doctrine of Justification”?**

The most impressive attempt in recent scholarship to identify a coherent pattern of theorizing among the Protestant reformers on the matter of justification comes from Berndt Hamm, Professor of Modern Church History at the theological faculty of the

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Benedict, “What is Post-Confessional Reformation History?” *ARG* 97 (2006): 277.

University of Erlangen.<sup>30</sup> Hamm is widely regarded as one of the leading German historians of Reformation thought and culture. His early work broke new ground on a set of problems which had long exercised historians of late medieval scholastic theology, and he has also made important contributions at the intersections of intellectual and social history in the Reformation period.<sup>31</sup> Hamm's work is uniformly characterized by careful scrutiny of the relevant primary sources, methodological sophistication, and even-handed judgment—which is why I have chosen his widely-cited essay as a point of departure. Even though I shall conclude that Hamm's proposal ultimately proves inadequate, his essay is deeply instructive not only in its mature historical-theological reflection, but also in illustrating the difficulty of the problem as it has hitherto been construed.

### **I.2.1 The Hamm Proposal: Criteria**

Hamm himself certainly recognizes the difficulty of the question he is posing: “I am not asking,” he writes,

“What is the *Lutheran* doctrine of justification?” but “What is the *Reformation* doctrine of justification?” That is to say, what links the Wittenberg Reformation of Luther and Melancthon, the Reformation of Zwingli in Zurich and Calvin's

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<sup>30</sup> Berndt Hamm, “What Was the Reformation Doctrine of Justification?” in *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm*, SHCT 110, ed. Robert J. Bast (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 179-216; reprinted from *The German Reformation: Essential Readings*, ed. C. Scott Dixon (New York: Blackwell), 53-90. This essay updates an argument Hamm first advanced in his 1985 *Antrittsvorlesung* at the University of Erlangen, later published as “Was ist reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre?” *ZThK* 83, no. 1 (1986): 1-38.

<sup>31</sup> *Promissio, pactum, ordinatio: Freiheit und Selbstbindung Gottes in d. scholast. Gnadenlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977); *Bürgertum und Glaube: Konturen der städtischen Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

Geneva-based Reformation in their opposition to medieval Catholic doctrine and the reforming Catholicism of the sixteenth century?<sup>32</sup>

For Hamm, there is a coherent set of core convictions which all four of the major Protestant reformers—Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin—hold in common against their Catholic opponents, a thesis which militates against two trends current in Reformation scholarship at the time Hamm was writing. The first, and for our purposes the most significant, is a historicizing trend highlighting the variegation and particularity of individual reformers and localized movements at the expense of unifying criteria. Hamm opines that “Reformation historians in recent decades have encouraged an awareness of the diversity of currents in the Reformation to such an extent that it is becoming increasingly difficult to retain a grasp on those features that are common to the Reformation as a whole, and to define their content precisely.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, “enthusiastic ecumenists” have sought to divert the force of Luther’s critique of scholastic soteriology away from the “fully catholic”

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<sup>32</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 179.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Hamm cites Ulrich Gäbler and Heinz Scheible as two representatives of this approach. Gäbler, for example, writes that “in view of the diversity of theological positions among sixteenth-century Protestants, it is impossible to trace a historically distinct outline of the term ‘evangelical.’” Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk* (Munich: Beck, 1983), 47. Scheible, Hamm argues, allows for a certain amount of common ground among the various reformers, but “formulated in such vague and amorphous terms” that it become difficult to differentiate them from medieval Catholic theology. Heinz Scheible, “Reform, Reformation, Revolution: Grundsätze zur Beurteilung der Flugschriften,” *ARG* 65 (1974): 117. Hamm is clearly uncomfortable with these characterizations; what is less clear is whether his discomfort ultimately rests on historical or theological grounds. If the historical reality in view—in this case, a supposed evangelical consensus on the nature and scope of justification—is in fact “vague and amorphous,” then it must be described in terms equally vague and amorphous. As I hope to demonstrate in this study, this is precisely the case well into the middle decades of the century: clarity emerges only gradually through a long process of reinterpretation, renegotiation, and refinement in the crucible of confessional formation.

position, represented perhaps by some of the more Augustinian versions of Thomism, by describing it as an attack on the “Ockham-infested doctrine of the late Middle Ages.”<sup>34</sup>

Corresponding to these two foils, Hamm sets out two criteria for ascertaining this *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*. The first seeks to identify the “objective common ground” held by the reformers in comparison with late medieval theology, an approach with both positive and negative aspects. Since this criteria is so central to Hamm’s proposal, I will quote it here in full:

Historically, there is little point in understanding the essential features of the Reformation in such a narrow sense—perhaps on the basis of certain interpretations of remarks made by Luther—that our criterion would prove Zwingli or even Calvin to be the proponents of non-Reformation theology. Or to put it in more positive terms: the nature of Reformation theology must always be defined by comparison. The objective common ground between the reformers when they move away from medieval systems must find a place in our definition of its features. Consequently, the question of what is characteristic of the Reformation is also the question what is common ground shared by all the reformers, and is not just specifically Lutheran.<sup>35</sup>

The problem with this approach, however, is that it assumes in advance what it is trying to prove. Hamm seems to be arguing that it is pointless to define the Reformation view on a given doctrine so tightly as to exclude figures whom we already know in advance to be proponents of Reformation theology. Such an approach might make better sense if we were characterizing the thought of a figure in general terms: it would certainly make no sense, for example, to argue that

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<sup>34</sup> This trend has only gained in strength in the years between Hamm’s initial version of the essay and the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999. For a more recent critique of this scholarship, see David C. Steinmetz, “The Catholic Luther: a Critical Reappraisal,” *TToday* 61, no. 2 (2004): 187-201.

<sup>35</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 182.

Zwingli was not a genuine “Reformation thinker.” That he thought of himself and was regarded by others as such is beyond cavil. In examining particular doctrines, however, the situation is rather more complex. I see no patent absurdity in maintaining that certain currents within a figure’s thought might be more or less in keeping with the *reformatische Lehre* on any given point—or better yet, that there is no monolithic, uncontested *reformatische Lehre* at certain points in time, but rather a range of options which are held by figures widely regarded as “reformational.” Indeed, when it comes to other more hotly contested matters within Protestant circles, such as the Eucharist, this is precisely what we observe. Luther regards Zwingli’s teaching as far too close to that of the *Schwärmerei* for his taste, while Zwingli in turn regards Luther’s teaching as still trapped in the labyrinth of Popish superstition.<sup>36</sup> Yet modern historians do not seem overly concerned that such diversity of opinion on so central a matter as the Lord’s Supper disqualifies either figure as genuinely “Reformational.” Instead, we are forced to use terms such as “the Lutheran Communion” and “the Reformed Communion,” rather than lumping them together under a common generic category.<sup>37</sup> The same may or may not be true of any supposed *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*, but this is a conclusion

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<sup>36</sup> For a sample of these mutual recriminations, see David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 72.

<sup>37</sup> For a recent treatment of the Lord’s Supper illustrating just this point, see Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

which can only be drawn *a posteriori* on the basis of a careful examination of the sources.<sup>38</sup> It cannot serve as a criterion for establishing such conclusions in advance.

Hamm's second criterion for ascertaining the *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre* is less problematic, though it may require some adjustments to be more useful. This criterion, Hamm explains, is based on an assessment of "what the theological exponents of Catholicism in the sixteenth century thought of the doctrine. What features of the doctrine were perceived as 'mold-breaking' and what features (in their eyes) could be integrated?"<sup>39</sup> This criterion guards against the excesses of ecumenical air-brushing by forcing us to compare Reformation teaching not only against the Scotist-Occamist theologians, the traditional villains of ecumenical historiography, but also against the more robustly Augustinian figures

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<sup>38</sup> The same holds true of Hamm's positive restatement of the point: the "objective common ground between the reformers" must certainly "find a place in our definition of its features"—a very prominent place, I would argue. But we can only know what that common ground is and how far it extends by examining it in detail. It may be that much of what had previously been taken for granted as "objective common ground" turns out, upon closer examination, to be misunderstanding, misappropriation, or rhetorical posturing, conclusions which cannot be ruled out of bounds *a priori*. I have some sympathy with Hamm's dismissal of Gäbler's sweeping generalizations, but Scheible's conclusions are based on careful examination of the sources and thus merit much closer attention than Hamm allows. More to the point, the essay by Scheible with which Hamm takes issue is concerned with distinguishing between "Reformation" and "Catholic reform" in the *Flugschriften* of the early 1520's, a period when these categories were very much in flux. As Scheible explains, "Hierfür muß zuerst geklärt werden, was unter Reformation zu verstehen ist. Nomen und zugehöriges Verb kommen ja in den zu untersuchenden Texten und auch bei Luther vor. Est bedeutet Verbesserung durch Wiederherstellung der ursprünglichen Gestalt. . . . Wenn in den Texten des 16. Jahrhunderts das Wort „Reformation“ begegnet, so müssen wir es mit „Reform“ wiedergeben. Was Reformation als historisches Ereignis bedeutet, kann also nicht durch philologisch-exegetische Untersuchungen gefunden, sondern muß durch historisch-semantische Überlegungen festgestellt werden." Scheible, "Reform, Reformation, Revolution," 115.

<sup>39</sup> Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 183.

who wrestled seriously with Reformation ideas on their own terms, figures such as Johannes Gropper, Gasparo Contarini, and Girolamo Seripando.

This is a salutary observation, yet I am not sure how consistently Hamm's analysis has been guided by it. He makes no mention, for example, of the fact that at Regensburg in 1541 Philipp Melanchthon and Martin Bucer, two reformers of unimpeachably Protestant credentials, reached an agreement with, among others, Gropper and Contarini on a compromise formula for the doctrine of justification.<sup>40</sup> Were Melanchthon and Bucer departing from the *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre* insofar as they found common ground with these Catholics? Luther certainly seems to have thought so.<sup>41</sup> But Hamm has already avowed that it is "pointless" to draw these lines in such a way as to exclude major reformers such as Melanchthon. It would seem, then, that the line between *reformatisch* and *unreformatisch* runs straight through the likes even of Melanchthon, one of Hamm's cardinal representatives of Reformation thought. But to entertain this suggestion is to run smack into one of the oldest and most bitterly contested debates in Reformation scholarship, the question of whether Melanchthon corrupted Luther's gospel or simply developed its core assertions with greater consistency and

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of the negotiations, see Athina Lexutt, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch: das Rechtfertigungsverständnis in den Religionsgesprächen von Hagenau, Worms und Regensburg 1540-41* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 236-60.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter of 10/11 May to the Elector of Saxony, Luther derides the formulation as a "patched and all-embracing" affair. He claims that the two ideas of justification by faith alone without works (Rom 3:28) and faith working through love (Gal 5:6) had been "zu samen gereymet und geleyemet" (thrown together and glued together): whereas one refers to becoming righteous, the other to the life of the righteous." WABr 9:406-09, #3616.

precision.<sup>42</sup> Hamm wisely avoids embroiling himself in this fruitless controversy, yet the problem remains: what sort of index do we have in judging when an ostensibly reformational figure, such as Melancthon, strays from the authentic *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre* if such a figure himself is one of the primary yardsticks for establishing the doctrine in the first place?

It might be argued that Hamm's use of this criterion is designed to provide just this. Whenever we find Catholic thinkers responding favorably to a Protestant proposal—in Hamm's words, whenever they are capable of integrating it—then we may safely conclude that because this new teaching does not “break the mold,” it must not be genuinely reformational. There are two distinct advantages to this approach, advantages so formidable, that I hope to be able integrate this criterion, with some modifications, to the approach I will develop in this study. First, using Catholic reaction as a criterion for establishing the reformational view allows us to bring into sharp relief the precise profile of the issues at stake by discerning where specific Reformation formulations touch a raw nerve with Catholics. Reformation scholarship has, for far too long, examined its chief figures and ideas in isolation from contemporaneous developments within the Catholic world, and Hamm is quite right to insist that any approach to this question must be comparative. Second, comparative criteria allow us to avoid centering our definition on one figure. The traditional response to the question of how we understand the willingness of

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<sup>42</sup> For a recent survey of the salient issues in this literature, see Reinhard Flogaus, “Luther versus Melancthon? zur Frage der Einheit der Wittenberger Reformation in der Rechtfertigungslehre,” *ARG* 91 (2000): 6-46.



Melanchthon and Bucer to compromise with the Catholics on the article of justification has simply been to assert that this represented a departure from the teaching of Luther. Presumably, there are still confessional Lutheran scholars who would be willing to take this line, using Luther's teaching as the ultimate index for the authentic *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*, but as Hamm correctly points out, this leaves us with at best a *Lutheran* (more likely a Gnesio-Lutheran) doctrine of justification, not a *Reformation* doctrine.

This criterion is not without problems, however, when deployed apart from a careful assessment of the shifting and fluid contexts which shaped the Reformation debates. The most significant of these is the assumption that genuinely reformational theology must be defined in opposition to Catholic thought. This, it seems to me, is quite far from a self-evident truth. Nor would it have been self-evident to most of the first-generation Protestant reformers, who saw themselves quite consciously as working for reform and renewal *within* the Catholic Church, not for schism.<sup>43</sup> Though many of the reformers were often quite caustic in their assessments of Catholic teaching, by and large they developed their critiques from within the thought-world of late medieval scholastic theology, only gradually coming to recognize that their most deeply-held convictions could not be accommodated within the church into which they had been born. And even when the break had been made, the impress of Catholic formation remained clearly

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<sup>43</sup> On this point, see David C. Steinmetz, "The Intellectual Appeal of the Reformation," *TToday* 57, no. 4 (2001): 459-50.

discernable. Even in those reformers who owed less to the formal theological methods of the late medieval schools, considerable affinities with Catholic thought call still be discerned.

Yet Hamm's observations here cannot be dismissed so easily. Granted that the first-generation reformers were in no hurry to leave the church in which they had been baptized, what emerged during their battle to reform the church "in head and members" was a genuinely new conception of human salvation, divorced from the Catholic sacrament of penance and centered on the notion of justification by faith alone. This soteriological fault-line between Catholic and Protestant would eventually become one of the clearest boundary markers defining confessional identity in early modern Europe. Yet any attempt to trace out the contours of the Protestant position in the first few decades of the Reformation must bear in mind two important features of the Catholic reaction: its doctrinal fluidity and its focus on practice.

Eventually it was recognized by both Protestants and Catholics that this new *Rechtfertigungslehre* could not be accommodated within the existing theology and practice of the Roman Catholic church. Yet when exactly did this recognition occur? We have already noted the willingness of front-rank Protestant and Catholic theologians to seek compromise on this issue at Regensburg in 1541; a second colloquy at Regensburg in 1546 continued the discussion, though without any

further progress.<sup>44</sup> At the Council of Trent, beginning in 1545, the condemnation of the Protestant schism as a whole may have been a foregone conclusion, but it was still by no means obvious which aspects of the doctrine of justification would be condemned and which might yet be assimilated.<sup>45</sup> In part, the difficulty was caused by the absence of an authoritative *katholische Rechtfertigungslehre* against which to measure the *reformatische*.<sup>46</sup> This was one of the major problems the Council of Trent was expected to solve. That it did so by firmly and comprehensively rejecting core Protestant teachings should not blind us to the fluidity of the situation within the Catholic context up to and including the Tridentine debates in the late 1540's. Not until the promulgation of the canons of Session VI in January of 1547—roughly three decades after Luther's supposed "Reformation breakthrough"—do we have an authoritative index of Catholic teaching against which to measure Reformation doctrine.<sup>47</sup> To return to Hamm's metaphor, Reformation theology did not "break the

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<sup>44</sup> See the account in Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf, 2 vols. (New York: Nelson, 1957), 2:198-201. A letter from Georg Major, the Lutheran representative at the colloquy, to Justus Jonas dated 10 Feb 1546 lists fourteen theses dealing with justification which had been proposed for discussion by his Catholic collocutors; in *CR* 6:35-37.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony N. S. Lane, "A Tale of Two Imperial Cities: Justification at Regensburg (1541) and Trent (1546/7)," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 119-46.

<sup>46</sup> As Jedin explains, the Tridentine fathers "were without the guidance of clear directives by the supreme teaching authority in the Church when they sought to bring out the contrast between the Catholic and the Protestant attitude of mind in regard to matters of faith." Jedin, *Council of Trent*, 167. See also G. R. Evans, "Vis verborum: Scholastic Method and Finding Words in the Debates on Justification of the Council of Trent," *Downside Review* 106, no. 365 (1988): 264-75.

<sup>47</sup> As one scholar has recently put it, "Luther was finally excommunicated for indiscipline, but never actually condemned for heresy by any authority with the necessary jurisdiction until the council of

mold” of medieval Catholic doctrine because prior to 1547 there simply was no mold to break.

This does not mean, however, that early Catholic responses to evangelical teaching can safely be ignored. There may not have been an orthodox *doctrine* of justification prior to the Council of Trent, but there most certainly was an orthodox *practice* of justification.<sup>48</sup> That practice, as we have already noted, centered on the sacrament of penance. Even “moderate” Catholic reformers, such as Contarini, who thought that at least some of the reformers’ concerns could be integrated into authentic Catholic theorizing about the sacrament, ultimately regarded the “Lutheran disease” as a grave threat to the well-being of Christendom because it diverted Christians away from the only God-ordained means by which post-baptismal sin could be forgiven and the penitent sinner returned to a state of grace.<sup>49</sup> Catholic reactions to the evangelical proclamation of reconciliation with God apart from this sacramental orthopraxy ranged from the baffled hostility of a John Eck to the

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Trent defined propositions with which Luther’s views were clearly incompatible.” Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 282.

<sup>48</sup> Still useful in this connection is the discussion by Lortz on the importance of the distinction between theory and practice in interpreting the early stages of the conflict. Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, trans. Ronald Walls, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:221. Carolyn Walker Bynum, in her recent monograph on blood cult in fifteenth-century Germany, notes the absence of a formal theoretical account of the salvation in late medieval theology. “A soteriology is there,” she argues, but only implicitly. It must be teased out from “the verbs and adjectives chosen, the biblical passages quoted, and the silences, echoes, and missed connections that almost slip past us.” Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 195-96.

<sup>49</sup> William V. Hudon, “Two Instructions to Preachers from the Tridentine Reformation,” *SCJ* 20, no. 3 (1989): 458-59.

pastoral *suavitas*—“brother to brethren, friend to friends”—of a Jacopo Sadoleto.<sup>50</sup> Yet by and large, the Catholic response to the evangelical challenge in the first decades of the conflagration centered on a defense of traditional Catholic practices (such as penance and indulgences) and the authority structures which legitimated those practices, rather than a defense of a clearly received and demarcated soteriological doctrine.<sup>51</sup> Joseph Lortz notes this disconnect between the church’s official teaching and its practice, and he argues that this “theological vagueness” created space for Luther’s views to gain a hearing:

Without it, the radical ideas expressed by Luther in 1517 would have encountered a general repulse from theologians and the decisive majority of public authorities, and would have died away before even taking root. As it were, vagueness as to the import of Lutheran ideas confused the best of Catholic minds—laity, clergy, monks, theologians and even canon lawyers—until the late twenties and thirties, even into the forties, as the religious controversies show. Here is the point at which we become acutely aware of the vast distinction between post-Tridentine and pre-Tridentine Catholicism, and, again, of the importance of practical theology and the practice of the curia in contrast to genuine theology.<sup>52</sup>

In the following study, I intend to argue that this “vagueness” in Catholic theology is paralleled by a certain fluidity—“vagueness” is not quite the right word

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<sup>50</sup> “Sadoleto’s Letter to the Genevans,” in John C. Olin, ed., *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>51</sup> Surveying initial responses to Luther’s attack on indulgences in the *Ninety-five Theses*, David Bagchi concludes that “the first reactions to Luther’s indulgence theses show that there was a complete agreement only in a belief that Luther was in error.” In pinpointing where, exactly, Luther was in error, these theologians varied wildly among themselves. It is therefore not surprising that a unanimity quickly developed with regard to the question of papal power as a means of settling the disputed issues. David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 26.

<sup>52</sup> Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, 1:233. Whether or not Lortz is correct in his speculation that clearer teaching on the part of Catholic authorities would have resulted in a “general repulse” is not my present concern.

here—in evangelical theorizing on the doctrine of justification well into the 1540’s and beyond. The latter tends to display a greater clarity and force during this period precisely because it is on the offensive: those figures who identified themselves most closely with Luther’s protest movement singled out certain aspects of traditional Catholic practice and the theories which undergirded it for sustained criticism, and the nature of their writings, focusing as they do on specific grievances, often gives a certain sharpness to many of their formulations. This should not blind us, however, to the fact that among themselves there still existed wide divergences in how salvation was interpreted scripturally and theorized systematically.

The first-generation reformers were generally at their most lucid—and unified—in explaining what justification was *not*: it was not a reward for human merit (*de congruo* or otherwise); it was not a result of the believer’s cooperation with the gift of grace (*synteresis*); it was not regulated by the church’s sacrament of penance. Indeed, the vaunted *solas* of Reformation theology—*sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and even *sola scriptura*—are all *negative* assertions; that is, they seek to isolate certain key terms from specific theological contexts in which they had become embedded.<sup>53</sup> Thus, they function not so much as summaries of Protestant belief but as rallying cries against specific Catholic teachings or practices. They

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<sup>53</sup> This observation could be developed at considerably greater length, but I think the basic point is obvious enough when we consider that absolutely no one in fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Western theology would have *denied* an important role to any of these key terms, *fides*, *gratia*, *Christus*, or *scriptura*. The qualifier *alone* (*allein*, in Luther’s (in)famous translation of Rom 3:28) is added to decouple these terms from other concepts with which they had become linked in Catholic thought and practice: faith from works; grace from merit; Christ from Mary (and the saints); scripture from the church’s magisterium. *It does not supply the actual content of the terms.*

constitute, in other words, a “rhetoric of dissent,” rather than a fully-orbed theological or ideological program. Yet, as I will demonstrate in the course of this study, there remain significant differences among the major reformers themselves as to what these terms actually mean.

As Lortz, Jedin, and others have pointed out, eventually the Roman Catholic Church got around to defining the doctrine of justification in precise terms specifically aimed to exclude any rapprochement with their opponents.<sup>54</sup> And so, of course, did the Protestants. During the late-1550’s and early 1560’s, a whole raft of confessional statements were issued by Protestant churches which defined justification in terms far more comprehensive and precise than the those of the first-generation reformers. We will examine anon in some detail the distance between these first- and second-generation confessional statements on the matter of justification, but first we must conclude our engagement with Hamm’s proposal by examining the eleven characteristics he advances in describing what he takes to be the *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*. Although I have rejected Hamm’s first criterion for establishing this construct and suggested major qualifications to the second, his work in synthesizing the views of the major reformers on this issue cannot be ignored.

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<sup>54</sup> For a summary of the Council’s decrees on justification, see “Trente (Concile de),” in *DThC* 15.1, cols. 1435-39. For somewhat different take on the thrust of Trent’s decrees on justification, see Otto Hermann Pesch, “La réponse du Concile de Trente (1545-1563): les décisions doctrinales contre la Réforme et les conséquences,” *Irénikon* 73, no. 1-2 (2000): 5-38.

## I.2.2 The Hamm Proposal: Synthesis

In tracing the profile of this *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*, Hamm suggests ten points at which this “evangelical factor can first be clearly perceived in historical terms.” They are, in summary form:<sup>55</sup>

1. The Unconditionally Given Acceptance of Mankind
2. Radical Sin
3. Grace Preceding Perfect Righteousness
4. *Simul Iustus et Peccator*
5. The Eschatological Final Validity of Justification
6. The Certainty of Salvation
7. Freedom and the Absence of Freedom
8. By Faith Alone
9. The Bond between Faith and the Biblical Word
10. Breaking the Mold: The Contrast with Medieval Theology
11. The Evangelical Understanding of the Person

Space will not allow a detailed engagement with each of these points here, and in any event, I have very little in the way of substantive critique to make concerning Hamm’s elaboration of most of these theses. What is claimed concerning the reformers’ views on these issues is, in my view, generally correct (with a few significant exceptions, explained below). Moreover, his conclusions are formulated in such a way as to avoid overstating the unanimity of expression in diverse sources while acknowledging (though not always explicating) a range of opinion within these stated bounds. Unlike many other attempts to argue for the existence of a “Reformation doctrine of justification,” Hamm generally avoids the sort of doctrinaire eisegesis which seeks to harmonize the writings of the early reformers

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<sup>55</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 189-208. Eleven points are listed here, of course, but the tenth, “Breaking the mold,” is really just a summary of the ways in which the prior nine points differ from medieval thought.



with the statements of later orthodoxy. Two important questions remain, however: to what extent do these characteristics constitute a fully-developed and coherent *Rechtfertigungslehre*, and when precisely does it emerge?

A careful reading of Hamm's theses will reveal that several are really just variations, or restatements, of a common principle, while others are tangential to the question in view. Theses 2, 7, 9, and 11 relate justification to the reformers' doctrines of sin, scripture, and theological anthropology. These are not irrelevant considerations, to be sure, but they set the context for the evangelical notion of justification rather than actually telling us what justification actually *is*.<sup>56</sup> Theses 1, 5, and 6 are all variations on a common theme: granted the "unconditionally given acceptance of mankind" (*die bedingungslos geschenkte Annahme des Menschen*) in justification (1),<sup>57</sup> the final validity of God's initial pronouncement at the eschaton

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<sup>56</sup> Since my concern in this study is with the specific ways in which justification is understood by the reformers in its exegetical context, these more systematic concerns will be peripheral to my argument.

<sup>57</sup> In describing the *Bedingungslosigkeit* of justification, Hamm refers to Melancthon's statement in the *Confessio Augustana Variata*, whereby it is affirmed that *remissio . . . non pendere ex condicione nostrae dignitatis, sed donari propter Christum* (MSA 6:16). Hamm is quite right in his assertion that for Melancthon—as, indeed, for all the reformers—forgiveness of sins (*remissio*) is not dependent on any inherent worth (*dignitas*) in the sinner. Thus, there is no "cause" for justification to be found in the human. He may push this line of argument too far, however, when he asserts that justification is "causeless" (*grundlos*) in an absolute sense: "It is here that the Reformation doctrine of justification breaks the mold. There can be no valid cause for man to be justified before God; not even God himself stands in such a causal relation to man and his actions. The acceptance of God, his bestowal of grace on his creature, is not subject to reasons or conditions. . . ." Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 192. It is perfectly correct to describe the reformers' view of justification as an "unconditional promise" in the sense that it does not depend on the human subject meeting any condition in advance. To call it "causeless," however, ignores the detailed discussions and fierce polemics by and among the reformers relating justification to predestination. For many of these figures, justification does not just happen: it is *caused* by God's electing will. The following comment by Martin Bucer is typical of the reformers' voluntarism in regard to all of God's saving acts: *Caeterum ut iudicet pro nobis Deus, & vitam aeternam adiudicet, prima causa est eius ultronea benevolentia. Sua enim voluntas prima causa est omnium*. For Bucer, as for many of the other reformers, affirming that the *voluntas Dei* is the *prima causa omnium* does not preclude assigning more proximate causes within the created

cannot be doubted (5).<sup>58</sup> The logical corollary of this position, of course, is the assurance of salvation (6). Thesis 4 introduces Luther’s famous phrase, *simul iustus et peccator*, referring to the simultaneous persistence of both sin and righteousness throughout the believer’s life. Thesis 8 introduces the *sola fide* principle, by which it is affirmed that “the sole grounds and cause of justification reside in God’s mercy in Jesus Christ, not any morality inherent in man and manifesting itself in works.”<sup>59</sup>

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order. Bucer continues: *proxima meritum Christi: nam mortuus est pro salute mundi, sed hoc ipsum benevolentiae divinae gratuitum donum est. Tertia, fides, qua hanc Dei benevolentiam & Christi meritum amplectimur & percipimus. Nam qui credit, habet vitam aeternam. Sed haec ipsa quoque fides opus & donum est in nobis propitii iam Dei propter meritum Christi. Postrema causa [sic], bona opera sunt: nam iuxta opera cuique rependitur, sed haec ipsa quoque sunt dona benevolentiae Dei, effectus meriti Christi, & fructus fidei. . . . Omnia igitur salutis nostrae donum sunt, & opus ultroneae & gratuita benevolentiae Dei. In sacra quatuor Evangelia, enarrationes perpetuae. . . .* (Basil, 1536 [DLCPT]), 364. According to Bucer, even *bona opera* have their place in this causal scheme. Other reformers tend to be less willing to follow Bucer in this regard, but the emphasis we see here on the will of God as the *causa iustificationis* is typical. Cf. Calvin, *Institutio* (1559) 3.4.25 (COS 4:114.14-18).

<sup>58</sup> Hamm contrasts this with prior scholastic thought, in which “man’s acceptance into grace and righteousness in justification, and his acceptance into sanctification at the Last Judgment, are two separate things, divided by the way of life inherent in obedience to the law and the principles of satisfaction and merit. . . . Reformation unconditionality brought the two aspects together: the sinner has already been accepted for salvation through his justification and in advance of his new life and good words. . . . Through the acceptance of the sinner, his entering into the righteousness of Christ, something final has taken place; it cannot be superseded even by the Last Judgment. . . .” Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 198. While I think that this interpretation is basically sound with regard to Luther, it is clear that at times he entertained doubts as to what seems to be the inescapable corollary of this position: “once saved, always saved.” In a 1538 addendum to the Smalcald Articles, for example, Luther contradicts the notion (widely ascribed to Johannes Agricola) that “all who once have received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sin or have become believers, should they sin after that, would still remain in the faith, and such sin would not harm them.” On the contrary, argues Luther, “when holy people . . . somehow fall into a public sin (such as David, who fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy against God), at that point faith and the Spirit have departed. The Holy Spirit does not allow sin to rule and gain the upper hand so that it is brought to completion, but the Spirit controls and resists so that sin is not able to do whatever it wants. However, when sin does whatever it wants, then the Holy Spirit and faith are not there.” SA 3.3.42-45 (BC 318-19). In this passage Luther also explicitly rejects the position Calvin would later hold, namely, that those who fall into such grievous public sin simply demonstrate that they “never really had the Spirit and faith.” Cf. *Institutio* (1559), 3.24.7 (COS 4:418-19). I am grateful to Reinhard Hütter for drawing my attention to this passage in Luther’s writings.

<sup>59</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 203.

If we restrict our focus to justification proper, setting aside for the time being such related but tangential matters as sin, scripture, and anthropology, we may summarize Hamm's findings to this point as follows:

- (a) Justification consists in an unconditional act of divine acceptance, whereby God's eschatological verdict is rendered proleptically through faith, granting the believer full assurance of salvation.
- (b) *Simul iustus et peccator*. Sin remains a lifelong reality in the believer, yet because of (a), the believer is always regarded as wholly righteous before God.
- (c) *Sola fide*. Justification is not granted in response to good works, or even in response to the inward gift of grace which makes such works possible; rather, faith is a "purely receptive mode."

Hamm argues that these characteristics represent common ground held by each of the four reformers he surveys against the backdrop of late medieval Catholic theology, a judgment I regard as more or less correct. Given the existential nature of the concerns clustered around (a), it seems to me altogether plausible that Luther's protest, beginning in 1517, against the sacramental regulation of justification in Catholic orthopraxy acted as a sort of lightning rod for reforming dissent, rallying opposition against the existing religious order around the slogan *sola fide* and proclaiming a Gospel aimed at providing relief for consciences troubled by the abiding persistence of sin.

Grant that the major Protestant reformers all read scripture and theorized salvation with regard to these three concerns; grant further that they did so more or less within the context of similar convictions regarding scripture, sin, and theological anthropology, as Hamm argues. It is still the case, however, that considerable diversity persisted in the ways in which Protestant theologians theorized justification all throughout the period we are examining, even though they did so from the context of a shared “theological culture.”<sup>60</sup> This is most readily apparent when we examine in greater detail the relationship of justification to grace and its interface with theories of atonement. To this I now turn by way of engagement with Hamm’s third thesis, “Grace Preceding Perfect Righteousness.”

The title of this thesis is perhaps misleading, as no medieval theologian of whom I am aware would have had any objection to the notion that grace precedes righteousness. Salvation is always a work of grace from first to last, and any act or impulse which God chooses to reward in his creatures is ultimately grounded in his sheer liberality.<sup>61</sup> As Hamm explains, “since man is guilty before God, and owes

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<sup>60</sup> I borrow this term from patristics scholar Lewis Ayres, who uses it to describe “sets of terminologies embodying similar logics,” with the assumption that “such terminologies were read in the context of a set of wider theological assumptions and practices.” Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: an Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> The tone in the Western theological tradition is, of course, set by Augustine, who held grace to be “the unmerited or undeserved gift of God, by which God voluntarily breaks the hold of sin upon humanity. Redemption is possible only as a divine gift.” Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: an Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), 36. Cf., *DThC* 6.2:1554-1687, esp. 1571-1695, on the necessity of grace for both knowing and doing the good; cf., Ritschl, *Critical History*, 73. As Augustine himself puts it, in a dictum which becomes axiomatic in the Western tradition, *cum Deus coronat merita nostra, nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua*. In *Ep.* 194.5; CSEL 57:190.

total righteousness and selfless love throughout his life, the reality and possibility of God's grace can have no foundation based in man."<sup>62</sup> This much is utterly incontrovertible throughout the Christian intellectual tradition. Even Pelagius, who proved to be more optimistic than most concerning the ability of human beings to obey God's commands, had to acknowledge that the mere giving of those commands in the first place was an act of grace: human beings did not merit being entrusted with the law, nor did they merit the example of Christ, who perfectly embodied all of its precepts.<sup>63</sup> Certainly by the late medieval period no one is arguing that grace has its foundation in human beings; *the question is rather how God's grace is applied to human beings*. And here, as we shall see, there is a wide range of options on the table, even among the reformers themselves.

Hamm proceeds to further specify the *reformatische* content of this notion of grace in a number of suggestive ways. First, he points out that the reformers dismiss the scholastic doctrine of *gratia creata*, the idea that saving grace is a created reality,

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<sup>62</sup> Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 193.

<sup>63</sup> As Elizabeth Clark explains, "For Pelagius and his supporters, God's goodness was revealed in the traces he had left in human nature, and by his giving of the law and of exemplary holy men, as well as Jesus, for our edification." Elizabeth A. Clark, "From Origenism to Pelagianism: Elusive Issues in an Ancient Debate," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 12, no. 3 (1991): 286. At times, this emphasis in Pelagius can sound downright "Reformational," as when in the *argumentum* introducing his commentary on the Pauline epistles, Pelagius notes that the letter to the Romans was written by Paul to enlighten certain *rudes* who did not understand that we are saved by God's grace, not by our merits: *Romanorum namque plerique tam rudes erant ut non intellegerent dei se gratia, non suis meritis, esse salvatos, et ob hoc duo inter se populi conflictarent*. In *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, vol. 10, no. 1, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St Paul*, ed., J. Armitage Robinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 4. Indeed, the debate between Augustine and Pelagius over the nature of grace is in no way a debate over the *necessity* of grace, but rather over its mode—internal or external—and consequently over how "to reconcile God's justice with human freedom and suffering" (Clark, 302).

or habit, in the soul.<sup>64</sup> This is accurate enough, as far as it goes, though Hamm must surely know that such a move does not “break the mold” of medieval theology; it merely signals that the reformers were taking sides on a debate which had already been underway in medieval theology for several centuries. More to the point, however, Hamm argues that for the reformers, “a conceptual approach in terms of the relationship replaces the traditional qualitative and moral attitude. Sin remains real in ourselves, but outside ourselves (*extra nos*), in the relationship, that is to say, we are justified in the way in which we are seen by God (*coram Deo*).”<sup>65</sup>

Hamm makes two further claims regarding this relational view of justification. The first has to do with the relationship between the reformers’

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<sup>64</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 193. It is well known that medieval theologians identified *gratia gratum faciens*, or saving grace, with the theological virtue of *charitas*, apart from the infusion of which no one can be saved. Yet there remained considerable disagreement as to what *charitas* might actually be. In the oft-cited seventeenth distinction in Book I of his *Sentences*, the *locus classicus* for this discussion in scholastic theology, Peter Lombard argued that this infused charity was none other than the Holy Spirit himself: *Quantum ergo bonum est sine quo ad aeternam vitam neminem tanta bona perducunt! Ipsa vero dilectio vel charitas (nam unius rei rei nomen est utrumque) perducit ad regnum. Dilectio ergo, quae Deus est, et proprie ex Deo est, Spiritus sanctus est, per quem diffunditur in cordibus nostris Deus charitas, per quam nos tat inhabitat Trinitas. Petri Lombardi Libri IV Sententiarum* 1.17.6; PL192:566. Thomas Aquinas felt that it was ridiculous to identify the human act of *charitas* with the third person of the Trinity as Lombard does, but he concedes that “it was the excellence of charity which moved him to posit this theory” (*Disputed Questions on Charity*, art. 1). Thomas, of course, concurs in making charity the form of all virtues, but he gets around the difficulties he sees in the Lombard’s position by arguing for charity as a created grace (*gratia creata*), a habit in the soul which is the work of the Holy Spirit (*gratia increata*), yet does not impinge upon human agency nor override free will. On the development of this debate in medieval theology, see A. Vanneste, “Nature et grâce dans la théologie du douzième siècle,” *ETL* 50, no. 4 (1974): 181-214; Miriam Rose, *Fides caritate formata: das Verhältnis von Glaube und Liebe in der Summa Theologiae des Thomas von Aquin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 121-31; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 166-71.

<sup>65</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 194.

understanding of atonement and redemption, between the saving work of Christ on the cross and the application of that work to believers through faith. Writes Hamm:

The propitiatory righteousness of Jesus Christ acting vicariously for us is of fundamental importance. It alone is the cause of justification; it alone provides satisfaction and wins merit. The new relationship in which grace justifies us means that God sees man in the light of Christ's righteousness, and allows it to stand for the righteousness of sinners.<sup>66</sup>

What Hamm is describing here comes to be summarized in the Protestant confessional symbols and in later scholasticism as the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness. "Luther," he writes, "and Melancthon and Calvin with him, expresses this understanding of justification in terms of the relations by speaking of the imputation to us of righteousness (*reputatio, imputatio*), and by describing the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner as a righteousness that is external and alien to mankind (*iustitia aliena, externa*)."<sup>67</sup> As I shall argue below, this notion of the imputed righteousness of Christ is ubiquitous in both the Reformed confessions beginning in the late 1550's and in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* in 1577. Hamm, however, detects the idea from an early stage in all four of his paradigmatic figures, though he concedes that they do not all use the same language consistently; more importantly, he regards this concept as integral to Reformation teaching.

Corollary to this notion of the *iustitia Christi imputata*, for Hamm, is another axiom which has long been regarded as a defining mark of the *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*, the sharp distinction between justification and both

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

regeneration and sanctification. This *iustitia aliena*, which is imputed to the believer through faith, “is indeed truly given to us, but it never exists in us, only in the manner of its acceptance and of divine absolution.”<sup>68</sup> Not only is God’s acceptance of the sinner and his imputation of Christ’s righteousness regarded as notionally distinct from the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing the believer, but, Hamm argues, the two “can never be congruent.” Justification stands in a causal relationship to the “partial renewal” which is effected by the Holy Spirit, and the believer’s acceptance into a right relationship with God is never conditioned by it.

It is at these two points, the notion of the *iustitia Christi imputata* and the sharp distinction between justification and regeneration/sanctification, that I believe Hamm’s otherwise serviceable description of the *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre* runs into serious difficulties. The problem is not that these terms and concepts are nowhere to be found in theologies of the Reformation period. The problem is rather that the precise profile Hamm is describing here does not emerge as a consensus position until much later than Hamm seems to allow, and even then it continues to exist in tension with other models well into the late decades of the sixteenth century—and perhaps even beyond. In other words, what Hamm has given us here is *not* a *reformatische Rechtfertigungslehre*; it is a *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



The argument I am intending to advance in this dissertation, in fact, is that the doctrine of justification described by Hamm is the result of a long and tortuous process which I describe as the “confessionalization of faith.” It is a process of debate and negotiation *within* the rival Protestant confessional camps (but with continuous reference, of course, to Roman Catholic teaching) by which the early diversity of views on the nature and scope of justification gives way to a relative unity of expression in the major confessional symbols. While first-generation reformers such as Zwingli and Luther share a common set of concerns and begin increasingly to articulate these concerns using a common theological vocabulary, we can speak of a “Reformation doctrine of justification” only in a rather loose sense. Well into the 1530’s and 1540’s, there were still wide divergences among the reformers themselves, some of which led to acrimonious in-house debate, while others were simply glossed over in the interests of confessional solidarity. Nevertheless, by the final quarter of the sixteenth century, this early diversity seems to have yielded to a precise set of formulations repeated with remarkable consistency within Protestant communities across regional and confessional lines. Before proceeding any further to develop my thesis and methodology in arguing this case, therefore, it will be helpful to trace out these confessional *termini a quo* and *ad quem* so as to highlight the clear emergence of the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* as it developed in the first two generations of the Reformation era.

### **I.3 Termini a quo and ad quem: The Emergence of the Confessional Model**

Well before the end of the sixteenth century, Protestant theologians had in fact developed a clear and consistent idiom for describing God's justification of the ungodly, the central concept in their doctrine of salvation.<sup>69</sup> This *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* represented a clear consensus among Lutheran and Reformed theologians in opposition to their Roman Catholic opponents. It also represented an "advance" with regard to earlier models of justification among the first-generation reformers, this in at least two respects. First, justification came to be defined as a transaction involving two conceptually distinct aspects: forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The former of these, the idea that justification involves the remission (or non-imputation) of sin, was never particularly controversial, in and of itself, in the debates of the Reformation era.<sup>70</sup> It was the

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<sup>69</sup> The centrality of justification both to the first-generation reformers and to later confessional Protestants is well established and need not be rehearsed at length. According to Oswald Bayer, the well-known aphorism describing justification as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* first appears in Valentin Löscher's *Vollständiger Timotheus Verinus* of 1718, yet the sentiment is fully in keeping with the views of many early reformers. Luther remarks in his comments on Psalm 130 that *stante enim hac doctrina stat Ecclesia, ruente autem ruit ipsa quoque* (WA 40.3:352); Calvin, in like manner, describes justification from 1539 onward as the "main hinge on which religion hangs (*sustinendae religionis cardo*)" (*Inst.* 3.11.1; COS 4:182). Bayer, "Justification: Basis and Boundary of Theology," in *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, ed. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

<sup>70</sup> There was, of course, plenty about the ways in which Protestant thinkers explained the non-imputation of sins that raised the ire of their Catholic opponents; for example, its *Einmahligkeit*—that is, its once-for-all character, its removal from the context of the sacrament of penance, or its conferral of subjective certainty of salvation. But the basic idea of justification as involving the forgiveness of sins was standard medieval fare. Thomas Aquinas, for example, cites the *Glossa ordinaria* in a *sed contra* affirming that *remissio peccatorum est iustificatio* (*ST* Ia-IIae q. 113 a. 1 s.c.). Though Thomas, like most medieval theologians in the West, views justification as a process which makes the sinner righteous, remission of sins is one of the primary effects of this infusion of grace: *sicut dilectio Dei non solum consistit in actu voluntatis divinae, sed etiam importat quendam gratiae effectum, ut*

latter, the affirmation of the *iustitia Christi imputata*, which represented perhaps the most striking theological *novum* in Protestant teaching, particularly when it was claimed that this imputed righteousness was given independently of, and without subsequent reference to, the imparted righteousness which followed from regeneration. The second aspect of this *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* is thus a clear distinction between justification on the one hand and regeneration or sanctification on the other.<sup>71</sup>

Between the years 1559 and 1566, a series of important confessional documents affirmed this model as the consensus view of the Reformed churches: the *Confessio Gallica* (1559), the *Scots Confession* (1560), the *Confessio Belgica* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1566). In 1577, this language of the imputed righteousness of Christ also featured prominently in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*. By the time of its “first codification,” then, Protestant theology had reached a cross-confessional consensus on the language of one of its most central soteriological affirmations, a consensus

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*supra dictum est; ita etiam et hoc quod est Deum non imputare peccatum homini, importat quendam effectum in ipso cuius peccatum non imputatur. Quod enim alicui non imputetur peccatum a Deo, ex divina dilectione procedit (ST Ia-IIae q. 113 a. 2 r.2).*

<sup>71</sup> According to Ritschl, “We shall . . . search in vain to find in any theologian of the middle ages the Reformation idea of justification—the deliberate distinction between justification and regeneration. Instances indeed occur in which, b the word justification is specially meant the Divine sentence of absolution from sins—particularly when certain unambiguous expressions of the apostle Paul are laid hold of; but we must not lay stress upon these instances so as to fancy in them an anticipation of the conscious thought of the Reformers.” Ritschl, *Critical History*, 90; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 215.

which would set the boundaries of orthodox teaching on the doctrine of justification for the next two centuries.<sup>72</sup>

Viewed from the vantage point of this consensus, early evangelical teaching on justification often appears inchoate and at times even contradictory. The first-generation reformers did not clearly and consistently distinguish justification from regeneration or sanctification.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, one of the most heated controversies prior to the first codification centered on Andreas Osiander's rejection of this very distinction, and it is worth noting that this is the only major intra-Protestant doctrinal controversy in which the emerging Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxies were united against a common foe.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, these early figures use a wide range of language to describe their views and often appeal to very different biblical texts to justify them. Terms such as *imputare* and *reputare* gain prominence only gradually

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<sup>72</sup> In dating the “first codification” of Protestant doctrine from the mid-1560's, I am following the historical framework given in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: the Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), I:52-59. By “two centuries,” I mean simply to underscore the longevity of these documents' influence, not to suggest a clear end date for confessional orthodoxy—indeed, these confessional documents are still binding in many Protestant churches today. Muller's study of Reformed Orthodoxy terminates circa 1725, by which point its staying power is clearly on the wane.

<sup>73</sup> Luther is notoriously difficult to interpret on this score. McGrath flatly states that “Luther does not make the distinction between justification and sanctification associated with later Protestantism.” McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 227. There is some evidence to the contrary, however which I consider in later chapters. Even Melancthon, who is often regarded as the source and font of a purely “forensic” approach, does not decisively eliminate the idea of *renovatio* from his definition of justification until the *Römerbriefkommentar* of 1532 (see Chapter 5, below). Cf. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997), 179-80. Zwingli, on the other hand, never develops such a distinction; cf. W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 160.

<sup>74</sup> For a summary of this debate, see David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64-69.

in these discussions, and their use evolves as the discourse becomes more precise.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, it is doubtful that the concept of imputed righteousness ever comes to occupy the dominant place even in Luther's view of justification that it manifestly holds in the language of both the Lutheran and Reformed confessions by the time of the first codification.<sup>76</sup>

One particularly well-known example from the later Luther will have to suffice for the present. In the 1545 preface to his collected Latin writings, Luther describes the moment early in his career, some thirty years earlier, when he first came to his new understanding of the *iustitia Dei* in Paul's letter to the Romans.

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<sup>75</sup> Lowell Green argues that the terms *imputare* and *reputare* have different shades of meaning which color their use in theological discourse. The former, he asserts, is a synthetic term, applying "extrinsic qualities" to its object, in contrast to the latter, which is analytic, ascribing "intrinsic qualities." It is easy to understand, then, how substituting the term *imputare* for the Vulgate's *reputare* in translating the Greek λογίζομαι in passages such as Romans 4:3 could set the stage for the emerging Protestant emphasis on the imputation of alien righteousness in contrast to the Catholic insistence on God's verdict as rendering an analytic judgment on a righteousness already infused. The reality is much more complex, however. Green himself notes a whole raft of late medieval humanist scholars who use the terms interchangeably—e.g., Lorenzo Valla, John Colet, and Faber Stapulensis. The distinction is suggested by Erasmus, but few in the sixteenth century seem to give it much heed—even after the debates over justification and imputation had been raging for several decades. Lowell C. Green, "The Influence of Erasmus upon Melancthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification," *CH* 43, no. 2 (1974): 185-86.

<sup>76</sup> Here I find Green's characterization more helpful: "Anyone who has read extensively in Luther knows that those aspects in which he was willing to accept terminology proposed by Erasmus and Melancthon [terms such as imputare] were a small part of his output on justification. He frequently employed other concepts which he found in the Bible such as justification as the spiritual marriage with Christ, justification as God's creating out of nothing, or as making restitution for God's justice which had been assaulted through sin." Nevertheless, "The work of both humanists affected Luther somewhat as a catalyst: it led him to rethink his earlier position and brought him to his fully reformational position, but in a manner in which he did not take over the position of either man. We have certainly become aware that the traditional notion that Luther provided the ideas and Melancthon the formulations for Luther's thoughts is faulty and unfactual" (Ibid, 198). Although I am not quite sure what a "fully reformational position" might be, I think it clear that Luther moves closer, in the manner described by Green, to what would eventually become the fully confessional position of the Protestant churches. For a different perspective on this question, one that views imputation as central to Luther's thinking from an early stage, see R. Scott Clark, "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*: Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification?" *EQ* 70, no. 3 (2006): 269-310.

Sometime after this, he explains, he read Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* and discovered, much to his delight, that this "new" insight into the righteousness of God could claim the sanction of an ancient and venerable Father of the Church. What follows is highly significant: "Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught."<sup>77</sup> This assessment of Augustine by Luther is important in two respects: on the one hand, it demonstrates that the language of imputation is important enough for Luther—the later Luther, that is—to elicit mild criticism of Augustine, with whom he is clearly in this context attempting to establish continuity. On the other hand, Luther still recognizes Augustine's work as supporting the key insight of his reformation *Durchbruch*.<sup>78</sup> Augustine's view is "imperfect" and "unclear" at points, but for all that Luther still finds it "pleasing."

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<sup>77</sup> "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," LW 34:337. WA 54:186.18-20: *Et quamquam imperfect hoc adhuc sit dictum, ac de imputatione non clare omnia explicit, placuit tamen iustitiam Dei doceri, qua nos iustificemur.*

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bernhard Lohse, "Zum Wittenberger Augustinismus: Augustins Schrift *De spiritu et littera* in der Auslegung bei Staupitz, Luther und Karlstadt," in *Augustine, the Harvest, and Theology (1300-1650): Essays Dedicated to Heiko Augustinus Oberman*, ed. Kenneth Hagen (Leiden: Brill, 1990). Lohse detects considerable differences in how Augustine is understood among three of the most important early Wittenberg theologians, Staupitz, Luther, and Karlstadt. Comparing Luther to Staupitz, Lohse concludes that "auf der einen Seite ist er an etlichen Stellen sehr sorgfältig im Zitieren und Auslegen darum bemüht, Augustins Gedankengang gerecht zu werden; auf der anderen Seite hat er sich aber vor allem mit seinen Aussagen zur Iustitia Dei, zur Rechtfertigung, aber auch zu der Unterscheidung zwischen *lex operum* und *lex fidei* teilweise erheblich von Augustins Leitgedanken entfernt" (p. 100). I shall examine Luther's account of his "breakthrough" in some detail in Chapter 4, below, but the salient point for our present purposes is that Luther clearly regards Augustine as a forerunner.

By the time of Protestant theology's first codification, it is likely that many would have regarded the teaching of the first-generation reformers on this matter in a similar light: imperfect and unclear, but pleasing. The issue is thrown into clearest relief when we compare the statements on justification given in the major Lutheran and Reformed confessions earlier and later in the period. Comparing the confessional statements of the emerging Protestant churches seems to me a far better route to establishing the extent of any supposed *reformatische* or *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*, precisely because these documents are consensus texts—that is, they do not simply represent the personal opinions of a handful of individual authors. Rather, these symbols won the assent, between them, of virtually all of those reformers and theologians whose opinions ought to count in determining what the extent of “reformational” teaching might be.<sup>79</sup> For our purposes here, I will be dividing these statements into two distinct groups, corresponding to two waves of creative confessional activity (see Fig. 1). The first took place fairly early on in the Reformation, while the Lutheran movement was still establishing its theological identity in the Empire and the urban reformation was in full swing among the south German and the Swiss. The second came concurrent with the early stages of confessionalization in the aftermath of the Peace of Augsburg. What follows is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the theology of these confessions; it simply

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<sup>79</sup> S. Gerbrandy, “Wat doen wij met de Heidelbergse Catechismus,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 37, no. 4 (1983): 290-303.

represents a sampling of the most important confessional texts which reflect the continuing development of the Protestant consensus on the doctrine of justification.

	Lutheran	Reformed
First Wave: 1528-37	<i>Small Catechism</i> (1529) <i>Large Catechism</i> (1529) <i>Augsburg Confession</i> (1530) <i>Smalcald Articles</i> (1537)	<i>Ten Theses of Bern</i> (1528) <i>Tetrapolitan Confession</i> (1530) <i>First Confession of Basel</i> (1534) <i>First Helvetic Confession</i> (1536) <i>Lausanne Articles</i> (1536) <i>The Ten Articles</i> (1536) <i>The Geneva Confession</i> (1536)
Second Wave: 1559-1577	<i>Formula of Concord</i> (1577)	<i>French Confession</i> (1559/71) <i>Scots Confession</i> (1560) <i>Belgic Confession</i> (1561) <i>Heidelberg Catechism</i> (1563) <i>Second Helvetic Confession</i> (1566)

Figure 1, Two Waves: Lutheran and Reformed Confessional Statements

### I.3.1 Justification in the Lutheran Confessions

Let us take the *Confessio Augustana* (CA) as a point of departure for the Lutheran confession.<sup>80</sup> In 1530, Melanchthon and his colleagues were content to summarize their teaching on justification with a very brief statement which sticks closely to the syntax of the biblical text:

Likewise, [the Lutheran pastors] teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made

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<sup>80</sup> The *Confessio Augustana* was composed in the context of ongoing legal proceedings against the Protestant princes in the Holy Roman Empire, and this delicate political situation is no doubt reflected in the cautious tone struck by Melanchthon and his colleagues in the document they submitted to the emperor. While space will not allow engagement with other texts from the “first wave” of Lutheran confessional activity, the observations drawn here are by no means incompatible with them. The Small and Large Catechisms do not discuss the article of justification explicitly, and the *Smalcald Articles*, though less conciliatory in tone, describe justification in terms much closer to the CA than the language of the “second wave” confessions.



satisfaction for our sins. God reckons (*imputat*) this faith as righteousness (Rom 3 and 4).<sup>81</sup>

Aside from its brevity, what most impresses about this article in relation to later formulations is the way in which the mode of justification is described in language closely echoing the biblical language: in both the CA and in Gen 15:6 (and its NT quotations in Rom 4:3, 22, Gal 3:6, Js 2:23), faith is the thing being “reckoned,” and *iustitia* is an indirect object in a prepositional phrase—*ad iustitiam/pro iustitia*. Two observations are in order. First, as has often been noted, this article is capable of sustaining a wide range of interpretations, from the purely forensic to a view of justification as involving both the acceptance and the transformation of the sinner.<sup>82</sup> The language is clearly forensic, but because the key formulation simply repeats the biblical syntax, no explicit foreclosure is made on a traditional Augustinian reading of justification as a transformative process concurrent with *acceptatio Divina*.

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<sup>81</sup> BC, 38-41. *Item docent, quod homines non possint iustificari coram Deo propriis viribus, meritis aut operibus, sed gratis iustificentur propter Christum per fidem, cum credunt se in gratiam recipi et peccata remitti propter Christum, qui sua morte pro nostris peccatis satisfecit. Hanc fidem imputat Deo pro iustitia coram ipso, Rom. 3 et 4 (BSLK, 56).* The German text reads: *Weiter wird gelehrt, daß Vergebung der Sunde und Gerechtigkeit vor Gott nicht erlangen mogen durch unser Verdienst, Werk und Genugtun, sonder daß wir Vergebung der Sunde bekommen und vor Gott gerecht werden aus Gnaden umb Christus willen durch den Glauben, so wie wir glauben, dass Christus fur uns gelitten habe und daß uns umb seinen willen die Sunde vergeben, Gerechtigkeit und ewiges Leben geschenkt wird. Dann diesen Glauben will Gott fur Gerechtigkeit vor ihme halten und zurechnen, wie Sant Paul sagt zun Romern am 3. und 4 (BSLK, 57).*

<sup>82</sup> Although noting that Article IV was rejected by the Catholic theologians charged by Charles V with drafting the *Confutatio* at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Robert Kress observes that the text “does not teach a merely external and forensic justification, as if nothing happened in the justified human being.” Robert Kress, “The Roman Catholic Reception of the Augsburg Confession,” *SCJ* 11, no. 3 (1980): 119.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, what CA Art. IV describes is a one-stage model of justification: reception into grace results in the forgiveness of sins, and this forgiveness of sins is tantamount to an imputation of righteousness.<sup>83</sup> This judgment takes place “on account of Christ” (*propter Christum*), but there is no suggestion of a “transfer” of righteousness or of merit from Christ to the believer—indeed, the concept of merit is conspicuously absent here.<sup>84</sup> This is not to suggest that the reformers equate justification with forgiveness of sins in a flat, one-dimensional way. In other contexts, both Luther and Melanchthon tend to describe salvation in broader terms, encompassing both the remission of sins and the believer’s reception of Christ’s righteousness. For example, in his 1528 treatise *Vom Abendmal Christi*, Luther describes salvation in terms reminiscent of the later confessional position, when he writes that Christ “gave himself and bestowed all his works, sufferings, wisdom, and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father.”<sup>85</sup> So

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<sup>83</sup> This interpretation is confirmed, I believe, by a close reading of Melanchthon’s *Apologia of the Augsburg Confession*, where justification is consistently understood in terms of Paul’s allusion to Psalm 32:1, which Melanchthon cites four times. Typical is the following: “To obtain forgiveness of sins is to be justified according to [Ps. 32:1]: “Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven” (*BC*, 133.76). Yet even in this forensic context, a transformational aspect is not excluded: “We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by faith in Christ, not through love, nor on account of love or works, although love follows faith. Therefore we are justified by faith alone, justification being understood as the making of a righteous person out of an unrighteous one or as a regeneration.”

<sup>84</sup> If it be objected that *propter Christum* is really the same thing as the imputation of the *iustitia Christi*, it should be pointed out that the Council of Trent, in regarding justification as resting on the meritorious cause of Christ’s righteousness, affirmed the former and denied the latter; *Sessio Sexta*. . . *decretum de iustificatione*, Ch. 7; Schaff, II:95.

<sup>85</sup> *Darumb hat darnach der son sich selbs auch uns gegeben, alle sein werck, leiden, weisheit und gerechtikeit geschenckt und uns dem Vater versunet, damit wir widder lebendig und gerecht, auch den Vater mit seinen gaben erkennen und haben moechten.* LW 37:366; WA 26:505–506. The inclusion of such terms as suffering and wisdom in this list of Christ’s benefits makes it unlikely, however, that what Luther has in view here is imputation, narrowly construed.

also, Melancthon occasionally uses language in his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* which seems at times to anticipate the later confessional formulations.<sup>86</sup> This is not to say that justification has a narrower sense for the earlier reformers than it does for the later confessional theologians—in fact, their language can be quite expansive, particularly when discussing the matter under the heading of other *loci*. The salient point, however, is that notions of positive imputation remain peripheral in theological discourse and wholly absent from confessional formulations. When forced to describe succinctly what it is that justification accomplishes, the early texts consistently focus on the idea of non-imputation of sin. This may simply reflect an assumption that one who has been forgiven is *ipso facto* righteous in the sight of

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<sup>86</sup> In only two places in the *Apology* is there any hint of the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. Toward the end of Art. IV on justification, in discussing various proof-texts alleged against the Protestant position by the writers of the *Confutatio*, Melancthon argues that the righteousness which "covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8) is a righteousness of the law. He contrasts this hypothetical righteousness with that of the Gospel, "because the latter promises us reconciliation and righteousness when we believe that on account of Christ as the propitiator, the Father is gracious to us, and that the merits of Christ are bestowed upon us (*donentur nobis merita Christi*)" (Art. IV.238; *BC* 156; *BSLK* 206). Likewise, in Art. XXI, Melancthon returns to the idea of justification in a dispute over the invocation of saints. Arguing that the Catholics "actually make the saints out to be not simply intercessors but propitiators," Melancthon denies them this function because they do not meet the two conditions essential to qualify as a propitiator. The first need not concern us here; the second, however, involves a "transfer" of righteousness in order to make atonement for sins:

The second qualification for a propitiator is this: his merits must be authorized to make satisfaction for others who are given these merits by divine reckoning in order that through them, just as though they were their own merits, they may be reckoned righteous. It is as when a person pays a debt for friends, the debtors are freed by the merit of the other, as though it were by their own. Thus, Christ's merits are given (*donantur*) to us so that we might be reckoned (*reputemur*) righteous by our trust in the merits of Christ when we believe in him, as though we had merits of our own (Art. XXI.19; *BC* 240; *BSLK* 320).

It is difficult to know how much weight to put on these statements. The latter comes in the context of discussions ancillary to justification, and neither can be regarded as representing his ordinary way of summarizing the matter. Melancthon varies his rhetoric considerably in this treatise, but the description he returns to time and again is justification as the forgiveness of sins *propter Christum*. Still, his language is very close at times in the *Apology* to what would become the later confessional formula, and it demonstrates at the least that the language of the later formulas is not alien to his way of thinking.

God, as the language of Ps 32:2/Rom 4:8 might seem to imply: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” Or it may be that forgiveness is viewed as standing in synecdoche for all the benefits which justification conveys. Whatever the precise relationship, remission of sin and imputation of righteousness are viewed as parallel terms, as the following definition of justification from Melancthon’s 1556 *Enarratio* on Romans seems to suggest:

Justification is the imputation of righteousness, by which God in his mercy receives (*recipit*) us and brings us to life (*vivificat*). Therefore we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.

Justification is the remission of sins, by which God receives (*recipit*) us and brings us to life (*vivificat*) on account of the mediator, and through him. Therefore we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.<sup>87</sup>

Compare this early Lutheran formulation with Article III of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord (FC):

Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own, in the past, at present, or in the future, that he gives us and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ’s obedience and that, because of this righteousness, we are accepted by God into grace and regarded as righteousness.<sup>88</sup>

This is only one affirmation in a much larger set of theses and antitheses, a set which not only continues the Lutheran polemic against Catholics views of salvation but also addresses itself to a number of intra-Lutheran debates as well.<sup>89</sup> The FC

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<sup>87</sup> CR 15:888.

<sup>88</sup> BC, 495.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the polemical background this text, see Robert Kolb, “Human Performance and the Righteousness of Faith: Martin Chemnitz’s Anti-Roman Polemic in Formula of Concord III,” in *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, ed. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 125-39.

statement on justification contrasts with CA not only in size, but also in substance; this in two important respects. First, where CA preserves the syntax of the foundational biblical text, Gen 15:6, FC does not: now the “righteousness of Christ’s obedience” is the thing being reckoned, not faith, and “we” are the recipients of something clearly external. Thus, the *iustitia* by which we are saved has been promoted from an indirect to a direct object. Second, this imputation of Christ’s righteousness appears as an aspect conceptually distinct from forgiveness of sins. I am not suggesting that these are *chronologically* distinct stages or that they are ever thought of as happening independently from one another, simply that later descriptions of justification, such as we see here in FC, tend consistently to rely on just this sort of symmetric linguistic construction in affirming both a non-imputation of sin and the positive imputation of Christ’s righteousness.<sup>90</sup> These observations may seem like overly-subtle points of grammatical nit-picking, but I would suggest that this departure from biblical syntax marks an important point of transition in the development of the doctrine. Hurling Bible verses at one another simply was not getting the job done. The shift to a two-stage model reflects the realization that the debate was fundamentally an argument over the meaning of the biblical terms

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<sup>90</sup> That is not to say that the earlier manner of speaking of justification as primarily forgiveness of sins is entirely eclipsed: the fourth affirmative thesis, for example, states that “according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word ‘to justify’ in this article means ‘to absolve,’ that is, ‘to pronounce free from sin’” (*BC*, 495). This statement is not balanced by an affirmation of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Yet in other places, such as the opening statement of the third Article of the FC’s Solid Declaration, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is affirmed with no immediate reference to non-imputation of sins (*BC*, 562). In general, however the unmistakable thrust of the FC’s treatment of justification involves both imputation and non-imputation viewed as complementary aspects of the same salvific transaction.

themselves, and this realization demanded a model which could explain, rather than simply restate, the key passages to which both sides appealed.

### **1.3.2 Justification in the Reformed Confessions**

Nor is this only the case in the Lutheran tradition. A similar comparison of early and late confessions in the Reformed tradition demonstrates a similar pattern of movement from the vague restatements of biblical language to precise formulations which clarified that language. Zwingli's *Sixty-Seven Articles*, possibly the first formalized statement of faith in what would become the Reformed tradition, makes no mention whatever of justification.<sup>91</sup> In the following decade, however, a whole series of confessional statements poured from the pens of south-German and Swiss reformers. In 1528, Berthold Haller and Francis Kolb issued *Ten Theses* on behalf of canton Bern, a statement which met with the warm approval of Zwingli and the Zürich reformers. The text on salvation reads:

Christ is our only wisdom, righteousness, redemption, and payment for the sins of the whole world. Hence it is a denial of Christ when we acknowledge another merit for salvation and satisfaction for sin.<sup>92</sup>

The first Reformed confessional statement to make explicit use of the term justification is the *Confessio Tetrapolitana* of 1530:

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<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that Zwingli has nothing whatever to say on the matter of salvation in these theses; it is simply to say that the language of justification is not integral to his concerns at this point. The closest he gets, perhaps, to what would become the standard "Protestant" usage comes in Art. 22, *de bona opera*: "That Christ is our righteousness, from which we conclude that our works are good in so far as they are of Christ; in so far as they are works they are neither righteous nor good." *CCFCT* 2:210. This, obviously, is a far cry from the *iustitia Christi imputata* of confessional orthodoxy.

<sup>92</sup> Art. 3, *CCFCT* 2:217.

First, therefore, since for some years we were taught that man's own works are necessary for his justification, our preachers have taught that this whole justification is to be ascribed to the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ, and to be received by faith alone.<sup>93</sup>

This text, a joint effort by Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, makes no mention of imputation—either negative or positive—and the proof-texts assembled for the doctrine do not even reference the NT usage of Gen 15:6 so crucial for the later Protestant confessions. The characteristic Protestant insistence on *sola fide* is clearly on display, but its use here nicely illustrates the point made earlier that these *sola*-terms are primarily apophatic—that is, they are aimed at denying the necessity of works or merit for justification. Likewise with the *First Confession of Basel* (1534), based on a prior text by Johannes Oecolampadius and edited by his successor, Oswald Myconius:

Concerning Faith and Works. We confess that there is forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ the crucified. Although this faith is continually exercised, signalized, and thus confirmed by works of love, yet do we not ascribe to works, which are the fruits of faith, the righteousness and satisfaction for our sins. On the contrary, we ascribe it solely to a genuine trust and faith in the shed blood of the Lamb of God. For we freely confess that all things are granted to us in Christ, who is our righteousness, holiness, redemption, the way, the truth, the wisdom, and the life.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ch. 3, CCFCT 2:222. *Primum igitur cum iam aliquot annis, ad iustificationem hominis, requiri propria eius opera traditum sit, nostri hanc totam divinae benevolentiae, Christique merito acceptam referendam, solaque fide percipi docuerunt.* CCER 746.

<sup>94</sup> Art. 9, CCFCT 2:277. *Wir bekennend nachlassung der sünden, durch den glouben in Jesum Christum den Crützgeten. Und wiewol diser gloub sich one underlaß durch die wreck der liebe übt, harfür thut, und also bewert würdet, yedochgebend wir die gerechtifkeyt und gnugthugung für unsere sünd, nit den werken, so des gloubens frücht, sonder allein dem waren vertruwen und glouben in das vergossen blut des lämblin Gottes.* BSRK 98. Interestingly, the Latin translation of this text printed in 1561 omits the contested “allein” (*sola*). *Confitemur Remissionem peccatorum per Fidem in IESUM CHRISTUM crucifixum. Et quamvis haec Fides per Opera charitatis, se sine intermissione exercet, exerit, atque ita probatur: attamen iustitiam et satisfactionem pro peccatis nostris, non tribuimus Operibus, quae Fidei fructus sunt; sed tantum verae fiduciae et fidei, in effusum sanguine AGNI DEI.* CCER 98-99.

The *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1536), the work of a committee of evangelical luminaries, including Heinrich Bullinger, Leo Jud, Kaspar Megander, Simon Grynaeus, Myconius, Bucer, and Capito, explains “How Christ’s grace and merit are communicated to us” in Article 12 as follows:

We do not obtain such sublime and great benefits of God’s grace and the true sanctification of God’s Spirit through our merits or powers but through faith which is a pure gift of God. This faith is a sure, firm, and solid foundation for and a laying hold of all those things for which one hopes from God, and from which love and subsequently all virtues and the fruits of good works are brought forth. . . . Such a faith is the true and proper service with which a man is pleasing to God.<sup>95</sup>

Nowhere in any of these statements is a distinction even hinted at between justification and regeneration/sanctification. Nor is there any mention of imputation, either in the early-Lutheran sense (*pace* CA IV) of *fides imputata pro iustitiam* or in the later orthodox sense of *iustitia Christi imputata*. This becomes all the more obvious when we compare these early formulations with the second wave of Reformed confessional texts, beginning in 1559.

The *Confessio Gallica*, written by Calvin in cooperation with Théodore de Bèze and Pierre Viret, begins its definition of justification in Art. 18 in fine Melancthonian form: “We believe that all our justification rests upon the remission of our sins, in which also is our only blessedness, as the Psalmist says” (Ps. 32:1). Here a key Lutheran proof-text makes its way into the Reformed confessional

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<sup>95</sup> CCFCT 2:285. *Solich hohe und grosse gütthaten göttlicher gnadenn und die ware heyligmachung des geysts gottes Empfahen wir nit us unsren verdiensten und krefften, sonder durch den glouben, der ein lutere gab und schencke gottes jst. . . . Dieser gloub . . . jst der recht und war diennst, mit dem man gott gefällt.* BSRK 104.



arsenal. The statement then draws a conclusion regarding the imputation of Christ's merit which is not found anywhere in the Lutheran confessional texts in use at the time: "We therefore reject all other means of justification before God, and without claiming any virtue or merit, we rest simply in the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us as much to blot out all our sins as to make us find grace and favor in the sight of God."<sup>96</sup> This is not quite a two-stage model, in that the non-imputation of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are not distinguished; rather, the *iustitia Christi* functions here in two distinct ways, to "blot out all our sins" and to "make us find grace and favor in the sight of God." And if there is any remaining doubt that this imputation excludes any notion of merit communicated through regeneration or sanctification, it is removed in Art. 22: "Moreover, although God works in us for our salvation, and renews our hearts, determining us to that which is good, yet we confess that the good works which we do proceed from his Spirit, and can not be accounted to us for justification. . . ."<sup>97</sup>

The *Scots Confession*, written the following year by John Knox and five colleagues, bears the heavy impress of the former's time spent with Calvin.<sup>98</sup> Yet

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<sup>96</sup> CCFCT 2:380. *Nous croyons que toute nostre iustice est fondee en la remission do nos pechez, comme aussi c'est nostre seule felicité, comme dit David. Parquoy nous reiettons tous autres moyens de nous pouvoir iustifier devant Dieu, et sans presumer de nulles vertus ne merites, nous nous tenons simplement a l'obeissance de Iesus Christ, laquelle nous est allouee, tant pour couvrir toutes nos fautes, que pour nous faire trouver grace et faveur devant Dieu. BSRK 226.*

<sup>97</sup> CCFCT 2:381. *Au reste combine que Dieu pour accomplir nostre salut nous regenere, nous reformant abien fair: toutesfois nous confessons que les bonnes oeuvres que nous faisons par la conduit de son Esprit ne viennent point en conte pour nous iustifier. . . . BSRK 227.*

<sup>98</sup> Ian Hazlett, "The Scots Confession 1560: Context, Complexion and Critique," *ARG* 78 (1987): 287-320; Iain R. Torrance, "Patrick Hamilton and John Knox: A Study in the Doctrine of Justification

the key formulation here on justification (in Art. 15) does not make both of the distinctions developed so clearly in the *French Confession*: “For God the Father beholding us, in the body of his Sonne *Christ Jesus*, acceptis our imperfite obedience, as it were perfite, and covers our warks, quhilk ar defyled with mony spots, with the justice of his Sonne.”<sup>99</sup> Here some sort of imputation or reckoning is plainly in view (even though the term is not actually used), yet it is not clear whether this transaction is based on an acceptance of the sinner’s works or of the sinner’s person. Both ideas came to find a place in Reformed theology, but acceptance of works is typically based on the prior acceptance of the person.<sup>100</sup>

The *Confessio Belgica* (1561), like the *French Confession*, begins its discussion of justification in Art. 23 with reference to Psalm 33 and Romans 4: “We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is contained, as David and Paul teach us when they declare that man blessed to whom God grants righteousness apart from works.”<sup>101</sup> No explicit mention is made of the *iustitia Christi imputata*; rather,

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by Faith,” *ARG* 65 (1974): 171-84; W. Stanford Reid, “French Influence on the First Scots Confession and Book of Discipline,” *WTJ* 35, no. 1 (1972): 1-14.

<sup>99</sup> *The Scots Confession, 1560*, ed., G. G. Henderson (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1960), 42.

<sup>100</sup> As in q. 121 of the *Geneva Catechism* (1536): “*M. But after God has once received us, are the works which we do by his grace, not pleasing to him? C. Yes they are, in that he generously accepts them, not however in virtue of their own worthiness.*” *CCFCT* 2:334.

<sup>101</sup> *CCFCT* 2:416. *Credimus nostram beatitudinem sitam esse, in peccatorum nostrorum, propter Jesum Christum, remissione, atque in ea iustitiam nostram coram Deo contineri, ut David et Paulus docent, pronunciantes, Beatum hominem, cui Deus iustitiam absque operibus imputat.* *BSRK* 241. For a recent introduction, see Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007).

*iustitia coram Deo* is “contained” (*contineri*) in the forgiveness of sins. The emerging confessional position is hinted at in the previous article, however, when it is denied that faith itself (*ipsam fidem*) justifies; rather, faith is the instrument by which we grasp Christ, who is our righteousness. The idea that Christ himself is our righteousness, expressed in the language of 1 Cor 1:30, *Christus, iustitia nostra*, becomes a favorite way of summarizing justification for many of the reformers and confessional theologians. The expression is biblical, however, and therefore not new; the challenge for Protestant theologians was to describe in a convincing manner *how*, exactly, Christ is our righteousness and to do so in a way which set their teaching apart from that of their Catholic opponents.<sup>102</sup> This was done by appealing to what amounts to a Protestant version of the treasury of merits: “Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available [*imputans*] to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits.”<sup>103</sup> With the further

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<sup>102</sup> Nineteenth-century theologians intent on finding anticipations of Luther’s mature thought often fastened on biblical expressions such as these in the writings of late medieval theologians. Carl Ullmann, for example, argues on the basis of this language that John of Wesel was one such “forerunner.” Carl Ullmann, *Reformatoren vor der Reformation, vornehmlich in Deutschland und den Niederlanden* (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1866), 325-25. Ritschl, however, points out that this Pauline language is perfectly capable of sustaining a Catholic reading, drily noting that “in the time of the Reformation . . . men had occasion to learn that contradictory senses could be attached by the conflicting parties to words that had the same sound.” *Critical History*, 91, 114. The Reformation, I suspect, was not the first time men had such occasion.

<sup>103</sup> CCFCT 2:416. *Jesus Christus nobis imputans omnia sua merita, et tam multa sancta opera quae praestitit pro nobis ac nostro loco, est nostra iustitia. Fides autem est instrumentum, quo nos cum illo in communion omnium bonorum eius retinemur. . . . BSRK 241.* Later in the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, Reformed theologians would give this concept even more definite shape in distinguishing between the “active” and “passive obedience” of Christ. Cf. Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

differentiation between justification and sanctification in Art. 24, all of the pieces of the confessional doctrine are clearly in place, if not succinctly stated.

The two documents which bear clearest testimony to the emergence of a *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* are the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1562) and the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). The *Second Helvetic Confession*, initially written as a personal statement of faith by Heinrich Bullinger beginning in 1561 and presented to the Imperial Assembly in 1566, is regarded by many as the most comprehensive and influential Reformed confession of the sixteenth century.<sup>104</sup> The *Second Helvetic*, interestingly, departs from the common practice of most of the previous Protestant confessions in not centering the discussion of justification on Psalm 32:2/Rom 4:8: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” This is because, for Bullinger, justification is quite clearly more than simply forgiveness of sins; it involves a positive aspect which is consistently set parallel to forgiveness: “to justify means to remit sins, to absolve from guilt and punishment, to receive into favor, and to pronounce a man just.”<sup>105</sup> As if to underscore the dual nature of this action, Bullinger devotes an entire paragraph to defining the nature of this *imputativa iustitia*:

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<sup>104</sup> So Timothy George, who points out the acceptance of this confession in the Swiss cantons and the Palatinate, as well as in the Reformed churches of France, Hungary, Poland, and Scotland in *OER*, s.v. “Helvetic Confessions.” The date of 1562 given in the text above is the date given in the critical edition by Müller (*BSRK* 170), and presumably represents the year when the text was completed.

<sup>105</sup> Art. 15.1, in *CCFCT* 2:486. *Iustificare significat in Apostolo in disputatione de Iustificatione, peccata remittere, a culpa et poena absolvere, in gratiam recipere, et iustum proniciare.* *BSRK* 191.

For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ's righteousness to us as our own, so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us.<sup>106</sup>

This two-fold formula—*non imputans nobis peccata, sed imputans nobis iustitiam [Christi]*—represents one of the key formulations for what I am here describing as the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*.<sup>107</sup> It appears with equal clarity in the *Heidelberg Catechism* the following year:

Question 56. What do you believe concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?  
That, for the sake of Christ's reconciling work, God will no more remember my sins or the sinfulness with which I have to struggle all my life long; but that he graciously imparts to me the righteousness of Christ so that I may never come into condemnation.

Question 60. How are you righteous before God?  
Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having

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<sup>106</sup> Art. 15.3, in *CCFCT* 2:486-87. *Etenim Christus peccata mundi in se recepit et sustulit, diviniaque iustitiae satisfecit. Deus ergo propter solum Christum pasum et resuscitatum propitius est peccatis nostris, nec illa nobis imputata, imputat autem iustitiam Christi pro nostra: ita ut iam simus non solum mundati a peccatis et purgati, vel sancti, sed etiam donati iustitia Christi, adeoque absoluti a peccatis, morte vel condemnatione, iusti denique ac haeredes vitae aeternae. Proprie ergo loquendo, Deus solus nos iustificat, et duntaxat propter Christum iustificat, non imputans nobis peccata, sed imputans eius nobis iustitiam.* BSRK 192.

<sup>107</sup> According to Ernst Koch: “Die imputatio des Werkes Christi bedeutet gleichzeitig non-imputatio der peccata, positiv gesehen imputatio der iustitia Christi. Hier ist einer der Schlüsselpunkte für die Rechtfertigungslehre der Confessio erreicht.” Ernst Koch, “Die Heilslehre der Confessio helvetica posterior,” in *Glauben und Bekennen: vierhundert Jahre Confessio helvetica posterior*, ed. Joachim Staedtke (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1966), 284.

fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.<sup>108</sup>

#### **I.4 The Confessional Model and Biblical Exegesis: The Plan of the Present Work**

The foregoing survey of Protestant confessional statements on justification reveals two basic trends. First, the later confessions depart from the earlier in their very precise and consistent use of the concept of *imputatio* as a two-fold transaction involving *both* the forgiveness of sins *and* the transfer of Christ's merit. This stands in contrast to the early Reformed confessions, which make no use at all of the language of imputation, and to the Lutheran *Confessio Augustana*, which uses the term in a markedly different way. Second, whereas the earlier confessions are clear to affirm that this transaction takes place without reference to good works—that is, *sola fide*—the later confessions push this distinction still further to separate justification from both regeneration and sanctification.

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<sup>108</sup> CCFCT 2:439-40.

*56. Frag. Was glaubstu von vergebung der sünden? Antwort. Daß Gott umb der gnügthuung Christi willen, aller meiner sünden, auch der sündlichen art, mit der ich mein lebenlang zustreiten habe, nimmermehr gedencken wil: sonder mir die gerechtigkeit Christi außgnaden schencket, daß ich ins gericht nimmermehr soll kommen.*

*60. Frag. Wie bistu gerecht für Gott? Antwort. Allein durch waren glauben in Jesum Christum, Also: daß ob mich schon mein gewissen anklagt, daß ich wider alle gebot Gottes schwerlich gesündigt, und derselben keines nie gehalten hab, auch noch jmmerdar zu allem bösen geneigt bin: doch Gott on alle mein verdienst, auß lauter gnaden, mir die vollkommene gnügthüung, gerechtigkeit unnd heiligkeyt Christi schencket und zurechnet, als hette ich nie keine sünd begangen noch gehabt, und selbst allen den gehorsam volbracht, den Christus für mich hat geleistet, wenn ich allein solche wolthat mit glaubigem hertzen anneme. BSRK 697-98.*

For historical background on the *Heidelberg Catechism*, see Lyle D. Bierma, ed., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005).

These developments raise important questions concerning the nature of the Protestant Gospel, questions which will occupy us in detail for the rest of this study: when, precisely, did this consensus emerge? What were its competitors within the Protestant world, and why did this particular model emerge victorious over the alternatives? Why were Lutheran and Reformed theologians in such close agreement on this one issue, when they tended to define themselves in opposition to one another on so many others? Obviously, these questions raise issues which cannot be fully explored in a single monograph. A complete answer to these questions would have to reexamine not only the genesis of Luther's "Reformation breakthrough" in the 1510's, but also trace the reception and development of these ideas in the peak years of the urban reformation in the 1520's and 1530's. It would require detailed engagement with the colloquies of the 1540's and the reception of the Catholic declarations on the doctrine of justification coming from the Council of Trent. It would require a reexamination of the *Osianderstreit*, with particular attention to the ways in which Lutheran and Reformed reaction to internal dissent shaped the emerging consensus. And finally, it would require detailed, contextual analysis of each of the Protestant confessional symbols as they were written and received throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. Needless to say, such a comprehensive account is far beyond the scope of the present work.

In this dissertation, my aim is to explore in detail one crucial stage in the development of the Protestant *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*: the emergence of the first half of the model in the exegetical debates of the 1520's and 1530's. During

these critical early years of the Reformation, Luther's protest against scholastic theology and the penitential orthopraxy of the late medieval church combined with a new set of textual tools and literary perspectives arising from Renaissance humanism to trigger a comprehensive reevaluation of the Pauline notion of justification by faith. Almost all of the major reformers—and many of their most vocal opponents—wrote substantial commentaries on the Pauline epistles, and no text was more closely scrutinized than the St. Paul's epistle to the Romans. The sixteenth century was a golden age for Pauline interpretation—one scholar has recently documented over seventy commentaries written on Romans in this century alone.<sup>109</sup> Many of these works simply repackaged and repeat the same exegetical commonplaces which had been in circulation for centuries, but many develop fresh new readings of the Pauline text based on state-of-the-art linguistic techniques and address these findings to the burning issues which were dividing the church. In time, some of these readings became enshrined as new orthodoxies—and in turn, were dutifully repackaged and repeated by subsequent transmitters.

There are several advantages to examining the emergence of the confessional doctrine of justification through the lens of the history of biblical interpretation. For one thing, Protestant theologians claimed that their teaching about salvation was based on their “new perspective on Paul”—which was really just a rediscovery of the text's original meaning. In their rejection of medieval scholasticism and the

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<sup>109</sup> David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 65.



church practices with which it was intertwined, the reformers unfailingly claimed to derive their teaching from the “pure milk of the word.” It thus makes sense to pay careful attention to how they interpreted that word and what led them to read it so very differently from at least a millenium’s worth of prior exegetical tradition. These seemingly arcane philological and exegetical debates were inextricably tied up during this period with practical and existential concerns of the first order, so it will ultimately be impossible to fully explain *why* particular figures read these texts the way they did, but in thinking their thoughts after them we can at least understand more fully what was at stake in these controversies and how specific reading strategies contributed not only to the emergence of a confessional theological consensus, but also to a confessional reading of the Bible.

Beyond this, however, there is a very practical scholarly reason for examining the emergence of the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* through the lens of the history of biblical interpretation. Many of these figures lived and taught in vastly different intellectual, social, political, and religious contexts, but one feature of their respective thought-worlds was continuous: both read, taught, reflected upon, and prayed through the same sacred texts. By focusing on particular biblical texts we are able to isolate a common point of departure for theological reflection. Furthermore, much of the debate surrounding the doctrine of justification—especially in the early stages of the Reformation—was conducted on an *ad hoc*, occasional basis. Specific practices and abuses were attacked “with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other,” and many of the key texts in this debate address

contextually-specific issues across a wide range of genres: sermons, theses, academic disputations, treatises, *Flugschriften*, etc. But always the debate centered around the Bible. By focusing specifically on exegetical writings, we are thus able to control for some of the interpretive variables arising from questions of genre, purpose, audience, and historical context.

The decision to focus on the 1520's and 1530's arises from two considerations. First, the decade immediately following Luther's break with Rome saw the initial movement of reforming agendas into the sphere of biblical interpretation, and it is important to note the wide range of approaches and emphases these early evangelical writers adopt in approaching the text. But it is during the period from 1532-1540 that many of the most innovative and influential commentaries on Romans emerge in the early Protestant tradition: Melancthon (1532/40), Bullinger (1533), Bucer (1536), and Calvin (1540) are the four major works. Each of these commentaries has received varying degrees of scholarly attention in the last generation, but no one to date has yet given a comprehensive account of their respective contributions to the emergence of the Protestant doctrine of justification.<sup>110</sup> This is a crucial task, because virtually all subsequent debate is conducted with reference to the exegetical positions staked out during this decade between the drafting of the Augsburg Confession and the first Colloquy of

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<sup>110</sup> Important contributions include T. H. L. Parker, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans, 1532-1542* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986). See also Steinmetz, "Calvin and Abraham: The Interpretation of Romans 4 in the Sixteenth Century," *CH* 57 (1988):443-55; reprinted in *Calvin in Context*, 64-78.

Regensburg. Even the early contributions of Luther on this matter are to some degree overshadowed by the Romans commentaries of the 1530's. One of the striking features of the conversation that develops during this period is the degree to which Melancthon's commentary of 1532 becomes a new point of departure: Bucer and Calvin, for example, are in constant dialogue with Melancthon, but neither mentions Luther even once. The decade ends with a failed attempt at rapprochement with the Catholics at Regensburg, an event which, to some extent, moves the debate from the realm of exegesis to the realm of ecclesiastical and imperial statesmanship.

Second, it is during this decade when important elements of the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* first emerge in Protestant theology. As we have already noted, Melancthon's 1532 commentary on Romans marks a decisive shift to a purely forensic conception of justification, clearly distinguished from *renovatio* or *regeneratio*. So also, the two-stage model of justification as imputation of Christ's righteousness and non-imputation of sin first appears in Calvin's 1536 *Institutio*.<sup>111</sup> All the pieces of the puzzle are on the table by the end of this decade,

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<sup>111</sup> Here the two-fold formula is unmistakable: "By Christ's righteousness then are we made righteous and become fulfillers of the law. This righteousness we put on as our own, and surely God accepts it as ours, reckoning us holy, pure, and innocent. . . . Christ's righteousness, which alone can bear the sight of God because it alone is perfect, must appear in court on our behalf, and stand surety for us in judgment. Received from God, this righteousness is brought to us and imputed to us, just as if it were ours." *Hanc enim ut nostrum induimus, et sane pro nostra nobis a Deo accepta fertur, ut pro sanctis, puris et innocentibus nos habeat. . . . verum iustiam Christi, quae una ut perfecta est, ita sola Dei conspectum sustinere potest, pro nobis sisti oportet ac iudicio repraesentari velut sponsorem. Ipsa vero a Deo accepta fertur ac nobis imputatur, perinde ac si nostra esset. Institutio* (1536) 1.32; COS 1:60-61; Battles, 34-35. By 1541 the formula appears in the *Geneva Catechism* in the compact, precise form it would take in virtually every subsequent major confessional symbol in both the Reformed and Lutheran churches: "merely through his goodness, without any regard to our works, he is pleased to accept us freely in Jesus Christ, imputing his righteousness to us, and does not impute our sin." *CCFCT* 2:333.

but they are not yet put together in the final form they will take in the confessions of the first codification. Perhaps even more surprising is the observation that Calvin's exegesis of Romans in 1540 is outstripped by his dogmatic pronouncements in the *Institutio* four years earlier, raising the interesting question as to which came first, the catechetical chicken or the exegetical egg.<sup>112</sup> And when we set these developments alongside the contributions of Bucer and Bullinger, it will become apparent that there still exists a wide range of exegetical options for interpreting justification in Romans, such that any conclusions regarding a supposed evangelical consensus on this matter must take into account the diversity and fluidity of a rapidly-evolving exegetical conversation.

The reformer's interaction with the text of scripture, however, tells only part of the story. The Reformation of the sixteenth century may have been a fight about the Bible, but it was also a fight about the history of the Bible's interpretation. Whatever the slogan *sola scriptura* may mean to the reformers' later admirers, for the early evangelicals themselves, it certainly did *not* mean that they read the Bible in isolation from the fifteen-hundred years of exegetical tradition which had come before. On the contrary, the task of interpreting scripture was inextricable from the task of interpreting the Church Fathers, as even a cursory glance through the exegetical writings of the reformers will show. But even though the two tasks were intimately intertwined, they were not indistinguishable. The reformers were

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<sup>112</sup> This is obscured for many readers by the fact that Calvin's 1540 commentary has only recently been made available in a reliable critical edition and has never been translated into English.

convinced that the somewhere along the way, the true meaning of scripture had in places been obscured, rather than elucidated, by this tradition. The task they set themselves, therefore, involved a ground-up reappraisal not only of scripture, but also by implication of the subsequent authors whose interpretive genius had charted the course for later interpretation.

Ironically, this turn to the literary sources of Christian tradition could claim not only the sanction of then-fashionable academic theory in the Renaissance humanist return *ad fontes*, but also some of very Fathers whose exegesis would come under subsequent scrutiny.<sup>113</sup> The humanists, after all, were interested in the literary sources of classical antiquity primarily as models of literary *eloquentia*. For Christian writers in the tradition of Augustine, however, it was the content of scripture, rather than its form, that guaranteed its authority as the ultimate criterion of theological understanding.

I admit . . . that it is from those books alone of the Scriptures, which are now called canonical, that I have learned to pay them such honor and respect as to believe most firmly that not one of their authors has erred in writing anything at all. If I do find anything in those books which seems contrary to truth, I decide that either the text is corrupt, or the translator did not follow what was really said, or that I failed to understand it. But when I read other authors, however eminent they may be in sanctity and learning, I do not necessarily believe a thing is true because they think so, but because they have been able to convince me, either on the authority of the canonical writers or by a probable reason which is not inconsistent with truth.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> The origin of the phrase *ad fontes* in Renaissance humanism is obscure, but its first documented usage comes from a treatise by Erasmus in 1511: *Sed in primis ad fontes ipsos properandum, id est graecos et antiquos*. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores* (Paris, 1511); ASD, 1.2:120.11-12. For a classic example of the way in which the Reformation took over this impulse from Renaissance humanism, see Philip Melancthon's *Oratio de studiis linguae graecae* (Wittenberg, 1549).

<sup>114</sup> *ego enim fateor . . . solis eis scripturarum libris, qui iam canonici appellantur, didici hunc timorem honorem que deferre, ut nullum eorum auctorem scribendo errasse aliquid firmissime credam ac, si aliquid in eis offendero litteris, quod uideatur contrarium ueritati, nihil aliud quam uel*

This passage was cited repeatedly by the reformers of the sixteenth century as a authoritative statement of the relationship between scripture and tradition and as granting patristic warrant to an exegetical method which might overturn even the views of individual Fathers themselves on particular passages.<sup>115</sup>

Not that the reformers were eager to do this, however. In later chapters I shall point out some of the ways in which evangelical exegetes drew constructively on patristic authorities, even as they were forced to make a series of progressive modifications to these authors' interpretations in forging their own confessional readings of the text. The result might be compared to a building partially disassembled and then subsequently reconstructed with the same materials according to an altered blueprint. But in order to recognize where changes have been made in

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*mendosum esse codicem uel interpretem non adsecutum esse, quod dictum est, uel me minime intellexisse non ambigam. alios autem ita lego, ut, quanta libet sanctitate doctrina que praeipollean, non ideo uerum putem, quia ipsi ita senserunt, sed quia mihi uel per illos auctores canonicos uel probabili ratione, quod a uero non abhorreat, persuadere potuerunt. E. 82.1; CSEL 34.2: 354; FotC 12:392.*

<sup>115</sup> Luther, for example, in his controversy with Johannes Eck, summarizes Augustine thus: *Nec potest fidelis Christianus cogi ultra sacram scripturam, que est proprie ius diuinum, nisi accesserit nova et probata reuelatio: immo ex iure diuino prohibemur credere nisi quod sit probatum uel per scripturam diuinam uel per manifestam reuelationem, ut [Jean] Gerson etiam etsi recentior in multis locis asserit et diuus Augustinus antiquior pro singulari canone obseruat dicens ad diuum Hieronymum: Ego solis eis libris didici hunc honorem deferre qui Canonici appellantur, ceteros autem ita lego, ut, quantalibet doctrina sanctitateque prepollean, non ideo uerum existimem, quia illi sic senserunt, sed si ex libris canonicis uel probabili ratione mihi persuadere potuerunt.* WA 2:279.23-32. Cf. WA 8:626.33-38; 50:524, n. b. See also Martin Bucer, *Defensio Aduersus Axioma Catholicum* (Strasbourg, 1534), *Quid catholicum*; Heinrich Bullinger, *In Acta Apostolorum Henrychi Bullingeri commentariorum* (Zurich, 1549), *praef. ep.*; Thomas Cranmer, *A Confutation of Unwritten Verities* (Cambridge, 1846; original, 1557]), 32n. Earlier Catholic theologians, of course, were not unaware of this text. Thomas Aquinas, for example, cites it approvingly in setting out his own understanding of the relative weight to be accorded to scripture and tradition, respectively (*ST* Ia, q. 8, r. 2).

the basic layout of the structure, it will be necessary to survey the terrain of patristic exegesis and its reception in the medieval exegetical tradition.<sup>116</sup>

In the following chapters I intend to demonstrate how early Protestant exegetes reappropriated Paul's language of justification in support of a radical new soteriological model. The first "plank" of this model, the sharp distinction between justification and regeneration, first emerged during the 1530's and became increasingly integrated in Protestant exegesis and teaching in the decades which followed. The model's second plank, the expansion from a one-stage to a two-stage transaction, came late, and restrictions of space inherent in the genre of a doctoral dissertation prohibit me from giving more than a brief sketch of these later developments. My examination of Romans exegesis from the 1520's and 1530's, however, will demonstrate the situation remained fluid throughout the first generation of Protestant confession-formation.

The plan of the present work will proceed as follows. Part I will focus on the reception history of Paul's argument concerning justification and future judgment in the first half of Romans 2. In Chapter 1, I will trace the emergence and development of a fairly stable set of readings in the patristic period stemming primarily from the work of Origen and Augustine. This reading of the text, affirming a tight connection between the keeping of the moral law and future (i.e., eschatological) justification,

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<sup>116</sup> It can, of course, be argued that modifications to the structure were continually underway throughout the middle ages, as monastic and scholastic commentators appropriated the patristic corpus for their own particular needs. Although I may have occasion to point out specific instances of this reworking throughout the course of this study, that task lies beyond the scope my immediate interests here.

would prove to be a major obstacle for the emergence of a Protestant reading of Paul, even as it supplied later evangelicals with a pliable set of terms which could be redeployed to support their new models. Chapter 2 examines the attempts of Protestant readers to integrate this traditional interpretation with their critique of the regnant Catholic orthodoxy of salvation, an integration only made possible by a creative new rhetorical-critical approach to the text first set out in the work of Philip Melancthon. These exegetical developments, I will argue, clear the way for a thoroughgoing reexamination of Pauline soteriology by severing the link between justification and Catholic sacramental practice. In Part II, I will turn to the positive development of the Protestant *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* in an examination of the core text in the exegetical debates over justification in the Reformation era, the second half of Romans 3. Chapter 3 will demonstrate a fairly broad consensus among patristic and medieval interpreters on the question of justification and its relationship to law, but also the persistence of alternate ways of reading the critical terms. In Chapter 4, I turn at last to a detailed examination of Luther's early Pauline exegesis, where I argue that these tensions in the traditional Augustinian understanding of justification were the sharp spur that goaded Luther into a ground-up reassessment of Paul—a reassessment initiated, but by no means completed, by Luther himself. In Chapter 5 I then turn to the ways in which Luther's challenge to the Augustinian synthesis was picked up by later figures and developed into a distinctively Protestant understanding of Paul, focusing on the first of two key conceptual developments: the clear insistence on a distinction between justification



and regeneration as the only sure guarantee for giving peace to consciences terrified by the demands of God's righteous law. The second development, the emergence of the two-fold model with the language of the *iustitia Christi imputata*, does not come into clear focus in the Romans commentaries of the 1540's. Although Calvin advances the first confessional formulation of this doctrine in 1541, it does not find clear exegetical grounding in his exposition of Romans until 1556, at a point beyond the scope of the present study. I will conclude the final chapter, however, with a brief sketch of Calvin's later exegesis as a way of foreshadowing the direction I intend to develop my argument in further research.

## Part I

### **“The Doers of the Law Will Be Justified”: Faith, Works and Judgment**

Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup>For he will render to every man according to his works: <sup>7</sup>to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For God shows no partiality. <sup>12</sup>All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup>For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup>When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup>They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup>on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

——Romans 2:3-16

Although the Holy Spirit has concealed these things in the Scriptures because of those who despise the riches of his goodness and patience, nevertheless he has not completely removed them. For not even the treasure hidden in the field is found by all, lest it be easily plundered and perish. Yet it is found by those who are prudent, who are able to go and sell everything they have and buy that field.

——Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, 2:6

There is not so much difficulty in this text, as is commonly thought.

——John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 2:6

## **Chapter 1: Faith, Virtue, and the Last Judgment in Patristic and Medieval Exegesis**

Ancient and medieval commentators were virtually unanimous in reading the first half of Romans 2 as affirming a tight connection between individual virtue and salvation in the eschatological judgment. Of decisive importance for the Western exegetical tradition were Rufinus's translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* and Augustine's exposition of the text in *De Spiritu et Littera*. Origen established the priority of human responsibility in a polemic against Gnostic opponents whom he regarded as subverting the notion of free will, while Augustine neutralized Pelagian appeals to the same notion by arguing that good works were the result of justification, not its cause. Medieval exegesis turned these two arguments into exegetical commonplaces, appealing to the former in reconciling this text with James' claim "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Js 2:24), to the latter in reconciling it with Paul's insistence that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom 3:28).

### **1.1 Origen**

The place of Origen in the history of the Western church's doctrine of justification has only recently started to receive the attention it is due. Until the last generation, it had been common for theologians—especially Protestant theologians—to begin

diachronic accounts of the history of justification with the writings of Augustine, dismissing the previous four centuries of patristic thought as sub-Pauline or ignoring it altogether.<sup>1</sup> Several recent studies, however, have highlighted the existence in the West of a sophisticated discourse of justification in the fourth century, a generation prior to Augustine, belying the notion that early Christian writers viewed the issue as peripheral to the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Of more immediate significance for the present study, however, are the renewal of interest in Origen as an interpreter of Paul and the higher appraisal by recent critics of Rufinus's Latin translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*.<sup>3</sup> Often dismissed as a second-rate interpolation, bearing the impress of later controversies, more recent scholarship has recognized the value of the work as an important contribution to the Western exegetical tradition.<sup>4</sup> As we

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<sup>1</sup> McGrath, for example, cites (*Iustitia Dei*, 33-34) with approval Krister Stendahl's suggestion that "Paul's great insight into justification by faith was forgotten" in the first 350 years of western theological reflection; in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 83. A significant exception to this disregard for the pre-Augustinian tradition is the treatment found in Jean Rivière's substantial article, "Justification," in *DThC* 8, cols. 2043-2227.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel H. Williams, for example, argues on the basis of an examination of Hilary of Poitiers' soteriology, that this "theological skepticism about the priority of saving faith and unmerited grace in the pre-Augustine period has been overstated" (666), in "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," *JEH* 57, no. 4 (2006): 649-67. See also J. Warren Smith, "Justification and Merit before the Pelagian Controversy: The Case of Ambrose of Milan," *Pro Ecclesia* 16, no. 2 (2007): 195-217.

<sup>3</sup> See, especially, Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, "Origen's Pauline Prefaces and the Chronology of his Pauline Commentaries," in *Origeniana Sexta* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1995), 495-513; "Justification by Faith in Augustine and Origen," *JEH* 47, no. 2 (1996): 223-35.

<sup>4</sup> On the reception history of the Origen-Rufinus commentary, see, with caution, Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: the Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). Scheck's work is valuable for the questions it raises and for its interaction with the relevant patristic scholarship, however the book is marred by the author's fierce polemical stance. Moreover, with only one chapter on medieval exegesis, the author's bold claim that "Catholic exegesis of Romans" represents a series of "footnotes to Origen" (217) awaits further demonstration.

will see, Origen's discussion of this text proved seminal for subsequent exegesis and theological reflection on the nature of the eschatological judgment and the relationship between faith and works.<sup>5</sup>

In the first three centuries of the Western church's exegetical tradition, Paul's judgment warnings were often read in a straightforward manner as affirming a tight connection between salvation and law keeping, with little concern for how these notions might conflict with Paul's teaching on justification. The passage thus became a useful hortatory proof-text in early Patristic sermons and treatises aimed at moral parenesis.<sup>6</sup> Origen, however, has different concerns in mind throughout his treatment of Romans 2, concerns which come into sharp relief beginning with his discussion of the "day of wrath" in 2:5:

Now we need to ask about the righteous judgment of God in which he will pay back to each one according to his own works. In the first place let the heretics who claim that the natures of human souls (*animarum naturas*) are either good or evil be shut out. Let them hear that God pays back to each one not on account of his nature but on account of his works. In the second place let believers be edified so as to not entertain the thought that, because they believe, this alone can suffice for them. On

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<sup>5</sup> Since my interest here is in the reception of Origen's exegesis "downstream" in the Western tradition, I leave aside the ongoing debate over the extent to which Rufinus's translation faithfully transmits the *ipsissima vox* of Origen. For a fuller treatment of this question, see Scheck, *Origen*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, Cyprian of Carthage cites Rom 2:13 along with Ecclus 4:29 ("Be not hasty in thy tongue, and in thy deeds useless and remiss"), 1 Cor 4:20 ("The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power"), Matt 5:19 ("He who shall do and teach so, shall be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven"), and Matt 7:24-27 (the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock) in support of the following thesis that *factis, non uerbis, operandum*. In *Ad Quirin.* 3.96; PL 4:775b; ANF 5:554. Tertullian, in his *Exhortation to Chastity*, urges his readers to persevere under trials, even if they are without benefit of clergy, for each individual stands or falls before God by his own faith: *Unusquisque enim, secundum quod et apostolus dicit, uiuit fide sua, nec est personarum acceptio apud deum, quoniam non auditors legis iustificantur a domino, sed factores*. In *Exh. cast.* 7.3-4; CCSL 2:1025.

the contrary they should know that God's righteous judgment pays back to each one according to his own works.<sup>7</sup>

The "heretics" against whom Origen is arguing here are "Marcion and all who, by different kinds of fictional constructions, introduce the concept of different kinds of natures of souls (*animarum naturas*)."<sup>8</sup> Marcion, it will be recalled, posited the existence of two separate deities, the inferior creator god, or Demiurge, of the Old Testament, and the supreme God of the New. The former was characterized by anger and cruelty, while the latter was a universal messiah who came to replace the *lex talionis* of the Jews with the new law of love.<sup>9</sup> Here, however, Origen seems to associate Marcion with the views developed by the followers of Valentinus, according to which "there is a nature of souls that would always be saved and never perish, and another that would always perish and never be saved."<sup>10</sup> This strong

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<sup>7</sup> *Romans*, 2.4.6; Hammond Bammel 1:110; FotC 103:111.

<sup>8</sup> *Romans*, 2.10.2; Hammond Bammel 1:139; FotC 103:135.

<sup>9</sup> Ever since Harnack it has been customary to characterize Marcion as drawing a sharp distinction between the justice of the Old Testament creator and the goodness of the New Testament supreme God. Winrich Löhr, however, has recently called this thesis into question, pointing out the absence of any unambiguous reference to such an antithesis in Marcion's extant writings, combined with the polemical use to which his early opponents, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, put this exaggerated distinction between law and gospel. Even his enemies acknowledged Marcion's rigorous asceticism (e.g., Tertullian, *Cont. Marc.* 1.1.29), making him an unlikely candidate for the sort of antinomianism with which he is often charged. Winrich A. Löhr, "Did Marcion Distinguish between a Just God and a Good God?" in *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung*, ed. Gerhard May and Katharina Greschat (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 131-46.

<sup>10</sup> *Romans*, 8.11.2; FotC 104:176. According to Alan Scott, Origen is referring to "the Valentinian belief that at least one group (i.e. the pneumatics) are elected to salvation from all eternity, while another group (i.e. the hylics) are condemned for all eternity. The Valentinians thought human freedom was severely limited, and emphasized the importance of biblical passages which suggested that salvation was due to divine election." Alan B. Scott, "Opposition and Concession: Origen's Relationship to Valentinianism," in *Origeniana quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly, 79-84 (Louvain: Peeters, 1992), 80.

emphasis on divine election was at odds with Origen's firm commitment to the notion of free will. It is therefore not surprising that Origen's primary concern in this passage centers on the question of human responsibility: God's judgment on the day of wrath will not simply be a revelation of his prior election, but rather of the secrets of human hearts, because "it belongs to God alone to know the hearts of men and to discern the secrets of the mind."<sup>11</sup>

### **1.1.1 Judgment and Virtue**

Origen's exegesis of Romans has been interpreted by many exegetes since the early modern period as underwriting a doctrine of "justification according to works."<sup>12</sup> At one level, this is a perfectly fair description: "We must expect and believe," he writes, "that God's judgment in accordance with truth is not only on those who do the things which have been enumerated above [that is, the transgressions enumerated in Romans 1], but also on all who do anything good or evil in any way."<sup>13</sup> And yet, it would be misleading to suggest that for Origen, there is a straightforward causal relationship between human actions and divine reward. The correlation, rather, is between works and the just or unjust soul, with the assumption that works stand in an emblematic relationship to virtue.

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<sup>11</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.1; Hammond Bammel 1:99; FotC 103:102.

<sup>12</sup> The reformers of the sixteenth century varied widely in their appreciation of Origen's Pauline exegesis. Some, such as Luther and Melancthon, took an exceedingly dim view of Origen's contribution. Others, however, such as Johannes Oecolampadius and Peter Martyr Vermigli, found much more to appreciate. I shall examine the reformers' engagement with Origen's exegesis in greater detail in Chapters 2, 4, and 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.1; Hammond Bammel 1:99; FotC 103:102.

One of the first objections Origen addresses in defending his notion of God’s judgment is how, if God is a just judge, sins may be forgiven through baptism, repentance, or martyrdom, and here it becomes clear that Origen does not have in mind any sort of straightforward tallying up of deeds on the day of judgment. Origen acknowledges that “the truthfulness of the judgment, of course, demands that the bad man receives bad things and the good man good things,” but it is the *person*, not the *works*, who receive the reward.<sup>14</sup> “You see,” he explains, “deeds pass away, whether good or evil. According to their own characteristics, they represent and form the mind of the one who is doing them; and they leave it either good or evil, to be devoted to either punishment or rewards.”<sup>15</sup> Deeds both “form the mind”—that is, they confirm the soul either in virtue or in vice—and they “represent” it. This much is standard Hellenistic philosophical fare.<sup>16</sup> Yet because Origen is a Christian, he must take account of conversion, along with the attendant biblical theme of forgiveness. In an illustration drawing on the language of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), Origen explains how this happens:

Let us suppose there is a soul in which dwells ungodliness, unrighteousness, foolishness, excess, and the entire multitude of evils to which it has openly subjected itself as servant and slave. But suppose this soul comes back to itself and opens the door of its mind once again to piety and the virtues. Will not piety, when

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<sup>14</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.2; Hammond Bammel 1:99; FotC 103:102.

<sup>15</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.2; Hammond Bammel 1:100; FotC 103:103.

<sup>16</sup> Origen is drawing on a long philosophical tradition which regards virtue as a habit fixed through regular practice. Epictetus, for example, argued that “every habit and faculty is confirmed and strengthened by the corresponding actions, that of walking by walking, that of running by running. If you wish to be a good reader, read; if you wish to be a good writer, write.” *Disc.* 2.18.1-3; LCL 131:341.



she has entered, immediately drive ungodliness out of there? In like manner righteousness shall also push out unrighteousness and wisdom shall put foolishness to flight, and to excess sobriety shall do the same. And thus, when the foreign occupants have been expelled from itself, the soul shall offer civil and proper hospitality to the virtues. How then shall it be just to convict a soul that is now filled with virtues, of the things it had committed when it was not yet a friend of the virtues? How will it be just to condemn a pious soul for ungodliness, or a just soul for injustice, or a soul practicing moderation for excess?<sup>17</sup>

In other words, Origen's answer to the question of how God can forgive sins is simple: that was then, this is now. The reason he can say this is that, at its most fundamental level, Origen's soteriology is not a scheme of justification according to works, but rather according to virtue.<sup>18</sup> What matters is the state of the soul at the end of its earthly sojourn, and although works play an important role both in forming the soul to virtue and in signaling its presence to others, the birth of piety in the soul "immediately" drives out ungodliness and renders the souls virtuous—and therefore worthy of reward. "Accordingly," for Origen, "it shall be unjust to punish a good mind (*bonam mentem*) for evils committed."<sup>19</sup>

### **1.1.2 Judgment and Works**

This is not to say, however, that Origen has no notion of merit attached to the works themselves. Eternal life is given on the basis of the presence of virtue in the soul, even if virtue has only lately driven out vice after a lifetime of sin. Yet all human beings, both Jews and Greeks, will answer for their actions before God on the day of

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<sup>17</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.3; Hammond Bammel 1:100; FotC 103:103-4.

<sup>18</sup> According to Maurice Wiles, "faith in Christ does not need to be supplemented by the virtuous life, it is the adoption of the virtues." Maurice F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 114.

<sup>19</sup> *Romans*, 2.1.2; Hammond Bammel 1:99; FotC 103:103.

judgment. Origen's discussion of judgment according to virtue is pitched to answer the objection that if God forgives sin, his judgment cannot be in accordance with truth. His discussion of judgment according to works in vv.7-11 is aimed at reconciling the impartiality of God's judgment with the church's rule of faith, which teaches that there is no salvation apart from baptism (Jn 3:5) and the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). "How then does Paul here make the [unbelieving] Gentiles sharers of the glory and honor and peace in the second place after the Jews?"<sup>20</sup>

Origen answers this question by distinguishing between the two parallel sets of binary oppositions laid out in vv. 7-8 and 9-10. The first set promises eternal life "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality" (v. 7). Origen interprets this to refer to Christians, glossing the text with Jn 16:20, 33 and Lk 21:19 to conclude that "to endure oppression in this world and to grieve is the lot of Christians, those who possess eternal life."<sup>21</sup> The second opposition, however, does not refer to eternal life, but rather to the temporal rewards God gives for good works, irrespective of the final destiny of the souls performing them. The first passage divides humanity into two "ranks (*ordines*)": those who will be given eternal life and those who will not. The second passage, however, divides the second rank still further, between those who do evil (v. 9) and those who do good (v. 10). Unbelievers who do evil are damned, as of course are those who do good, but

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<sup>20</sup> *Romans*, 2.7.3; Hammond Bammel 1:126; FotC 103:123.

<sup>21</sup> *Christianorum ergo est pressuram pati in hoc saeculo et lugere, quorum est et uita aeterna*. *Romans*, 2.7.4; Hammond Bammel 1:126; FotC 103:124. The logic of the argument is rather sloppy, but Origen bolsters the conclusion by appealing to "the voice of the savior himself" (Jn 17:3).

the latter are still owed a reward for their good deeds. Origen concedes that unbelievers, whether Jews or Greeks, may be virtuous and perform “every good work”; nevertheless, “such a person does not have eternal life, since, though he does believe in the only true God, yet he has not believed in his Son Jesus Christ whom God sent; nevertheless, the glory of his works and his honor and peace might be imperishable.”<sup>22</sup> Nor are Christians off the hook entirely: a baptized believer who perseveres in faith will nevertheless face judgment for sins committed, even though such judgment has a different character from the judgment against unbelievers:

For are we to think that anyone who believes in Christ and afterwards commits murder or adultery or speaks false testimony or does anything of this sort, which we sometimes see even believers perpetrating, that even then he who has believed in Christ will not be condemned for these things? It is certain that all these things will come to judgment. Therefore, the word of the Lord, “he who believes in me will not be condemned” has to be understood in the following sense: Anyone who has believed will not be condemned as an unbeliever (*incredulis*) and infidel (*infidelis*); but he will undoubtedly be condemned for his own actions.<sup>23</sup>

Origen is not entirely clear in this passage whether this judgment of believers results in the loss of salvation or is simply the condemnation of the Christian’s deeds apart from the Christian’s person. The passage immediately following, however, seems to suggest the latter, when Origen defends this notion against the “harsh” and “intolerable” suggestion that a Christian who has committed such sins “should not be regarded as a believer.” After all, “how many can be found on earth who so balance their lives that they transgress at no point whatsoever?” Furthermore, 1 Jn

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<sup>22</sup> *Romans*, 2.7.5; Hammond Bammel 1:127-28; FotC 103:125.

<sup>23</sup> *Romans*, 2.7.7; Hammond Bammel 1:129; FotC 103:127.

1:8-9 clinches the argument for Origen: Christians are never wholly without sin, but Christ's intercession is a remedy for those who confess.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout this text Origen develops a remarkably nuanced view of the eschatological judgment, one which attempts to do justice both to the church's rule of faith, with its unequivocal insistence on the uniqueness of salvation in Christ, while at the same time defending the impartiality of God's judgment. The former he maintains by associating Christian conversion with the creation of virtue, the latter by reaffirming a universal judgment according to works. Good works are not sufficient to merit salvation apart from baptism and the confession of Christ, nor, it seems, must individual bad deeds—even on the order of murder, adultery or false testimony—necessarily rob the repentant believer of salvation. Thus, for Origen there is a correlation between salvation and good works, but an interval, as well, an interval corresponding to the fluid relationship between the interior renewal of virtue and the external fruits of that renewal in virtuous living. As we shall see, this interval has a long history as a fundamental *crux interpretum* for Pauline exegesis.

## **1.2 Meritorious Faith: The “Ambrosian” Option**

The first attempt I have found in the Western tradition to read the first half of Romans 2 as anything other than a straightforward exhortation to a life a virtue comes, perhaps not surprisingly, with the first extant commentary on Romans composed in Latin, the work of a late fourth-century exegete known to us only as

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<sup>24</sup> *Romans*, 2.7.8; Hammond Bammel 1:130; FotC 103:127.

Ambrosiaster.<sup>25</sup> Long thought to be the work of Ambrose, this anonymous commentary nevertheless bears striking similarities with the Bishop of Milan's insistence that faith itself merits the forgiveness of sins.

Ambrosiaster was "a juridically trained Roman, possibly of Spanish extraction, converted from paganism, and apparently a member of the local clergy under Pope Damasus (366-384)."<sup>26</sup> His *Commentarius in epistolas paulinas* was based a number of Old Latin versions of the Pauline corpus, and he restricts himself for the most part to commenting on the logical and juridical aspects of the text, rather than to speculative theology or pastoral application. In his comments on Romans 2, Ambrosiaster is primarily concerned with defending the notion of God's just judgment against both Jews and Greeks, while at the same time affirming against the Jews that the law of the Old Testament is incomplete and incomprehensible apart from Christ. Ambrosiaster's comments on Rom 2:13 are particularly significant with regard to the later exegetical tradition, particularly as they have come down to use in three different forms. The  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  texts read as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam is widely regarded as the first scholar to reject Ambrosian authorship, though this is not quite accurate. In 1527 Erasmus published a four-volume edition of Ambrose (*Diui Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis omnia opera. . .*) with the Basel printer, Johannes Froben. Erasmus noted his concerns in this edition that the text had been corrupted, though he never rejected Ambrose's authorship outright, and in his later *Annotationes* on Romans, he cites the commentary as the work of Ambrose without qualification. According to Hoven, the name "Ambrosiaster" was coined by the editors of the later Benedictine edition of Ambrose's *Opera* (Paris, 1686-90). René Hoven, "Saint Ambroise ou l' Ambrosiaster?" *L'antiquité classique* 38 (1969): 172-74. Though I will refer to the author of the commentary as Ambrosiaster in this work, it should be remembered that virtually all of the authors cited herein would have regarded it as the work of the Bishop of Milan. Moreover, given the consistency of the two writers' views on the way in which faith merits justification, I will refer to this position as the "Ambrosian option."

<sup>26</sup> *HPE* 2:1081.

“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” He says this because they are not righteous who hear the law, *but* who believe in Christ, whom the law promised. And this is what it means to “do” the law.<sup>27</sup>

The  $\gamma$  text, however, reads somewhat differently:

“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” He says this because they are not righteous who hear the law, *unless* they believe in Christ, whom the law promised. And this is what it means to “do” the law.<sup>28</sup>

The  $\alpha/\beta$  text presents faith in Christ as itself being the fulfilment of the law—to believe in Christ *is* to be a “doer of the law.” The  $\gamma$  text, however, presents faith in Christ merely as a necessary condition for being a “doer of the law,” a reading borne out by the remainder of the gloss on 2:13:

For how does someone who does not believe the law keep it, when he does not receive the one to whom the law bears witness? But the one who appears not to be under the law, because he is uncircumcised in his flesh, may be said to have kept the law if he believes in Christ. And he who says he is in the law, in other words, the Jew, is not a doer of the law but a hearer only, because what is said in the law does not penetrate to his mind, for he does not believe in the Christ who is written about in the law. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Ambrosiaster’s argument in this text concerns not the latent inability of human beings to fulfil the moral aspects of the law, but rather the status of those who

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<sup>27</sup> *Non enim auditores legis iusti sunt apud deum, sed factores legis iustificabuntur. hoc dicit, quia non hi sunt iusti (iusti sunt), qui audiunt legem, sed qui credant in Christo (Christum), quem {eadem} lex promisit, |et| hoc est facere legem. Ad Rom. (2:13); CSEL 81.1:74.1-5. The words in parentheses are alternate readings in  $\beta$  text; emphasis mine.*

<sup>28</sup> *Non enim auditores legis iusti sunt apud deum, sed factores legis iustificabuntur. hoc dicit, quia non hi iusti sunt, qui audiunt legem, nisi credant in Christum, quem eadem lex promisit, et hoc est facere legem. Ad Rom. (2:13); CSEL 81.1:75.3-6; emphasis mine.*

<sup>29</sup> *nam quomodo facit legem, qui non credit legi, dum non recipit, cui lex testimonium perhibet? qui autem in lege videtur non esse, quia incircumciscus est carne, credit autem in Christum, hic fecisse legem dicatur, et ille qui se dicit in lege esse, id est Iudaeus, quia quae dicuntur non transfundit ad mentem, non factor legis sit, sed auditor; non enim credit in Christum scriptum in lege. . . . Ad Rom. (2:13); CSEL 81.1:75.7-13.*

believe and Christ without fulfilling the ceremonial demands of the law (i.e., the one who is “uncircumcised in his flesh”): Jews who are circumcised and keep the ceremonial observances of the law are not “doers of the law” unless they believe in Christ, while a Gentile, by virtue of his faith may in fact be a “doer of the law” even though he or she is uncircumcised. It is in this sense, then, that for Ambrosiaster faith in Christ “fulfils” the law: it renders obsolete the physical boundary markers of Jewish identity.

This is not how the text was received in the later exegetical tradition, however. Among both medieval and Reformation-era commentators, the line, “they are not righteous who hear the law, but who believe in Christ, whom the law promised” (i.e., the wording from the  $\alpha/\beta$  version of the text) is frequently reproduced as a gloss on Rom 2:13 with no reference to the wider context of Ambrosiaster’s exegesis. Since most of the exegetes regarded this commentary as the work of Ambrose, it is thus not surprising that they should read this suggestive explanation in line with the latter’s teaching on the matter of justification.

Ambrose places a special emphasis on the role of faith in gaining the forgiveness of sins. According to J. Warren Smith, Ambrose regards faith as “a quality or virtue or disposition of the soul . . . which is sufficiently meritorious that it . . . gives to us the quality of righteousness the Father loves and so blesses with the pardon of sin.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, for Ambrose, faith can actually be said to merit forgiveness. This is illustrated by a remarkable bit of allegorical exegesis Ambrose gives in his

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, “Justification and Merit,” 202.

sermon, “On Jacob and the Happy Life,” on the story in Genesis 27 where Jacob tricks his father into giving him his brother’s birthright by donning Esau’s clothing. In the same way, Ambrose argues, the younger son (the Church) has displaced the older (the Jews) by putting on the latter’s garments (the Law and the Prophets). The Jews, however, “cannot appreciate the law and the prophets . . . because they lack Christ, who as the fulfilment of the law illuminates its true meaning.”<sup>31</sup> Ambrose explains:

The Christian people put on [the clothing of the Old Testament], and it shone brightly. They made it bright with the splendor of *their faith* [*suae fidei claritate*] and the light of their holy works [*piorum luce factorum*]. Isaac recognized the familiar fragrance that attached to his people, he recognized the clothing of the Old Testament. . . . Isaac “smelled the fragrance of his garments.” And perhaps by that we are not justified by works but *by faith* [*non operibus iustificamur, sed fide*], because the weakness of the flesh is a hindrance to works but the brightness of faith puts the error that is in man’s deeds in the shadow and *merits* [*meretur*] for him the forgiveness of sins.<sup>32</sup>

Ambrosiaster’s exegesis of this passage is brief and understated, raising far more questions than it answers. Its importance, however, lies in its longevity. We shall see his terse formulation cropping up continually throughout the exegetical tradition. The notion that faith in Christ itself fulfils the law became a point of departure for countless medieval exegetes, even if there was widespread disagreement as to how exactly it did this. Reformers in the sixteenth century looking for patristic warrant in asserting the primacy of faith over works in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>32</sup> *De iacob et vita beata* II, 2.9; PL14:648A-B; cited in Smith, “Justification and Merit,” 202 (emphasis and paranetical remarks his).



justification also found this sort of exegesis appealing.<sup>33</sup> Given the widespread assumptions concerning the authorship of the late fourth-century Romans commentary, it is not surprising that it should be read in a manner congruent with Ambrose's broader theology, and the prestige it gained by association with one of the four great *doctores ecclesiae* guaranteed it a prominent place in the exegetical controversies of later periods.

### 1.3 Augustine

The decisive emergence of justification as a major theme in Western theology comes, however, with Augustine. Since so much of the medieval and Reformation discussion of justification developed within an explicitly Augustinian framework, we must pause here to briefly sketch out Augustine's understanding of the terms *iustitia* and *iustificare* before turning to a more detailed consideration of how Augustine himself handled the vexing issue of justification and good works in the first half of Romans 2.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, for example, in his commentary on Genesis writes, "The allegory of Ambrose on this passage is not displeasing to me. Jacob, the younger brother, is blessed under the person of the elder; the garments which were borrowed from his brother breathe an odor grateful and pleasant to his father. In the same manner we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odor, procures his favor; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place." *In primum Mosis librum, qui Genesis vulgo dicitur, Commentarius Iohannes Calvini* (Geneva, 1544); CTS 1:487.

<sup>34</sup> My summary here is dependent on the following recent scholarly treatments: R. Dodaro, "Justice," in *ATA*, 481-83; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 38-54; Josef Lössl, *Intellectus gratiae: die erkenntnistheoretische und hermeneutische Dimension der Gnadenlehre Augustins von Hippo* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). See also Volker Henning Drecoll, *Die Entstehung der Gnadenlehre Augustins* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); Hammond Bammel, "Justification by Faith in Augustine and Origen," 223-35.

### 1.3.1 *Iustitia* and *iustificare* in Augustine

The starting point for Augustine's understanding of *iustitia* is the classical jurisprudential notion of justice as "rendering to each his due."<sup>35</sup> Justice is the highest of the virtues, according to Aristotle, precisely because it is a relational excellence, the exercise of "virtue in relation to others."<sup>36</sup> Augustine picks up on this relational aspect of *iustitia*, expanding its scope beyond the horizontal plane of human relations to include the right relationship of the human to God.<sup>37</sup> Thus, all the law and the prophets are summed up in Augustine's notion of *iustitia*, understood as a right relationship—that is, a relationship of love—with God and with neighbor.<sup>38</sup> So also the Gospel is summed up in his concept of *iustificare*—the process by which we are made just.

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle succinctly defines justice as "the excellence through which everybody enjoys his own possessions in accordance with the law," *Rh.* 1.9; cf. the longer discussion in *Eth. Nic.* 5.1-2; according to Cicero, *Iustitia virtus est, communi utilitate servata, suam cuique tribunes dignitatem.* In *Rhetoricum libro duo* 2.53. The logic of the Aristotelian definition became enshrined in the Western legal tradition in the code of Justinian, which defines *iustitia* by Ulpian's dictum: "Justice is the constant and perpetual wish to render everyone his due" (*Iustitia est constans et perpetua uoluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi*). *Inst.* 1.1.10; *The Digest of Justinian*, ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger, trans. Alan Watson, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 1:2.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 223. Cf., *Eth. Nic.* 5.1: "Justice is often thought to be the chief of the virtues, and more sublime 'or than the evening or the morning star'; and we have the proverb—In Justice is all Virtue found in sum.' And Justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree because its possessor can practice his virtue towards others and not merely by himself" (5.1.15); LCL 73:259.

<sup>37</sup> This right relationship is, of course, one of love; Augustine thus defines *iustitia* as "the love of God and neighbor, which is diffused through all the others [*quae per ceteras omnes diffunditur, dilectio Dei et proximi*]." *Div. quaest.* 61.4; CCSL 44A:145; FotC 70:121.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Augustine's discussion of Mt. 22:40 in *De trin.* 8.10.

In his exegesis of the Pauline corpus Augustine notices that the *iustitia Dei* with which Paul is concerned involves not only God’s distributive justice, whereby he punishes sin and rewards merit, but also God’s covenant righteousness, his mercy in restoring the relationship with his creatures—*both* are aspects of God’s *iustitia*. Human beings neither merit God’s approbation nor even desire his mercy, so God takes the initiative, *operating* on the human soul so that it will *cooperate* with God in the process of restoration.<sup>39</sup> Justification for Augustine is thus both an event and a process, but with the emphasis on the latter: “The pervasive trajectory of Augustine’s thought is unambiguous: justification is a causative process, by which an ungodly person is made righteous. It is about the transformation of the *impius* into *iustus*.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 43. Cf. *Grat.* 17.33: *Ut ergo uelimus, sine nobis operatur; cum autem uolumus, et sic uolumus ut faciamus, nobiscum cooperator.* PL 44:901.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. Dependent as he was on the Old Latin translation of the Bible, Augustine seems to have been unaware that the Latin word *iustificare* had a much tighter semantic range than the Greek word it typically translated, δικαιοῦν. The former, a compound of the adjective *iustus* and the verb *facere*, is almost non-existent outside the Latin Bible and its quotations in Patristic literature, and it literally carries the causative meaning of “to make righteous.” The Greek δικαιοῦν, on the other hand, has a much broader range of meanings, to include “show/do justice,” “vindicate,” “treat as just,” “pronounce righteous,” “make free,” etc. (BDAG). The decision of the Latin translators to render δικαιοῦν as the virtual neologism *iustificare*—rather than, for instance, *iudicare*, a term having wide currency in legal and philosophical circles—no doubt reflects a considered judgment as to the best fit of the term not only philologically, but theologically. We ought not to suppose, rather condescendingly, in my view, that Augustine was incapable of reevaluating such decisions and arriving at his own conclusions, still less that his entire soteriology was predetermined by a mistranslation of a Greek word. Augustine’s command of Greek was shaky, to be sure, but he gives evidence on more than one occasion of a willingness to correct a received text in light of better information, and he is constantly in correspondence with other scholars, such as Jerome, whose linguistic skills are better than his own, in order to come at a better reading of a particular passage or unpack the nuances of a Greek or Hebrew word. Whatever his competence as a philologist, Augustine clearly regarded the Greek text as authoritative, and we must allow that his unqualified use of the term *iustificare* reflects a conscious theological judgment rather than a mere lexical blunder. The most impressive evidence for Augustine’s considered use of the term comes from the way in

### 1.3.2 Forensic Judgment and the Consummation of Justification

Moving from this general description of Augustine's mature thought on justification to a consideration of his exegesis of Romans 2, it becomes clear that Augustine advances the discussion with regard to justification and law-keeping in several important respects. First, because he views justification primarily as a process whereby the sinner is made righteous, Augustine develops an impressive way of reconciling this text with other statements of Paul which affirm that justification occurs without reference to works of the law—these latter statements simply refer to the ingressive aspect of justification, the operative moment at which the sinner receives the grace of the Holy Spirit and begins the process of transformation. On the contrary, passages such as Rom 2:13, in which Paul affirms the significance of works, provide Augustine with important points of contact in harmonizing Paul with James, a subject he takes up early in his career in an exegetical miscellany *On Eighty-Three Different Questions* (c. 388-96).<sup>41</sup> Paul and James do not contradict one another, Augustine argues, because “the former is speaking of the works which precede faith, whereas the latter, of those which follow on faith, just as even Paul

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which in some contexts he is willing to grant the term a broader range of meanings, as in his discussion of *iustificare* in *Spir. et litt.* 45 (see below).

<sup>41</sup> *Nam qui putant istam Jacobi apostoli sententiam contrariam esse illi pauli apostoli sententiae, possunt arbitrari etiam ipsum paulum sibi esse contrarium, quia dicit alio loco: non enim auditores legis iusti sunt apud deum, sed factores legis iustificabuntur. Div. quaest. 76; CCSL 44A:76.* Other passages Augustine cites in support of the Pauline insistence on good works include Gal 2:6, Rom 8:13, Gal 5:19-21, and 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

himself indicates in many places.”<sup>42</sup> Harmonizing the two apostles on the matter of justification would continue to be a major preoccupation of medieval interpreters, many of whom would follow Augustine’s lead in describing justification as a process independent of prior good works which nonetheless issues in their performance.

Second, Augustine is the first Western exegete I have been able to identify who wrestles seriously with the future tense of the verb in Rom. 2:13, forcing him to admit that the term *iustificare* may have more than one sense in Pauline usage. In his treatise *De spiritu et littera* of 412, a favorite of later Protestant exegetes,<sup>43</sup> Augustine provides what may be his most systematic treatment of the major theological themes in Romans.<sup>44</sup> In a manner consonant with his earlier discussions, Augustine here argues that justification is the source and ground of good works, not the other way around:

We must rather understand, *Those who observe the law will be justified* (Rom 2:13) so that we realize that they fulfilled the law only because they are justified. Thus justification does not follow upon the observance of the law; rather, justification precedes the observance of the law. What else, after all, does *justified* (Rom 3:24)

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<sup>42</sup> *Quapropter non sunt sibi contrariae duorum apostolorum sententiae, Pauli et Iacobi, cum dicit unus iustificari hominem per fidem sine operibus, et alius dicit inanem esse fidem sine operibus: quia ille dicit de operibus quae fidem praecedunt, iste de iis quae fidem sequuntur; sicut etiam ipse Paulus multis locis ostendit. Div. Quaest. 76; CCSL 44A:76; FotC 70:196.*

<sup>43</sup> Reinhart Staats, “Augustins ‘De spiritu et littera’ in Luthers reformatorischer Erkenntnis,” *ZKG* 98, no. 1 (1987): 28-47. I give extended treatment to Augustine’s Pauline exegesis in this text in Chapter 3.

<sup>44</sup> Paul W. Meyer, “Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter* as a Reading of Paul’s Romans,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 366-81.

mean but: made righteous by the one, of course, *who justifies sinners* (Rom 4:5), so that from sinners they become righteous?<sup>45</sup>

This is vintage Augustine. The problem, of course, is that the text does not say “being justified” (*iustificati*). It says “they will be justified” (*iustificabuntur*). But giving justification a future sense in this passage would utterly subvert the anti-Pelagian argument Augustine is making in this treatise, namely that “it is God who brings about in man the will to believe, and in all things his mercy anticipates us.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, if the doing of the law *precedes* justification, then it would appear that Paul is allowing human free will in its fallen state the decisive role in meriting grace. Clearly, this will not do. So Augustine proposes a second possible reading, one which preserves the unavoidable future tense of the verb but construes *iustificabuntur* in a sense much closer to the Greek δικαιωθήσονται:

Or it is certainly true that they *will be justified* in the sense that they will be regarded as righteous, that they will be counted as righteous. In that sense scripture says of a certain man, *But he wanting to justify himself* (Lk 10:29), that is, wanting to be regarded and counted as righteous. For this reason we say in one sense that God sanctifies his holy ones, and we say in another sense, *May your name be sanctified* (Mt 6:9). We use the former expression because he sanctifies those who were not holy, but we use the latter so that what is always holy in itself might be regarded as holy by human beings, that is, that they might have a holy fear of it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *sed sic intellegendum est factores legis iustificabuntur, ut sciamus aliter eos non esse factores legis, nisi iustificentur, ut non iustificatio factoribus accedat, sed ut factores iustificatio praecedat. Quid est enim aliud iustificati quam iusti facti, ab illo scilicet qui iustificat impium, ut ex impio fiat iustus? Spir. et litt. 45; CSEL 60:199; WSA I.23:178-79.*

<sup>46</sup> *profecto et ipsum velle credere Deus operatur in homine, et in omnibus misericordia ejus praevenit nos. Spir. et litt. 60; CSEL 60:220; cf. G. Bonner, “Spiritu et littera, de” in ATA, 816. On the anti-Pelagian thrust of this treatise, see the analysis in Chapter 3.*

<sup>47</sup> *aut certe ita dictum est iustificabuntur, ac si diceretur iusti habebuntur, iusti deputabuntur, sicut dictum est de quodam: ille autem uolens se iustificare, id est ut iustus haberetur et deputaretur. unde aliter dicimus deus sanctificat sanctos suos, aliter autem sanctificetur nomen tuum; nam illud ideo, quia ipse illos facit esse sanctos, qui non erant sancti, hoc autem ideo, ut quod semper apud se*

This is a tantalizing bit of exegesis, particularly because it is left undeveloped: Augustine simply suggests that *iustificare* might be here interpreted in a forensic sense (that is, as a simple declaration rather than a process) and then moves on to pick up the thread of an earlier line of argument regarding natural law. The connection Augustine draws between the use of *iustificare* here in Rom 2:13 and in Lk 10:29 is highly significant, referring as it does to an unambiguous use of the term in a purely declarative sense.<sup>48</sup> The lawyer, in asking Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” is clearly not transforming himself into a righteous man. Indeed, the irony of the story is that in wishing to justify himself, he is seen to be unjust, underscoring the purely locutionary character of the utterance. We must be careful to note, however, that Augustine’s use of the term in this forensic sense arises only in the context of justification as a *future* event, strongly suggesting that what is in view here is the eschatological judgment. This sense of the term does not necessarily militate against his normal, transformative construal of the term; rather it reinforces it by suggesting that at the last judgment there will be an accord between the faith and the works of

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*sanctum est sanctum etiam ab hominibus habeatur, id est sancte timeatur. Spir. et litt. 45; CSEL 60:199; WSA I.23:179.*

<sup>48</sup> In fact, the most recent edition of Walter Bauer’s *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (BDAG), the standard lexicon for NT and Patristic Greek, places Luke 10:29 at the top of the list of NT occurrences of δικαιοῦν under the sense “to render a favorable verdict, vindicate.” The fact that Augustine is capable of reading *iustificare* in this sense does not necessarily prove that he had consulted the Greek, but it does suggest rather strongly that he is quite capable of making sense of words in terms of their immediate context and working out semantic range by comparison across a broader set of occurrences, something attentive readers in every age have managed to do.

true believers.<sup>49</sup> Thus, “when God crowns our merits”—that is, when he pronounces just those who keep the law—“he crowns nothing but his own gifts.”<sup>50</sup>

In summarizing our discussion of Augustine’s use of Rom 2:13, we may observe that Augustine’s concept of justification was flexible enough to allow for at least three senses of the term. First and foremost, justification is for Augustine a transformative process, whereby God makes sinners to be righteous. This is the primary and governing sense of the term for Augustine, however it also permits—in fact, it demands—two corollary aspects, ingression and completion. The former comes to the fore especially in the context of Augustine’s dispute with Pelagius and his followers, where he argues that works of the law cannot precede justification, this in order to safeguard the primacy of God’s grace in human salvation (on which, more in Chapter 3). The latter comes to the fore not only in exegetical contexts where the grammar of Paul’s argument so constrains him, but also in his discussion of the end to which justification is ordained:

The reward of virtue will be God himself, who gave the virtue, together with the promise of himself, the best and greatest of all possible promises. [. . .] For all our

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<sup>49</sup> McGrath states: “There is no hint in Augustine of any notion of justification purely in terms of “reputing as righteous” or “treating as righteous”, as if this state of affairs could come into being without the moral or spiritual transformation of humanity through grace” (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47). This is correct so long as Augustine’s forensic reading of Rom 2:13 does not exclude his transformative reading, a conclusion I think warranted by the overall trajectory of Augustine’s teaching on justification, though he does not make the argument explicit in this context. It is important to underscore, however, that Augustine can speak of justification purely in terms of “reputing as righteous” *in combination with* the “moral or spiritual transformation of humanity through grace.”

<sup>50</sup> *cum Deus coronat merita nostra, nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua. Ep.* 194.5; CSEL 57:190.



good works, when they are understood as being his works, not ours, are then reckoned [*imputantur*] to us for the attainment of that Sabbath rest.<sup>51</sup>

Augustine's treatment of justification in his exegetical and polemical writings would prove to be of critical importance both for the medieval Catholic tradition and for the Reformation of the sixteenth century. But his legacy would always be a disputed one. Catholic theologians would emphasize the sanative and transformative aspects of Augustine's doctrine of justification, while Protestant theologians would capitalize on Augustine's anti-Pelagian rhetoric as an objection to any works-based conceptions of grace. In time, Protestants would come to the conclusion that Augustine's soteriological grammar was itself inadequate for their reconception of Paul's Gospel, but this realization would only emerge after a generation of evangelical exegetes had attempted to divest Augustinianism of a millennium's worth of reception history.

#### **1.4 Medieval Interpretations: A Sample**

Medieval commentators are virtually unanimous in viewing the first half of Romans 2 as referring to a final eschatological judgment in which both Christians and non-Christians will stand before the judgment seat of God to receive the due reward for their actions. Within this broad consensus, however, considerable variation remained in relating the notion of judgment according to works with the Pauline theme of salvation according to grace. In viewing the medieval discussions of the

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<sup>51</sup> *praemium uirtutis erit ipse, qui uirtutem dedit ei que se ipsum, quo melius et maius nihil possit esse, promisit. [. . .] nam et ipsa opera bona nostra, quando ipsius potius intelleguntur esse, non nostra, tunc nobis ad hoc sabbatum adipiscendum inputantur.* *Civ.* 22.30; CCSL 48; *City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1972), 1088, 90.

relationship between justification and law from the vantage point of Romans 2, we see the full range of patristic interpretive options represented and often developed in creative new ways. Many commentators continued the early patristic tradition of deploying Paul's language of law-keeping in parenetic or hortatory modes, rather than situating it within the context of Paul's soteriological argument. Thus, for example, in a homily on the risen Christ's encounter with his disciples on the Emmaus road (Lk 24), Gregory the Great uses Rom 2:13 as a hermeneutical key to give the narrative a tropological reading in which he urges his listeners to the exercise of a particular virtue, hospitality.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the most common approach, however, is the cut-and-paste pluralism of such exegetical annals as the *Glossa ordinaria* or Peter Lombard's *Magna Glossatura*, where different—sometimes even opposing—interpretations of a text are laid out one after another with little attempt to harmonize them. Consider, for example, the following entry from the *Gloss* explaining the term *factores legis* in Rom 2:13:

“. . . but the doers . . . .” That is, those who believe in Christ, whom the Law promised, whatever they are, because there is nothing but through grace.  
“. . . the doers of the law will be justified . . . .” That is, they will be considered righteous; or, they will be made righteous by God in order that they may practice the

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<sup>52</sup> Arguing for the importance of active hospitality in the lives of all Christians, Gregory observes that the disciples were not enlightened as to the identity of their companion on the road to Emmaus by means of hearing his discourse, but rather by serving him a meal: *Audiendo ergo praecepta Dei illuminati non sunt, faciendo illuminati sunt, quia scriptum est: Non auditores legis iusti sunt apud Deum, sed factores legis iustificabuntur*. The conclusion to be drawn, Gregory feels, is obvious: *Quisquis ergo vult audita intelligere, festinet ea quae iam intelligere potuit opere implere. Ecce Dominus non est cognitus dum loqueretur, et dignatus est cognosci dum pascitur. Hospitalitatem ergo, fratres carissimi, diligite, caritatis opera amate. Hom. ev. 2.23.2; CCSL 141:194.*

Law—not those who practiced the law before were “doers,” but rather they are “doers” after they are justified. . . .<sup>53</sup>

Here we have the views of Ambrosiaster and Augustine laid out side-by-side, with no indication that these two interpretations may stand in any sort of tension.

Ambrosiaster’s interpretation is softened somewhat by the replacement of the last clause, *et hoc est facere Legem* with a simple affirmation that the doing of the law must come through grace, *quod non est nisi per gratiam*.<sup>54</sup> The two interpretive options Augustine provides in *De spiritu et littera* 45 are summarized, but no attempt is made to adjudicate between them, and, interestingly enough, the eschatological context is completely stripped from the “forensic” reading (*iusti deputabuntur*).<sup>55</sup> The purpose of the *Gloss*, however, is not to settle theological questions exegetically, but rather to provide a set of sanctioned, authoritative readings which would serve to guide theological exegesis. Thus, it will come as no

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<sup>53</sup> *Sed factores. id est, qui credunt in Christum, quem lex promisit [Ambrosiaster], quicumque sint, quod non est nisi per gratiam. Factores legis iustificabuntur, id est, iusti deputabuntur, vel iusti fient a Deo ut sint factores: non qui ante erant factores post iustificabuntur [Augustine] . . . . Gl. ord., Rom. 2:13. Peter Lombard expands somewhat on these same options: Non enim auditores legis iusti sunt apud Deum, etsi apud homines, id est non pro auditu legis solo aliqui iusti sunt apud Deum; sed factores legis, id est illi qui legem opere implent [Ambrosiaster], scilicet qui credunt in Christum, quem lex promisit, quicumque sint quod quidem est per gratiam, iustificabuntur, id est iusti habebuntur, [Augustine] iusti deputabuntur apud Deum et homines. Collectanea in omnes d. pauli apostoli epistolas, in epistolam Romanos 2; PL 191:1344c.*

<sup>54</sup> *Non enim auditores Legis iusti sunt apud Deum, sed factores Legis iustificabuntur. Hoc dicit, quia non hi iusti sunt qui audiunt Legem, sed qui credunt in Christum, quem eadem Lex promisit: et hoc est facere Legem. In Epistolam ad Romanos, 2:13; CSEL 81.1, 75.*

<sup>55</sup> This option is remarked upon in passing by Luther in his *scholia* on Romans (WA 61:201).

surprise to find a number of medieval interpreters taking the Augustinian or the “Ambrosian” positions as starting points for further discussion.<sup>56</sup>

Some medieval commentators were quite content with these earlier Patristic harmonization. Denys the Carthusian, for example, a peripatetic mystic and church reformer of the fifteenth century, combines a forensic understanding of eschatological justification (along the lines laid out by Augustine and the *Glossa*) with a straightforwardly activist reading of Rom 2:13, read in harmony with James 2:20, Mt 7:26, and Lk 11:28: human beings, enabled by grace, fulfill the law, and God responds by reckoning them righteous on the last day.<sup>57</sup> William of St. Thierry adopts a similar variant of the Augustinian line, but he adds a teleological spin in arguing that “as a man is created in order that he may be a man, so the doer of the law is justified in order that he may be just, or that he may appear to be what he is in keeping the law, namely just.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> E. Ann Matter describes the *Glossa* as ‘a sort of encyclopedia of biblical exegesis,’ and contrasts its use with that of a ‘textbook’ such as Lombard’s *Sentences*. Matter, “The Church Fathers and the *Glossa Ordinaria*,” in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena D. Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 109.

<sup>57</sup> *iustificabuntur, id est, iusti erunt ac reputabuntur apud Deum. Nam et fides sine operibus mortua est [Js 2:20]. Et in Euangelio Christus testatur: Omnis qui audit uerba haec, et non facit ea, assimilabitur uiro stulto qui aedificauit domum suam supra arenam [Mt 7:26]; et alibi, Beati qui audiunt uerbum Dei, et custodiunt illud [Lk 11:28]. Ipsa ergo impletio legis per gratiam, ex qua procedit impletio, iustificat hominem, estque iustificatio eius. Enarrationes piae ac eruditae in omnes beati Pauli epistolae, ad Romanos, DCO 13:22.*

<sup>58</sup> *sicut creatur homo, ut sit homo, sic faciens legem iustificatur, ut sit iustus; uel esse appareat quod in faciendo est, id est iustus. Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos 2.2; PL 180:569d; Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans, trans. J. B. Hasbrouck, ed. J. D. Anderson (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 55.*

Many commentators, however, found this a difficult text to reconcile with other Pauline themes, despite the interpretive possibilities offered by the patristic tradition. Richard of St. Victor, in a short exegetical treatise entitled, *An Explication of Some of the Apostle's Difficult Passages*, gives sustained consideration to the problem of Paul's use of the language of law. The problem is posed quite starkly: it seems that when Paul says that no one will be justified by works of the law (Rom 3:20), "he is contrary to himself, contrary to reason, contrary to the truth, and, worse than all these, he is contrary to the teaching of his Lord."<sup>59</sup> Richard then proceeds to multiply biblical passages in which works and the law are affirmed in connection with salvation, beginning with Rom 2:13. The remainder of the treatise is concerned with reconciling these broad themes in a generally Augustinian direction, but his resolution of individual passages is often quite original. In explaining, for example, how it is that "the doers of the law will be justified," Richard draws a distinction between the law and legal works (*opera legalia*). The latter, clearly proscribed by Rom 3:20, refer to good works intended to secure right standing before God. The law itself, however, points to and promises Christ, in virtue of whom our sins are wiped out.<sup>60</sup> In stating that "the doers of the law will be justified," therefore, Paul is

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<sup>59</sup> *Uidetur namque esse contraries sibi ipse, contrarius rationi, contrarius ueritati, et quod his omnibus amplius est, sententiae ipsius Domini. Explicatio aliquorum passuum difficilium Apostoli; PL 196:666a.*

<sup>60</sup> *Certe quae in lege ad expiationem peccati immolabantur, in figura futurorum sacrificabantur. Name Christi passionem et merem in redemptionem peccatorum futuram praefigurabant, et eo ipso uirtutem expiationis et sanctificationis habebant. Ibid., PL 196:667d.*

not arguing that those who do *legal works* will be justified, but rather that love of God and neighbor fulfill the law through Christ.

### **1.5 Thomas Aquinas: *Iustificari tripliciter accipitur***

One of the most sophisticated treatments of Paul's language of justification in Romans 2 in the medieval period is found in Thomas Aquinas's *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>61</sup> Thomas begins his consideration of the passage with two of the standard intertextual connections, Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders (Mt 7:24-27) and James' exhortation to be doers of the word, rather than mere hearers (Js 1:22). Having thus established the fact that those who practice the law are just, Thomas concludes on the basis of Rom 3:20 that no one is justified *by the fact* that he performs works of the law.<sup>62</sup>

To explain this difficult formulation, Thomas argues that "being justified" (*iustificari*) can be understood in three different ways,<sup>63</sup> 1) *quantum ad*

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas' work a biblical exegete remains one of the most understudied areas of his thought. Most accounts of Thomas' theology derive mainly from the *summae* and his commentaries on Lombard and Aristotle. A number of recent studies in the last generation have sought to redress this lacuna, including W. G. B. M. Valkenberg, "'Did Not Our Heart Burn?': The Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Katholieke Theologische Universiteit Utrecht, 1990); Christopher T. Baglow, *'Modus Et Forma': A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura Super Epistolam Ephesios* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2002). The following studies have addressed Thomas' lectures on Romans in particular: Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "The Narrative of Natural Law in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans 1," *ThS* 59, no. 2 (1998); Mary C. Daly, "The Notion of Justification in the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Epistle to the Romans" (Dissertation, Marquette University, 1971); Thomas Domanyi, *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Thomas von Aquin: e. Beitr. zur Unters. seiner Auslegungsmethoden* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979).

<sup>62</sup> *Secundo astruit quod factores legis sunt iusti . . . Sed circa secundum uidetur esse quod infra [Rom 3:20], dicitur ex operibus legis iustificabuntur omnis caro coram eo. Non ergo alique ex hoc quod opera legis faciunt, iustificantur. Super Rom.. 2.2.*

<sup>63</sup> *Sed dicendum est quod iustificari tripliciter accipi potest. Ibid.*

*reputationem*, 2) *per executionem*, and 3) *quantum ad causam iustitiae*. So far as concerns *reputatio*, or “reckoning,” Thomas observes that to describe a man as “justified” is the same as to reckon him just, and to underscore the forensic character of this aspect, Thomas references Ez 16:51. Like Augustine in *De spiritu et littera*, Thomas here chooses an unambiguous example of a purely declaratory use of the verb to make his point. Thomas’ choice of the word *reputatio*, however, is also significant. Augustine, it will be remembered, had described this aspect as being “held” (*habere*) or “reckoned” (*deputare*) as righteous, and this language is echoed in the Gloss and in Lombard’s *Collectanea*.<sup>64</sup> Thomas, though clearly aware of Augustine’s discussion, uses a closely related word, but one with an important Pauline resonance in Gal 3:6: *Abraham credidit Deo et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam*. In his lectures on Galatians, Thomas describes this *reputatio* as an event which takes place *apud homines*, as it were, rather than *apud Deum*: “it is imputed to him as righteousness by men exteriorly, but interiorly it is given by God, who justifies those who have faith by remitting their sins through charity working in them.”<sup>65</sup> And thus we might be able to read his use of the term here, were it not for his statement, immediately following, that the doers of the law “will be reckoned just *before God and men*.”<sup>66</sup> In his lectures on Galatians, Thomas had been very careful to

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<sup>64</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 45; CSEL 60:199.

<sup>65</sup> *et quod ad iustitiam reputetur ei exterius ab hominibus, sed interius datur a Deo, qui eos qui habent fidem, per charitatem operantem iustificat, eis peccata remittendo. Super Gal. 3.3.*

<sup>66</sup> *Et secundum hoc potest intelligi factores legis iustificabuntur, id est, iusti apud Deum et homines reputabuntur. Super Rom.. 2.2.* Daly interprets “apud Deum et homines” as “either by God or by

distinguish between such reckoning “by men exteriorly” on the one hand and “interiorly,” “by God,” on the other. Yet here in Romans, they appear together. Thomas gives us no further explanation as to what he means here, but in light of our previous discussion of Augustine’s similar construal of *iustificabuntur* in this passage, we may suggest that what Thomas has in mind is the eschatological declaration whereby those who have persevered in grace will be reckoned righteous, or vindicated, before the throne of God and his servants. This use of the term does not correspond with Thomas’ ordinary use of *iustificare* as a theological *terminus technicus*, but this would simply indicate that Thomas is astute enough as an exegete to realize that Paul’s own language does not always correspond to the terminology of later theologians.<sup>67</sup>

Second, Thomas suggests that *iustificari* may refer to “the carrying out of justice [*executionem iustitiae*], inasmuch, that is, as works of justice follow.”<sup>68</sup> He

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men,” but no reasons are given for this idiosyncratic reading. She then interprets this *quantum ad reputationem* purely in terms of *reputatio* in human society (41-42).

<sup>67</sup> Thomas’ understanding of *iustificatio* involves two basic senses. First, “in its passive sense justification implies a movement towards justice, just as heating implies a movement towards heat.” This sense of justification makes no reference *per se* to sin, but rather to the source of justice, God: “in this sense justification might be appropriate even for someone who was not in sin, so long as he received this kind of justice from God; thus Adam is said to have received original justice.” The second sense of the term, however, applies more properly to a redemptive context: “There is a second way in which this kind of justice can come about in man, and this is by that kind of movement or transition which is from contrary to contrary. And in this sense justification implies a kind of transformation from the state of injustice to the state of justice in the sense defined. It is in this sense that we speak here of the justification of the unrighteous, according to the text from Paul, ‘To the one who does not work but who believes in him who justifies the unrighteous,’ etc.” *ST* 1a2ae, q. 113, a. 1. Cf. Bannach, “Die Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen bei Thomas von Aquin,” 136-53; Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas.”

<sup>68</sup> *Secundo, per executionem iustitiae, in quantum scilicet opera iustitiae exequentur. Super Rom. 2.2.*



then refers to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, where Christ affirms that the penitent sinner “went down to his home justified [*iustificatus*]” (Lk 18:14). The reason for this, Thomas explains, is that “the publican had performed a work of justice by confessing his sins.”<sup>69</sup> The saying, “the doers of the law will be justified,” therefore, simply means that the justice of the law must follow.<sup>70</sup> This rather enigmatic formulation is illuminated by a further explanation of this text Thomas provides in the *Summa Theologiae*. As a point of entry into the question of whether the moral precepts of the old law could justify, Thomas observes that the affirmative seems to be the case, on account of Paul’s statement in Rom 2:13.<sup>71</sup> Against this objection is set Augustine’s interpretation of Paul’s statement “the letter kills” as applying to the moral precepts of the law: “Therefore, these did not effect justification.” Thomas’ *responsio* makes an important distinction, which is worth quoting here at length:

We call healthy primarily and strictly what possesses health, secondarily what is a sign of health or preserves it. In the same way, justification primarily and strictly means bringing about justice, secondarily, and somewhat loosely, it can be used of signifying justice or of a disposition to justice. Taken in the last two ways, the precepts of the Law clearly brought about justification; inasmuch, that is, as they disposed men to receive the justifying grace of Christ, which they also signified. As Augustine says, “The life also of that people foretold and prefigured Christ.” If,

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<sup>69</sup> *descendit hic iustificatus in domum suam, quia scilicet publicanus opus iustitiae fecerat confitendo peccatum.* Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *Et hoc modo uerificatur quod hic dicitur factores legis iustificabuntur, scilicet legis iustitiam exequendo.* Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *Uidetur quod praecepta morali ueteris legis iustificarent. Dicit enim Apostolus, Non enim auditores legis iusti sunt apud Deum, sed factores legis iustificabuntur. Sed factores legis dicuntur qui implet praecepta legis, Ergo praecepta legis ad impleta iustificabant.* ST IaIIae, q. 100, a. 12, obj. 1.

however, we take justification in the strict sense, justice may be predicated either of a habitual disposition or of individual acts; and accordingly justification may be taken two ways. First, according as a man becomes just through acquiring the disposition of justice; secondly, according as he performs acts of justice, and here justification is simply the carrying out of justice.<sup>72</sup>

Taking *iustificatio* in the strict sense, then, it can refer either to a *habitus* or an *actus*.

The former may be either acquired or infused, but only an infused *habitus* makes one truly just before God. Because such an infusion is the gift of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be brought about by human action; thus in this sense, the precepts of the moral law cannot make one just *apud Deum*. Nevertheless, when we consider *iustificatio* as an *actus*, then, Thomas argues, “all the precepts of the Law wrought justification.”<sup>73</sup> This is what Thomas believes Paul is saying in Rom 2:13: “the doers of the law carry out of justice.”<sup>74</sup> This is an aspect of justification strictly construed—that is, it is not merely concerned with preparation for or signification of justice—but it is still not justification in the sight of God.

In what way, then, does the doing of the law constitute justification? First, by obeying the precepts of the law, one avoids the penalty for their violation, which

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<sup>72</sup> *Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut sanum proprie et primo dicitur quod habet sanitatem, per posterius autem quod significat sanitatem, uel quod conseruat sanitatem; ita iustificatio primo et proprie dicitur ipsa factio iustitiae; secundo uero, et quasi improprie, potest dici iustificatio significatio iustitiae, uel dispositio ad iustitiam. Quibus duobus modis manifestum est quod praecepta legis iustificabant, in quantum scilicet disponebant homines ad gratiam Christi iustificantem, quam etiam significabant; quia sicut dicit Augustinus, contra Faustum, etiam uita illius populi prophetica erat, et Christi figuratiua. Sed si loquamur de iustificatione proprie dicta, sic considerandum est quod iustitia potest accipi prout est in habitu, uel prout est in actu: et secundum hoc, iustificatio dupliciter dicitur. Uno quidem modo, secundum quod homo fit iustus adipiscens habitum iustitiae. Alio uero modo, secundum quod oper iustitiae operatur: ut secundum hoc iustificatio nihil aliud sit quam iustitiae executio. ST IaIIae, q. 100, a. 12.*

<sup>73</sup> *Se uero accipiatur iustificatio pro executione iustitiae, sic omnia praecepta legis iustificabant. Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ad primam ergo dicendum quod Apostolus accipit ibi iustificationem pro executione iustitiae. Ibid.*

is death.<sup>75</sup> Second, “the precepts of human law bring about acquired justice.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, the “doers of the law” obtain “a kind of justice [*quaedam iustitia*]” which avoids vice and establishes virtue, yet it is not “wherof to glory” (Rom 4:2) because it is only the infused *habitus iustitiae* which renders one just before God, not the *actus iusti* which follow therefrom. To return to the example of the penitent publican, he returned home “justified,” in Thomas’ view, in the sense that his just deed of confession was a “carrying out of justice.” This act did not “earn” him right standing before God—he either had this already due to an infused *habitus*, or his deed merely allowed him to avoid punishment for breaking certain commands and helped to establish an acquired disposition to justice. This is the second aspect, then, by which “the doers of the law will be justified.”

There is one more way in which Thomas suggests that the term *iustificari* may be understood, but it is not a live option in this context.

The third way in which justification may be taken concerns the cause of justice, with the result, that is, that it is said that the one is justified who receives justice *de novo*, as in Rom 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” However it is not understood thus in this instance, that the doers of the law should be justified, as if through the works of they law they might acquire justice. This, indeed, cannot be the case, either as regards ceremonial works, which do not confer justifying grace, nor as regards moral works, from which the habit of justice may not be acquired; but rather through the infused habit of justice such works are performed.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Homo faciens praecepta legis dicitur uiuere in eis, quia non incurrebat poenam mortis, quam lex transgressoribus infligebat.* Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> *Praecepta legis humanae iustificant iustitia acquisita.* Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> *Tertio modo potest accipi iustificatio quantum ad causam iustitiae, ut scilicet ille dicatur iustificari qui iustitiam de nouo accipit, sicut infra V, 1: iustificati igitur ex fide, et cetera. Sic autem non intelligitur hic quod factores legis iustificentur, quasi per opera legis iustitiam acquirant. Hoc quidem esse non potest neque quantum ad opera caeremonialia, quae gratiam iustificantem non*

This last option, then, considers *iustificatio* as an infused *habitus*. We have seen that Thomas can speak of justification either as an *actus* or a *habitus*, and this distinction corresponds to another important distinction which lies at the heart of Thomas' understanding of grace, that between *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens*. Justification may be considered as an *actus*, that is, as a gracious gift freely bestowed (also known as "actual grace"), but yet have no essential relationship to the recipient's ultimate salvation. It may result from a naturally acquired *habitus*, or it may simply be a transient gift of the Spirit, who listeth where He will.<sup>78</sup> More excellent than these gifts, however, is the infusion of a supernatural *habitus* of grace, which not only issues in just deeds but actually makes a man just by ordering him to his ultimate end.<sup>79</sup> But this is precisely what Paul does *not* have in view when he

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*conferebant; neque etiam quantum ad moralia, ex quibus habitus iustitiae non acquiritur, sed potius per habitum iustitiae infusum huiusmodi opera facimus. Super Rom. 2.3. Cf. ST IaIIae, q. 100, a. 12: Nam praecepta caeremonialia continebant quidem iustitiam secundum se in generali, prout scilicet exhibebantur in cultum Dei, in speciali vero non continebant secundum se iustitiam, nisi ex sola determinatione legis divinae. Et ideo de huiusmodi praeceptis dicitur quod non iustificabant nisi ex devotione et obedientia facientium. Praecepta vero moralia et iudicialia continebant id quod erat secundum se iustum vel in generali, vel etiam in speciali. Sed moralia praecepta continebant id quod est secundum se iustum secundum iustitiam generalem quae est omnis virtus, ut dicitur in V Ethic. Praecepta vero iudicialia pertinebant ad iustitiam specialem, quae consistit circa contractus humanae vitae, qui sunt inter homines ad invicem.*

<sup>78</sup> McGrath describes this grace as follows: "Actual grace, *gratia gratis data*, may be conceived as a series of transient effluxes of divine power or influence, given over and above the realm of nature, which impinge upon human will in order to incline it or assist it to particular actions." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 138.

<sup>79</sup> *Apostolus, in ad Cor. XII, enumeratis gratiis gratis datis, subdit, adhuc excellentiorem viam vobis demonstro, et sicut per subsequencia patet, loquitur de caritate, quae pertinet ad gratiam gratum facientem. Ergo gratia gratum faciens excellentior est quam gratia gratis data. Respondeo dicendum quod unaquaeque virtus tanto excellentior est, quanto ad altius bonum ordinatur. Semper autem finis potior est his quae sunt ad finem. Gratia autem gratum faciens ordinat hominem immediate ad coniunctionem ultimi finis. Gratiae autem gratis datae ordinant hominem ad quaedam praeparatoria finis ultimi, sicut per prophetiam et miracula et alia huiusmodi homines inducuntur ad hoc quod*

affirms that “the doers of the law will be justified,” because this would imply that the *habitus* of grace is the effect of human law keeping, rather than its cause.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Patristic and medieval exegetes were virtually unanimous in reading Romans 2 as affirming a tight connection between eschatological justification and law-keeping. Paul’s warning that God will “render to each according to his works” (ἀποδώσει ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ, 2:6) evoked strong resonances from the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Prov 24:12), as well as from more recent Jewish literature.<sup>80</sup> But for Christian exegetes in third and fourth centuries, it also provided a point of contact with notions of justice in wide currency among educated citizens of the Roman empire. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that figures such as Origen and Augustine should interpret these texts in conversation with Hellenistic assumptions regarding justice as chief among the virtues. The language of virtue, after all, gave Christian exegetes a term which could serve as an intermediary between the strict demands of justice, on the one hand, and inadequacy of human action, on the other. So far as I am aware, no significant Pauline exegete in the Western tradition—and certainly none of those surveyed in this chapter—interprets the warning that God will “render to each according to his works” to indicate that the eternal fate of a Christian’s soul will

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*ultimo fini coniungantur. Et ideo gratia gratum faciens est multo excellentior quam gratia gratis data. ST IaIIae, q. 111, a. 5.*

<sup>80</sup> For more on the Jewish background to this passage, see Roman Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeichen: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum*, WUNT 2.9 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 171-76.

hang on the outcome of a strict reckoning of deeds.<sup>81</sup> Rather, early Christian exegetes tended to read “works” as *indicia* of an inner state transformed by grace and to insist that it was this inner state which served as the ultimate basis for God’s final justification of the believer at the Last Judgment. There persisted some diversity of opinion throughout the middle ages as to what the mediating term might be—virtue and faith were both construed as qualities in the soul which could mediate between God’s grace and human action, the development of traditions stemming back to Origen and Ambrose, respectively. For virtually all medieval theologians, however, these different ways of construing the inner principle which transformed the *iniustus* to *iustus* were bounded by a more or less Augustinian understanding of grace, such that the virtue or faith which undergirds human action and ultimately “merits” eternal reward is viewed itself as a gift of God: “when God crowns our merits he crowns nothing but his own gifts.” This assumption was the starting point for evangelical exegetes in the sixteenth century as well, but as we shall see, it was developed in a radically different direction.

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<sup>81</sup> Protestant criticisms of medieval theology in the sixteenth century were often aimed against what the reformers took to be the “correlation between merit and reward on which the Sophists rudely insist” (Calvin, *Inst.*, 3.18.4), though most recognized that this “correlation” was nothing so simple as a strict tally of good deeds. Many Protestant popularizers however, writing in the vernacular, insisted on characterizing the Catholic view as one involving a “justification by works” or “works-righteousness,” and it became a common rhetorical trope to lump Roman Catholic and Anabaptist views together under these latter headings. For a particularly scathing example of such rhetoric, see John Bale’s *A mysterye of iniquyte contayned within the heretycall genealogye of Ponce Pantolabus, is here both dysclosed & confuted* . . . (Geneva, 1545), esp. 53ff.

## Chapter 2: Two Kinds of Righteousness: Rhetorical Criticism and Proleptic Judgment in Early Protestant Exegesis

The emergence of a confessional Protestant soteriology did not happen overnight, nor was it simply the inevitable result of a startling new insight into the meaning of a particular word or concept. Rather, what emerged in the generation after Luther's theological "breakthrough" was a thoroughgoing revision of the way Western theologians had traditionally understood Paul. This revision involved not only the reevaluation of central concepts such as the *iustitia Dei*, but at a deeper level, it involved a radical reconstruction of the flow of Paul's argument in the epistle as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the first half of Romans 2, where Paul appeals to commonly held notions of divine justice in arguing for God's impartiality between Jew and Greek.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 1, I argued that Patristic and medieval commentators had viewed this passage as affirming a tight connection between eschatological justification and the keeping of the law, a connection that was mediated, nevertheless, by

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<sup>1</sup> Some hint at this process is given in Luther's account of his *Durchbruch*, when his new insight into Rom 1:17 revealed "a totally other face of the entire Scripture." In "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," LW 34:337; WA 54:186.9-10. For more on this, see Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> The principle of exact retribution Paul articulates in 2:5 is nearly a verbatim quote of Prov 24:12 (LXX); cf. also Job 34:11, Jer 17:10, Hos 12:2, Sir 16:12-13.

intermediary terms such as grace, faith, and virtue. Protestant exegesis radically reconceived the thrust of this passage. Instead of viewing the text as pointing to the eschatological climax of the Christian's pilgrimage, Protestants argued that Paul was setting the stage for his doctrine of justification by faith alone by outlining a hypothetical alternative: *if* anyone were to seek glory, honor, and immortality by patiently doing good, God would surely give eternal life to such a one. As Paul's appeal to the Old Testament in the following chapter makes clear (3:10-19), however, no one ever does this. It is perfectly true, therefore, that "the doers of the law will be justified" (2:13)—if there were any—but for Protestants this is an empty set: "there is no one righteous, no, not one" (3:10). This does not mean that Protestants wholly ignored the force of this text as a warning, however. Even as they relativized the passage with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith, Protestant exegetes acknowledged that God does reward the good works of the justified. What is more, this interpretation did not materialize all at once. Early Lutheran and Reformed exegetes took a wide variety of approaches to this text for almost a generation before a hybrid position emerged in the writings of Philipp Melancthon and John Calvin in the early 1540's. And as I shall demonstrate in what follows, this exegetical convergence represented not the wholesale abandonment of traditional interpretation, but rather a synthesis of medieval and patristic views with a revolutionary new law-gospel hermeneutic derived from Martin Luther.



## 2.1 Divergent Trajectories in Early Evangelical Exegesis

In the early decades of the sixteenth century, an Augustinian friar named Martin Luther made the observation that if love of God and neighbor fulfill the law, then justification must come through the law after all, because what the law commands is nothing other than love. But for fallen human beings whose desires are curved in on themselves, love of God and neighbor is impossible. Our lack of love is precisely the problem—it cannot, therefore, be the solution. This was fundamentally a spiritual and religious problem for Luther, but he found a way out through his reading of the Bible—specifically of Paul. Justification through love plainly was not the answer—but Paul speaks of justification by faith.

At the same time Luther was grappling with Paul in the midst of his own existential crises, away in the south of the empire peasants and parish priests were also busy rethinking the Gospel in light of a renewed emphasis on scripture. Demand for a “pure gospel,” untainted by human additions, was at the heart of this “communal reformation,” both in the countryside and in the cities.<sup>3</sup> Though resonating with Luther’s attack on the indulgence trade and subsequent critique of the Catholic sacramental system, reformers in cities such as Zurich and Strasbourg soon adapted his rhetoric of justification to their own context.<sup>4</sup> These upper German

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1992), 73.

<sup>4</sup> The first to note this “filtering” of Luther’s message through contextual filters was Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1982), 89.

and Swiss leaders of the nascent Reformed tradition quickly developed their own reappraisal of Paul's letters, one aimed at liberating their communities from episcopal regulation while at the same time preserving a strong communal identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that these reformers read Paul with a markedly less antithetical view of the law and its role in human salvation.

Throughout the 1520's and 1530's, exegesis of Romans 2 developed along markedly different trajectories in Wittenberg and in the cities in the south of the empire. Lutheran exegesis downplayed the notion of future judgment in order to secure the individual believer's assurance of salvation. Reformed exegesis, on the other hand, maintained a clear emphasis on accountability before the judgment seat of God, but harmonized this traditional trope by developing the exegesis of Augustine and Ambrosiaster in creative new ways. Before detailing the divergence of these two exegetical schools, however, we must first take stock of the where Protestant exegesis of Paul began—with Luther.

### **2.1.1 Luther's Early Lectures on Romans (1515)**

Both Martin Luther and Huldreich Zwingli lectured on Paul's letter to the Romans, though neither ever published his exegesis in the form of a commentary.<sup>5</sup> More importantly for our purposes, neither seems to have exerted a decisive influence on

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<sup>5</sup> Luther lectured on Romans from the spring of 1515 to the fall of 1516. A copy of the *glossa* and *scholia* in Luther's own hand has survived, along with a number of student notebooks from the lectures. The former were long believed to have perished, until they surfaced in a public display case at the Royal Library in Berlin marking the tercentenary of Luther's death in 1846. They were finally edited by Johannes Ficker and published in the Weimar Edition of Luther's works in 1938 (vol. 56). The student notebooks (*Vorlesungshefte/Nachschriften*) were published the following year (vol. 57).

the interpretation of Romans primarily through his exegetical labors. When compared with the fuller and more sophisticated commentaries of the 1530's, the annotations of both Luther and Zwingli appear as transitional pieces, leaning heavily on prior patristic and medieval exegetical traditions while searching for new terms in which to recast the message of the epistle.

Luther's lecture notes on Romans 2 give scant evidence of any real tension with traditional readings of judgment according to works. In this text he clearly regards Paul as describing an actual eschatological event in which God will judge all human beings—both Christians and non-Christians—according to their deeds. His interlinear glosses actually serve to heighten the dramatic effect of Paul's argument, emphasizing the finality of the judgment and its awful consequences for those individuals whose works do not measure up:

*But by, that is, through, your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up, heaping up, for yourself, your very own self, wrath, the punishment of the wrath of God, on the day of wrath, the Last Day, and of the revelation, when everything will be revealed and will remain thus revealed forever and, of the just judgment of God, which will stand forever. Who will render, at that time, namely, to every man, to the good and to the evil, according to his works.*<sup>6</sup>

There is no hint here that this passage may stand in tension with the theme of justification by faith in the following chapter, a remarkable departure from traditional exegesis in light of Luther's stark elaboration of the passive righteousness

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<sup>6</sup> *Secundum autem i. e. per duriciam tuam et impenitens cor thesaurizas cumulas tibi ipsi iram penas irae Dei in die irae nouissimo et reuelationis vbi omnia reuelabuntur et ita reuelata in aeternum manebunt | et | iusti iudicii dei. quod in aeternum stabit Qui reddit [redd]et tunc scil. unicuique bono et malo secundum opera eius. WA 56 :19.16-20.4; LW 25:17.*

of God in his *scholion* on Rom 1:17. Moreover, Luther shows virtually no concern to reconcile Paul with himself, in the manner of the medieval exegetes.

We may get some idea as to why this is the case in his gloss on 2:13, where traditional exegesis is blended with Luther's evolving view of justification to novel effect. Luther glosses *iusti sunt apud deum* as *iusti reputantur a Deo*, language which will become characteristic of the later Protestant *Rechtfertigungslehre*, though as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, its application in this context is hardly novel. In a marginal note, however Luther explains that

“To be righteous before God” is the same as “to be justified in the presence of God.” A man is not considered righteous by God because he is righteous; but because he is considered righteous by God, therefore he is righteous, as we read later in chapter 4. But no one is looked upon as righteous except the one fulfills the Law in deed, and no one fulfills the Law except the man who believes Christ. Thus the apostle intends to conclude that outside of Christ no one is righteous, no one fulfills the Law, as he explains in the following chapter.<sup>7</sup>

This exegesis gathers together a number of exegetical moves which we have already seen in the earlier tradition: with Augustine and Thomas, Luther regards Paul as describing an eschatological *actus Dei forensis in foro coeli*. In contrast with previous interpreters, however, Luther resists the conclusion that this final judgment is based on works or personal virtue: “A man is not considered (*reputatur*) righteous by God because he is righteous; but because he is considered (*reputatur*) righteous by God, therefore he is righteous.” As Hamm and others have noted, this relational

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<sup>7</sup> *Idem enim est 'Iustum esse apud Deum' et 'Iustificari apud Deum'. Non enim, quia Iustus est, ideo reputatur a Deo, Sed quia reputatur a Deo, ideo Iustus est, ut infra c. 4. Nullus autem reputatur Iustus, nisi qui legem opere implet. Nullus autem implet, nisi qui in Christum credit. Et sic Apostolus intendit concludere, Quod extra Christum nullus est Iustus, nullus legem implet, ut capitulo sequenti. WA 56.1:22.24-29; LW 25:19.*

view of righteousness as constituted by God’s gracious acceptance is one of the key insights developed by Luther.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Luther is unwilling at this point to back away from the language of law-keeping altogether, and it is here that the notion of faith (*credere*) serves as a sort of stop-gap explanation. “No one is looked upon as righteous except the one fulfills the Law in deed,” Luther allows, but no one does this “except the man who believes in Christ” (*nisi qui in Christum credit*).<sup>9</sup> As we have seen, the *Glossa ordinaria* had offered two different explanations for how faith fulfills the law, stemming from the exegesis of Ambrosiaster and Augustine. Luther cites from the Gloss extensively in his lectures on Romans and was no doubt aware of these interpretations. Although he does not explicitly identify his source here, his argument that no one fulfills the law *nisi qui in Christum credit* closely echoes the language of the Gloss, which in turn transmits Ambrosiaster’s view that the doers of the law are simply “those who believe in Christ” (*qui credunt in Christum*).<sup>10</sup> But Augustine’s position, also transmitted in the Gloss, would seem to be excluded—or at least rendered superfluous—by Luther’s suggestion that the *reputatio Dei* is synthetic, rather than analytic, of righteousness.

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<sup>8</sup> Hamm, “Reformation Doctrine,” 194.

<sup>9</sup> Compare this terse explanation with the gloss given by Luther’s near-contemporary, John Colet: “But in this place it must be remarked, that St. Paul means not that the Gentiles, or any Gentile man, had lived rightly without the Law; since beyond doubt his opinion is that no one lives rightly or can be righteous, save by faith in Christ (*neminem nisi ex fide Christi recte vivere, et iustum esse posse*).” *Romans* (1497), Lupton, 4, 138.

<sup>10</sup> *Sed factores. id est, qui credunt in Christum, quem lex promisit, quicumque sint, quod non est nisi per gratiam. Gl. ord., Rom. 2:13.*

There is no hint of this tension in the *Scholia*, however, where Luther explicitly cites *De spiritu et littera*, ostensibly in support of his own position:

This passage is interpreted in a twofold way by blessed Augustine in chapter 26 of *On the Spirit and the Letter*. First in this way: The doers of the Law will be justified means that through justification they will become, or be made, what they were not before, doers. Second, and in a better way, will be justified means that they will be looked upon (*habebuntur*) and thought of (*deputabuntur*) as righteous, as stated in the gloss.<sup>11</sup>

Taken on its own, there is nothing particularly surprising in Luther's preference for one Augustinian reading over another, but set alongside his preference for a synthetic notion of justification in the glosses, it would seem that Luther is reading Augustine rather idiosyncratically. Augustine, as I have argued, only opts for this forensic construal of *iustificari* in the context of an eschatological judgment—an analytic pronouncement whereby God declares righteous those who have already been transformed from *iniustus* into *iustus* because that is what they truly now are. Luther explicitly denies this interpretation in the glosses, but in the *scholia* he seizes on Augustine's forensic language, ignoring the eschatological context. None of this would have been apparent to his students, however, as the *scholia* (and the *Nachschriften*) omit any reference to this most innovative aspect of Luther's interpretation. In other words, in his public lectures Luther simply presents two

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<sup>11</sup> *Hoc B. Augustinus c. 26. de spi. et lit. dupliciter. Primo sic: 'Factores legis Iustificabuntur' i. e. per Iustificationem fient siue creabuntur, vt sint factores, quales ante Iustificationem non fuerunt. Secundo et melius 'Iustificabuntur' i. e. Iusti habebuntur et deputabuntur, vt in glosa dictum est.* WA 56.1:201.10-14 ; LW 25:184. The exposition in the *Nachschriften* is virtually identical; cf., WA 57.1:145.5-14. Luther's terms here, *habebuntur* and *deputabuntur*, suggest that he may in fact be conflating two "glosses," the *Glossa ordinaria* and Lombard's *Magna glossatura: Factores legis iustificabuntur, id est, iusti deputabuntur, vel iusti fient a Deo ut sint factores: non qui ante erant factores post iustificabuntur. Gl. ord., Rom. 2:13. Iustificabuntur, id est iusti habebuntur, iusti deputabuntur apud Deum et homines.* PL 191:1344c.

time-honored Augustinian readings of this difficult text and expresses a mild preference for one over the other. It is only in his private notes on the text that we can discern a tendency to push this language in an altogether different direction.

Luther's early lectures on Romans are clearly a transitional work. Several of his characteristic departures from medieval theology are on display here, including his notion of the passive righteousness of God and his understanding of justification as a synthetic judgment, one which constitutes the human as righteous rather than crowns his or her merits. Yet these revolutionary notions are developed almost in passing within the context of an exegetical treatment of the Last Judgment remarkable only for its conventionality. Nowhere does Luther raise any objection against the traditional view that Christians will face an eschatological reckoning; on the contrary, his *scholion* on 2:7-13 capitalizes on the dire warnings of judgment to exhort his hearers to long-suffering patience. As we shall see, the notion of a final judgment according to works soon becomes deeply problematic for most Protestant thinkers—Luther especially. But here, it would seem that Luther's exegesis of justification is still inchoate, its implications for the doctrine of the Last Judgment yet to be fully worked out. Eventually, Luther would “abolish” altogether the notion of an eschatological judgment for believers, a direct consequence of his new teaching on justification.<sup>12</sup> It is unlikely, however, that his students in 1515-16

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<sup>12</sup> In a sermon preached in September of 1538, for example, Luther comforted his hearers with the assurance that “the judgment is abolished (*auffgehoben*); it concerns the believer as little as it does the angels . . . All believers pass from this life into heaven without any judgment (*ohne Gericht ins himmelreich*)” (*WA* 47:102.39, 103.36). This reconception of the last judgment in Reformation theology has gone largely unremarked by historians of Christian doctrine; the corresponding shift in

would have found anything exceptional in Luther's exposition aside from his complete lack of interest in the traditional exercises in reconciling this passage with Romans 3.

### **2.1.2 Early Lutheran Exegesis of Romans: Melanchthon (1522) and Bugenhagen (1527)**

At least five different commentaries on Romans were published under Melanchthon's name during his lifetime.<sup>13</sup> Luther had surreptitiously printed a set of lectures given by his younger colleague on Romans and the Corinthian correspondence in 1522.<sup>14</sup> Though they were reprinted at least ten times in the next three years, Melanchthon himself was never satisfied with these annotations, despite the high praise of Luther.<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1528, Melanchthon began a new set of lectures on Romans, focusing this time on the structure and outline of the text. The first five chapters of this work were published in May of the following year, the completed outline in February of 1530.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after his return from Augsburg in

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visual culture, however, has not escaped the notice of art historians. See the perceptive analysis in Craig Harbison, *The Last Judgment in Sixteenth Century Northern Europe: A Study of the Relation between Art and the Reformation* (New York: Garland, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> The following paragraph is dependent on the summary in Timothy J. Wengert, "The Biblical Commentaries of Philip Melanchthon," in *Philip Melanchthon (1487-1560) and the Commentary*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 133-39.

<sup>14</sup> *Annotationes Philippi Melanchthonis in Epistolas Pauli ad Romanos et Corinthios* (Nuremberg: Stuchs, 1522); reproduced in CR 15:441-92.

<sup>15</sup> MBW 230 (T1:476-77). My analysis of the text is based on a 1524 reprint from the same press, available in the Special Collections Library at Duke University. As far as I can tell, this is a reproduction of the same text first printed two years earlier; accordingly, I will refer to it as *Romans* (1522), or simply as the *Annotationes*.

<sup>16</sup> *Dispositio orationis in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Wittenberg: Klug, 1530).



1530, Melanchthon began lecturing on Romans again, this time focusing on the theology of the epistle, rather than merely its rhetorical structure. The completed commentary was published in August of 1532, accompanied by a dedicatory epistle to Archbishop Albert of Mainz.<sup>17</sup>

The 1530's were something of a golden era for exegesis of Romans.<sup>18</sup>

Following Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*, a steady stream of exegesis followed from Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic scholars: Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Caietan and Francis Titelmann the same year;<sup>19</sup> Bullinger and Jean de Gagny in 1533;<sup>20</sup> Erasmus, with an update of his wildly popular *Annotationes* in 1535, as well as Jacopo Sadoletto;<sup>21</sup> Martin Bucer and Philibert Haresche in 1536;<sup>22</sup> the Lutheran Johannes Lonicer published in 1537 a collection of glosses culled from the writings

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<sup>17</sup> *Commentarii in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Wittenberg: Klug, 1532); reproduced in MSA 5.

<sup>18</sup> Indispensable for study of the Pauline interpretation in this decade is Parker, *Commentaries on Romans*, 37. The list in the following paragraph is culled mainly from Parker's study and is limited to new publications; for a fuller listing of reprints year-by-year throughout the decade, consult Parker, 1-83.

<sup>19</sup> Caietan, *Epistolae Pauli et Aliorum Apostolorum ad Graecam veritatem castigatae* (Paris: Badius, 1532); Titelmann, *Elucidatio in omnes epistolas apostolicas*. . . (Antwerp: Hillenium, 1532); Parker notes that this claims to be a third edition, but is unable to locate any previous editions extant (*Commentaries on Romans*, 13).

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *In sanctissimam pavli ad romanos Epistolam, Heinrychi Bullingeri Commentarius* (Zurich: Frosch, 1533); Jean de Gagny, *Epitome paraphrastica enarrationum in Epistolam divi Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos* (Paris: Vascosan, 1533), also an update of a previous work: *Brevissima et facillima in omnes d. Pauli epistolas scholia* (Paris, 1529).

<sup>21</sup> Erasmus, *In Novum Testamentum Annotationes* (Basel: Froben, 1535); Sadoletto, *In Pauli epistolam ad Romanos commentariorum libri tres* (Lyon: Gryphius, 1535 [DLCR]).

<sup>22</sup> Bucer, *Metaphrases et enarrationes perpetuae epistolarum d. Pauli Apostoli. Tomus primus continens metaphrasim et enarrationem in Epistolam ad Romanos* (Strasbourg: Rihel, 1536); Haresche, *Expositio tum dilucida, tum brevis epistolae divi Pauli ad Romanos cum definitionibus vocum difficiliorum, & acceptionum adnotatione*. . . (Paris: Parvun & le Preux, 1536).

of the early Greek fathers;<sup>23</sup> Johannes Brenz in 1538;<sup>24</sup> Conrad Pellican in 1539;<sup>25</sup> Calvin in 1540.<sup>26</sup>

By the late 1530's, Melanchthon was at work on another treatment of Romans. In a letter to Brenz in the fall of 1538, Melanchthon explained, "I do not wish to give birth to any new dogmas, but rather to uphold the simple and consistent doctrine and method which I observe in the *Loci communes* and which I observed in the prior edition of *Romans*."<sup>27</sup> In March of 1540, the Strasbourg printer Krafft Müller published Melanchthon's *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, This Year 1540 Revised and Expanded by the Author, Philip*

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<sup>23</sup> *Veteris cuiuspiam theologi Graeci succincta in d. Pauli ad Romanos Epistolam exegesis* (Basel: Robert Winter, 1537).

<sup>24</sup> *Explicatio Epistolae Pauli ad Romanos. 12 Septembris anno 1538. D[omino] I[oanne] B[rentio] auctore* (Schwäbisch Hall, 1538); reprinted in JBW 2.1. Jean d Gagny also issued a revised version of his commentary in this same year, *Divi Pavli Apostoli Epistolae/Breuissimis & facillimis scholiis* (Paris: Colinaeum & Galliotum, 1538).

<sup>25</sup> *In Omnes Apostolicas Epistolas, Pauli, Petri, Iacobi, Ioannis et Iudae D. Chuonradi Pellicani. . .* (Zürich: Froschauer, 1539).

<sup>26</sup> *Ioannis Calvini Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Strasbourg: Rihel, 1540). The content of this early edition can be accessed in T. H. L. Parker's excellent critical editions, which reconstruct the successive stages of revision in the editions of 1540, 1551, and 1556: SHCT 22 and COE 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Nolo enim nova dogmata gignere, sed simplicem et consentientem doctrinae methodum tuor, quam in Locis communibus sequor et quam in Romanis prius secutus sum.* Wengert seems to suggest that Melanchthon acted in response to a request in 1538 from Peter Braubach, a south German printer, citing the letter to Brenz dated 15 Sept 1538 ("Commentaries," 137). The letter, however, gives the impression that the work was already well underway: *Petrus bibliopola cupit edere meam alteram enarrationem ad Romanos, etsi nihil prorsus a priori discrepant: Dico eadem fere eodem modo.* MBW 2092 (T8:217).

*Melanchthon*.<sup>28</sup> This version was a thorough rewriting of Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*, prompted at least in part by specific attacks against his earlier Pauline exegesis from Catholic and radical opponents.<sup>29</sup> Then, in 1544, another edition of the same title was released by the same printer. This 1544 edition was later reprinted in the fourth volume of Melanchthon's *Opera omnia*, edited by Kaspar Peucer, and it was this version which supplied the text for the printing the *Corpus Reformatorum*.<sup>30</sup> Up to now, scholars have simply assumed that these texts are identical.<sup>31</sup> Even a cursory comparison of the 1544 text in the *CR* and the 1540 edition shows significant differences, however. In April of 1540, Melanchthon had written to Camerarius complaining of shoddy typography, which had marred his

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<sup>28</sup> *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos hoc Anno M. D. XL. recogniti et locuplatati autore Philippo Melanchtone*. . . (Strassburg: Cratonem Mylium, 1540 [DLCPT]). This edition was reprinted the following year by the Wittenberg publisher Johannes Klug.

<sup>29</sup> In the *Argumentum*, Melanchthon identifies three such calumniators by name: Johannes Mensinger, Georg Witzel, and the anti-Trinitarian Johannes Campanus, to whom Melanchthon affectionately refers as "the weasel" (*mustela*); I am grateful to Timothy Wengert, who pointed out this reference in correspondence. *Romans* (1540): Arg., np.; cf. CR 15:496. Mensinger had recently authored an attack on Melanchthon's doctrine of justification as articulated in the *Apology*, in a treatise *Vom vordienste vnd rechtfertigungen*. . . (Frankfurt a. d. Oder: Hanau, 1535). Witzel had been one of the more prolific Catholic opponents to the Wittenberg theology, joining battle against the reformers' *Rechtfertigungslehre* in a number of treatises and pamphlets, including *Pro defensione bonorum operum, adversus novos evangelistas* (Leipzig: Blum, 1532); *Comprehensio locorum utriusque testamenti, de absoluta necessitate bonorum à fide operum*. . . (Leipzig: Wolrab, 1538), and a preface critical of Protestant theology to an edition of Augustine's treatise *De fide et operibus* from the same printer the following year.

<sup>30</sup> *Omnium Operum Reverendi Viri Philippi Melanthonis . . . Ps. 4: Quae continet enarrationes epistolae ad Romanos, ad Corinthios, ad Collossenses, ad Timotheum* (Wittenberg: Crato, 1564); reprinted in CR 15:493; cf. Wengert, "Biblical Commentaries," 139-40.

<sup>31</sup> Fred Kramer's translation of the *CR* edition is presented as "the 1540 commentary."

exposition of justification in the prolegomena.<sup>32</sup> The differences in the 1544 edition, however, extend much further than the correction of printers' errata. Much of the material remains intact, however whole paragraphs have been reworked or entirely rewritten, and some sections have been greatly expanded. For example, the exposition of Rom 2:6ff., which we shall examine presently, is 390 words in 1544, as compared with 219 in 1540 and 167 in 1532. Moreover, in 1544 the text headings, which in 1540 had loosely followed Erasmus' Latin translation, were thoroughly reworked.<sup>33</sup> In the rest of this chapter, I will be tracking the evolution of Melancthon's interpretation of Romans 2 from 1522 to 1544 in an attempt to fit him into the ongoing exegetical conversation that developed among Protestants over the issue of divine judgment and good works.<sup>34</sup>

Melancthon's exegesis of the Pauline judgment text in Romans 2 develops considerably over the period we are considering, but the basic trajectory of his interpretation remains consistent with the path first charted in the *Annotationes* of 1522. As Wengert has argued in an important essay analyzing this text, the *Annotationes* represent an important turning point in early modern biblical

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<sup>32</sup> *In Romanis prolegomena continent explicationem, ut iudico, integram loci περί τῆς δικαιοσύνης, sed Typographus fuit in edendo admodum negligens.* MBW 2407 (CR 3:988).

<sup>33</sup> Although much work remains to be done in ascertaining the extent of these revisions and the circumstances surrounding them, it is no longer tenable to refer to the CR edition as "the 1540 commentary." Henceforth I shall refer to the Müller edition of 1540 as *Romans* (1540) and the Peucer/CR edition (ET, Kramer) as *Romans* (1544).

<sup>34</sup> Melancthon published one more work on Romans over a decade later, the *Epistolae Pauli scriptae ad Romanos enarratio* (Wittenberg: Rhau, 1556); reprinted, CR 15:797-1052. This work, while important for understanding the development of Melancthon's Pauline exegesis, is outside the scope of the present study.

commentary.<sup>35</sup> In contrast with earlier medieval approaches, which tended to view texts as bundles of authoritative propositions to be sorted and reconciled,<sup>36</sup> Melancthon takes his cue from humanist writers who analyze the text as a rhetorical whole. “Simply put, Melancthon viewed Paul’s Epistle to the Romans as a letter, shaped by its author using common rhetorical methods to make a single theological point, the letter’s *scopus*.”<sup>37</sup> Difficult passages are interpreted in light of the *scopus*, and lines of argumentation which do not advance the *scopus* can safely be passed over in silence. This single point, also referred to as the *status causae*, thus becomes the hermeneutical key which unlocks the entire text.<sup>38</sup>

Melancthon identifies the *scopus* of Romans in the *Argumentum* and constantly refers back to it throughout his exposition. “The *status causae*,” he argues, “is that we are justified by faith.” Paul makes his case using many different arguments concerning the law and sin, but the upshot is that neither good works nor

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<sup>35</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, “Philip Melancthon’s 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 118-40.

<sup>36</sup> Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17. Nauert overstates his case, I think, when he argues that “each statement tended to be quoted and understood without the slightest attention to the context in which it originally stood,” particularly when one is comparing equivalent genres. However egregious this practice may have been in a theological manual like Abelard’s *Sic et Non* or Lombard’s *Sententiae*, medieval commentators were quite capable of following the logic of a text through from beginning to end. Nevertheless, the contrast with Renaissance humanism’s focus on analyzing texts at a rhetorical level is striking.

<sup>37</sup> Wengert, “Melancthon’s 1522 Annotations,” 126.

<sup>38</sup> As Melancthon himself argued in his *Institutes rhetoricae* (Strasbourg: Johannes Herwagen, 1523), describing the *status* as “a brief pronouncement or proposition containing the sum of the controversy to which all proofs and arguments are referred.” Cited in Wengert, “Melancthon’s 1522 Annotations,” 128.

human virtue can justify a person before God. Rather, faith is reckoned by God for righteousness, irrespective of good works.<sup>39</sup> With justification by faith thus serving as the hermeneutical cipher, Melanchthon is able to interpret discrete sections of the text in line with classical rhetorical categories in order to demonstrate how each constituent part advances the overall argument.

Melanchthon's exegesis of the first half of Romans 2 is a clear example of how the new humanistic method of rhetorical criticism could be put to use in reconfiguring the overall flow of the argument. Rather than viewing this passage as integral to the development of Paul's teaching on justification, Melanchthon argues that the first half of the chapter represents a *digressio* from the main argument, in which Paul pursues his attack against hypocrites who say one thing and do another.<sup>40</sup> Then, in his comments on 2:6, where Paul quotes Ps 62:12 in affirming that God "will render to every man according to his works," Melanchthon observes that sometimes the scriptures use a "vulgar way of speaking" in describing a reward for works, allowing that even Christ seemed to speak this way in Matt 25. This *modus loquendi* is subordinate, however, to scripture's primary way of speaking, which is the idiom of justification by faith, and Melanchthon follows up this assertion with a

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<sup>39</sup> *Status causae, iustificari nos fide, quae sententia probatur multis argumetis, Tum lex & peccatum, cum gratia conferuntur. Est autem uis huius sententiae, iustificari nos fide. Nihil humanorum operum bonum esse, nihil humanarum uirium aliquid posse. Sed quia Christus sit donatus, propter hunc se credas delicto ignosci, confidasque te saluum fore, eam fidem reputari a deo, nullius operis, siue boni, ut uidetur, siue mali respectu, pro iustitia. Romans (1522), Arg., 2. See Wengert, "Melanchthon's 1522 Annotations," 129-30 for further references to this *scopus* throughout the text.*

<sup>40</sup> *Principio secundi cap. Digressione quadam expatiatur Paulus, quas proprie insectatur Hypocritas, in speciem bonos, in quem locum incidit hac occasione. Romans (1522), 11-12.*

string of texts in support of his view.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the judgment of which Paul speaks is primarily a judgment of faith or unbelief. “Works truly are judged,” Melanchthon allows, but only “as evidence (*indicia*) of faith or unbelief. . . . Good works are not themselves righteous, but they declare righteousness.”<sup>42</sup>

Not every evangelical commentator was as sophisticated as Melanchthon in reconfiguring the epistle’s *dispositio* according to rhetorical categories, but Melanchthon’s subordination of this passage to the doctrine of justification proved immensely influential, especially in his suggestion that good works are simply an index of faith. Melanchthon’s Wittenberg colleague, Johannes Bugenhagen, authored a brief commentary on Romans in 1527 in which he recapitulates the same basic approach to the text, but this time with a more strident tone. Bugenhagen’s commentary demonstrates that this passage had become the subject of fierce debate in the years since Luther launched his campaign of reform. “The ignorant,” writes Bugenhagen, commenting on Rom 2:7, “seize on passages of scripture such as this, and with one little verse they would fight against the whole Scripture and against the scope of the entire letter (*contra scopum totius Epistolae*).”<sup>43</sup> His response to this

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<sup>41</sup> *Vulgaris modus loquendi est scripturae mercedem pro operibus dari. Sicut & dominus apud Matth. 25. sic recenset opera, quem sic oportet intelligi. Primum fide tantum saluari Io.3[:14-15]. Exaltari oportet & c. Qui credit & c. Item qui credit in eum non iudicatur. Roma 4[:5]. Porro ei qui non operatur, sed credit in eum qui iustificat impii & c. Fides reputatur ad iustitiam secundum propositum gratiae dei. Sic & tantum incredulitate damnari. Ioan.3[:36]. Qui non credit, iam iudicatus est. Romans (1522), 13-14.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ita primum iudicatur fides, aut incredulitas. Opera uero iudicantur, tanquam fidei aut incredulitatis indicia. . . . Ipsa bona opera non sunt iusticia, sed declarant iustitiam. Romans (1522), 14.*

<sup>43</sup> *Scripturarum ignari huiusmodi locos arripiunt, & uno uersiculo uolunt pugnare contra totam Scripturam, & hic contra scopum totius Epistolae. In Bugenhagen, Romans (1527), 17.*

ostensive proof-texting, like that of Melanchthon, is to assert the priority of faith as the source of good works: “O blind men, who do not see that the faithful one performs good works, and is saved on account of faith!”<sup>44</sup> The Holy Spirit indwells believers, performing good works through them, but these works are never pure enough to justify while we are in the flesh. “Consequently, righteousness is only from faith, not from works, which are only a testimony of devotion and of a faithful heart.”<sup>45</sup>

### 2.1.3 Early Reformed Exegesis of Romans: Oecolampadius (1525) and Zwingli (1527)

By the time Zwingli preached on Romans in middle of 1527, Luther’s *Durchbruch* had been the subject of intense debate among theologians and biblical scholars for at least a decade.<sup>46</sup> Despite some strong resemblances between Luther’s preaching and

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<sup>44</sup> *O caecos homines, qui non uident fidelem facere bona opera, & hunc saluari propter fidem. . . .* Ibid. Bugenhagen does not identify these opponents by name, and I have been unable to locate any contemporaneous commentators prior to 1527 who do not somehow ground the *bona opera* which justify in faith. My suspicion is that the *caecos homines* Bugenhagen has in mind here are not biblical scholars, but polemicists who rip (*arripiunt*) passages out of context in controversies over dogma. For a particularly crude example of such proof-texting, see Johannes Eck’s *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutherum et alios hostes ecclesiae*, first published in 1525; CC 34:88.

<sup>45</sup> *Spiritus Dei regnans in cordibus nostris facit bona opera. . . . Porro, dum sumus in carne, illa opera tamen pura esse non possunt propter carnem, quare ne per illa quidem iustificari possemus. Itaque ex fide tantum est iustitia, non ex operibus, quae testimonium solum sunt pii & fidelis cordis.* Ibid. Later, in his comments on 2:13, he allows that Christians can be “doers of the law,” rather than mere hearers, insofar as their works derive from the power of the Holy Spirit, but there is no consideration of the relationship between these works and their justification. *LEGEM. Id est, id quod lex requirit, nempe, ne concupiscent, id est, ne scortentur corde, bene uelint proximo. Viua illa sunt facta Christianorum, siquidem sunt ex uirtute Spiritussancti* (19).

<sup>46</sup> Zwingli preached a series of sermons on Romans in mid-year 1527. These were never transcribed or published during his lifetime, however Zwingli’s handwritten annotations on the text were preserved and published by Leo Jud in 1539. No modern critical edition of these annotations has yet been produced, however the Jud edition was reprinted in 1836 in vol. 6.2 the Schuller-Schulthess *Huldrici Zuinglii Opera*. For a critical text-history and dating of the annotations, see Walter E.



Zwingli's, however, the latter always maintained his independence, averring that he had learned "the force and sum of the Gospel from reading the tractates of John [Chrysostom] and Augustine and from the diligent study of Paul's epistles in the Greek."<sup>47</sup> Modern scholarship has largely confirmed this. W. P. Stephens concludes that "Zwingli seems to have read Luther hastily, to have looked to him for the confirmation of his own views, and to have admired him primarily for the boldness of his stand against the pope."<sup>48</sup> This characterization is consonant with my suggestion in the introduction that the first-generation reformers initially were united by a common rhetoric of dissent, while agreement in theology and exegesis remained to be fully worked out.

Melanchthon had suggested in 1522 that the scriptures use a "vulgar way of speaking" in describing a reward for works. Zwingli pursues a strategy similar to that of Melanchthon in his interpretation of this *locus*, allowing that works receive a reward, but only because of their source in faith:

Works arise either from faith or from unbelief, and works are either good or evil with respect to faith or faithlessness. "Anything which does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). "Every tree which does not bear [good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire] (Mt 7:19, 12:33). Therefore a reward is rendered to our works, not in and of themselves [*simpliciter et per se*], but with respect to faith or unbelief.

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Meyer, "Die Entstehung von Huldrych Zwinglis neutestamentlichen Kommentaren und Predigt-nachschriften," *Zwingliana* 14, no. 6 (1976): 311-12.

<sup>47</sup> "Eine freundliche Schrift an die Eidgenossen," ZSW 5:713.3-4.

<sup>48</sup> For a summary of the discussion see Stephens, *Theology of Zwingli*, 23-24. See, however, Martin Brecht, "Zwingli als Schüler Luthers: zu seiner theologischen Entwicklung, 1518-1522," *ZKG* 96, no. 3 (1985): 301-19.

God gives grace and his spirit to men, and faith (which itself is a gift of God) performs good works.<sup>49</sup>

Melanchthon had held that good works are proof (*indicia*) of a saving faith, but are of nothing more than symbolic value. Zwingli seems less clear on this matter, even in the brief passage cited above. On the one hand, he is willing to allow that some sort of “reward” (*merx*) is given by God to human works, but only in a manner of speaking, and with respect to faith.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Zwingli asserts that faith performs good works, and his intertextual citations seem to underline the connection between this fruit and the final fate of the tree which bears it. It is hard to know whether Zwingli means that good works are accepted because of faith or whether they are called good because of their source in faith, by means of synecdoche. In either case, this is not quite the same as what Melanchthon says.

It may be helpful at this point to compare Zwingli’s exegesis with a more proximate source. In 1525, the Basel reformer Johann Oecolampadius had published the first commentary on the text of Romans in what was to become the Reformed

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<sup>49</sup> *Opera fiunt ex fide vel infidelitate. Opera enim bona sunt aut mala respectu fidei aut perfidiae. Quidquid non ex fide venit, peccatum est, Rom. 14. Omnis arbor quae non facit, Matth. 7. 12. Operibus ergo merces redditur, non quidem simpliciter et per se, sed respectu fidei et infidelitatis. Gratiam et spiritum suum donat homini deus, et fides (quae et ipsa donum dei est) bona operatur. Zwingli, Romans (1527); ZO 6.2:81.*

<sup>50</sup> In his 1524 treatise against Jerome Emser, Zwingli had suggested that the language of merit in scripture was an accommodation to the weakness of those who still needed such “milk”: *Quomodo et hic in meriti causa videmus nostris operibus tribui, etiam, ore dei, quod illius est gratiae: non Hercle alia ratione, quam quae vel nunc est dicta, videlicet illius benignitate; vel quod inter membra Chrsti semper sunt, quibus aduc lacte opus est [cf. 1 Cor 3:2], qui non confestim huc veniunt, ut abnegates se ipsis toti in deum rapiantur, ut iam non ipsi, sed Christus in eis vivat [cf. Gal 2:20], ut cognoscant se ne vivere quidem, nisi quod dues vita, motus, actio rerum omnium est. In Adversus Emserum; ZSW 3:280.13-20.*

tradition.<sup>51</sup> Oecolampadius had been a close associate of Erasmus, collaborating with the senior scholar on his 1519 *Annotationes* on the New Testament and even supplying an epilogue to the work. He eventually broke with Erasmus over his reforming work in Basel and became a close associate of Zwingli. Oecolampadius regarded Luther as “closer to the evangelical truth than any of his opponents,”<sup>52</sup> yet he never slavishly adhered to the thought either of Luther or of Zwingli. His comments on Romans demonstrate a sophisticated literary appreciation of the text supplied by his humanistic training, together with a theological perspective saturated in the exegesis of the fathers.

Oecolampadius is aware of the theological polemics developing over the Pauline warnings of future judgment in Romans 2, but his exegesis harmonizes the evangelical rhetoric of justification by faith with this text through a creative appropriation of Ambrose/Ambrosiaster. For Oecolampadius, God promises to repay humans according to works, but what is ultimately in view here is not a tit-for-tat adding up of merit, but rather a perseverance in the hope of attaining eternal life, a hope which must be rooted in faith in order to succeed.<sup>53</sup> Good works themselves do not justify; rather, they are “evidence and testimony” that saving faith is present.

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<sup>51</sup> *In epistolam B. Pauli apost. ad Romanos adnotationes à Ioanne Oecolampadio Basileae praelectae. Cum indice* (Basel: Apud Andream Cratandrum, 1525).

<sup>52</sup> Robert C. Walton, “Oecolampadius, Johannes,” in *OER* 3:169-71.

<sup>53</sup> *Retributionem bonorum pollicetur fidelibus, qui per dilectionem usque in finem perseverant: & ita triae commendat, fidem, dilectionem, & perseverantiam. Fide enim quaerimus. unde dicit, Quaerunt gloriam & honorem. Nullus enim querit, nisi cui est spes inveniendorum bonorum, maxime autem gloriae & honoris, & incorruptionis in humilitate et contemptu, ac adversitatibus huius vitae. Romans* (1525), 22<sup>v</sup>.

Thus, Ambrosiaster sums up the matter with his observation that “those who believe in Christ, whom the law promised, these fulfill the law.”<sup>54</sup>

Both Zwingli and Oecolampadius argue for the primacy of faith in God’s final judgment of believers, but in rather different ways. Zwingli emphasizes the primacy of faith in creating and sustaining good works, while Oecolampadius echoes Melancthon’s view that good works are simply the *indicia* of faith. Both, however, follow the lead of Melancthon in viewing the eschatological judgment of which Paul speaks not primarily as a judgment of works, but as a verdict rendered on belief or unbelief.

#### **2.1.4 The Rhetorical Turn: Melancthon’s 1532 Commentarii**

The publication of Philip Melancthon’s *Commentarii in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* in 1532 marked both an important turning point in the history of evangelical theology and the beginning of a new era in the history of Pauline exegesis. As Timothy Wengert has pointed out, it is in the lengthy *Προλεγόμενα de iustificatione* at the beginning of this text that Melancthon first articulates a purely forensic conception of justification, in contrast from his earlier account in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, even though earlier reformers—

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<sup>54</sup> *Locus ille non suffragaturis, qui contendunt ex operibus esse salutem, & non ex fide. Nam quamvis obiiciant etiam locum Matth. 24. de misericordibus, externis tamen illis operibus non promeretur homo salutem, neque ipsa iustificat, sed sunt iudicia & testimonia intentae fidei. Unde et Ambrosius his verbis hunc locum explanat: Non hi sunt iusti qui audiunt legem, sed qui credunt in Christum quem promisit lex, hi faciunt legem. Romans (1525), 23<sup>v</sup>-23<sup>t</sup>. Oecolampadius’ citation of Ambrosiaster does not reproduce exactly the language either of the original text (as we have it) or of its citation in the *Glossa ordinaria*.*

<sup>55</sup> Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 179. See Chapter 5, below.

including Melanchthon himself—had lectured and written extensively on Paul’s letter to the Romans, the 1532 *Comentarii* served as the point of departure for every major commentary on Romans written by Protestants thereafter. In this and the following chapters, I will examine in some detail the exegesis of Melanchthon, Bullinger, Bucer, and Calvin on the theme of justification in Romans, but two points stand out from even a cursory perusal of these texts: each of the three major Protestant exegetes who published on Romans after Melanchthon refers explicitly to Melanchthon’s exegesis in favorable terms, and none refers explicitly to Luther.<sup>56</sup> In this work, Melanchthon comes to the fore as the spokesman for the Wittenberg school of Pauline exegesis, developing a distinctively Lutheran hermeneutic that clearly sets him apart from his fellow reformers in the south German and Swiss cities of the empire.

In his 1522 *Annotationes*, Melanchthon had attempted to neutralize Rom 2 as an argument against the evangelical understanding of justification by characterizing it as a *digressio* from the *scopus* of the epistle. His exegesis of the judgment passages, however, is quite thin. Moreover, in the decade between these two commentaries the text in question had become the source of no little controversy between the rival camps. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1532 Melanchthon

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<sup>56</sup> Although Bullinger only refers to Melanchthon twice by name in his commentary on Romans, the influence of this *eximiae eruditionis vir* is apparent throughout the exposition: *Romans* (1537), 61, 69. Likewise with Bucer, who refers continually to Melanchthon’s “most learned and devout” *Commentarii. Romans* (1536), Praef., 13. Calvin’s appraisal in his introductory epistle to Simon Grynaeus is well-known, but it bears repeating here: “Philip Melanchthon, who, by his singular learning and industry, and by that readiness in all kinds of knowledge, in which he excels, has introduced more light than those who had preceded him.” *Romans* (1540); COE 13:4.

spends considerably more effort in explaining just what is at stake in this text if it does not contribute directly to the main point of Paul's letter.<sup>57</sup> Building on his earlier exegesis, Melanchthon here draws on the characteristically Lutheran distinction between law and gospel to suggest that what is in view in the first half of Rom 2 is a purely hypothetical righteousness according to works.

In keeping with his earlier line of argument, Melanchthon argues that "Paul does not attribute justification to works, but he describes those who are righteous *a posteriori*, that is, from the fruits, of what sort they are."<sup>58</sup> There may be an accord between faith and works, but this is simply because works are the byproduct of a living and active faith. Yet surely this could not have been a fully satisfying explanation. After all, as Origen had long ago pointed out in connection with this passage, "it belongs to God alone to know the hearts of men and to discern the secrets of the mind."<sup>59</sup> Why then would God need to discern the presence of faith *a posteriori*, on the basis of its external fruits? Melanchthon grants the premise that this text is speaking of a divine judgment according to works, but he deflects the force of the argument by an appeal to the law-gospel distinction:

Nevertheless, there is no discussion here about the difference between faith and works, or about how faith justifies. For throughout the whole letter this point is

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<sup>57</sup> At the beginning of Chapter 2, Melanchthon notes that *Nondum pervenit ad principalem propositionem, sed adhuc versatur in declaranda et amplificanda obiurgatione seu accusatione. Et hic in 2. capite proprie facit apostrophe ad illos, qui habent bonos mores et tamen habent impia corda. Romans* (1532), Cap. 2; MSA 5:81-82.

<sup>58</sup> *Igitur Paulus non tribuit iustificationem operibus, sed describit iustos a posteriori, h. e. a fructibus, quales sint. Romans* (1532), Rom 2:6; MSA 5:83.28-84.3.

<sup>59</sup> *Romans* 2.1.1; FotC 103:102.

especially emphasized, that we are certainly pronounced righteous through mercy freely on account of Christ; there is not one other particle spoken in passing to be deflected against the total remaining argument. In my humble opinion, the matter can be untangled thus, that *Paul speaks in the manner of the law*, where reward is put forward for righteousness as if for our merits. But nevertheless the gospel teaches that those who grasp faith are freely accepted through his mercy.<sup>60</sup>

The key phrase here is that “Paul speaks in the manner of the law (*more legis*),” a suggestion to which Melanchthon returns in his treatment of 2:13, where he concedes that although Paul does not say “that men satisfy the law or are pronounced righteous in any other way than by fulfilling the law,” nevertheless he “he describes in general the righteousness of the law. For it is true that the righteousness of the law is to do the law.” But because Paul’s argument here is directed against the Jews, who thought they would be saved simply by hearing the law, he does not proceed further to explain how in fact one fulfills the law.<sup>61</sup>

This explanation, we shall see, is of critical importance for the emergence of the Protestant understanding of justification by faith alone, because it allows Paul’s warning to be understood as a rhetorical argument aimed against the Jews, rather

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<sup>60</sup> *Interim hic non disputat, quid intersit inter fidem et opera, quomodo fides iustificet. Cum autem in hac tota epistola hic locus precipue tractetur, quod certo per misericordiam iusti pronuntiemur gratis propter Christum, non est una aliqua particula obiter dicta detorquenda contra totam reliquam disputationem. Meo iudicio brevissime sic posset res expediri Paulum loqui more legis, ubi iustitiae tamquam nostris meritis proponitur merces. At interim evangelium docet gratis per misericordiam accipi ea, quae fides consequitur. Romans (1532), 2:6; MSA 5:84.4-14.*

<sup>61</sup> *Est enim collatio, quae in genere docet, qualis sit iustitia legis, sc. facere legem, non tantum audire aut externa specie et ceremoniis profiteri. Neque hoc dicit Paulus homines legi satisfacere aut homines non aliter pronuntiarum iustos nisi propter legis impletionem, sed in genere describit iustitiam legis. Verum est enim, quod iustitia legis est facere legem, non tantum audire aut externis ritibus profiteri, sicut iustitia legum in qualibet re publica aut in philosophia est facere leges, non tantum audire. Et haec generalis sententia hic sufficit Paulo, qui arguet Iudaeos, quod sint rei, quia, etsi legem audiverint, non tamen faciant. Quomodo autem fiat lex, item quomodo placeat, hic non dicit. Romans (1532), 2:13; MSA 5:84.17-29.*

than as a theological one of abiding value for Christians. Judgment according to works thus becomes a purely hypothetical possibility: if anyone could satisfy the law by fulfilling it, God would pronounce him or her righteous. But no one can perform this kind of righteousness, so this kind of justification never happens. Thus, when Paul speak *in more legis*, he represents only one side of the law-gospel dialectic, and this only for rhetorical effect—the point has no fundamental relation to the apostle’s main point, which is the assertion of justification by faith alone. Accordingly, this passage has nothing to say directly to the church.

### **2.1.5 Bullinger (1533)**

The first full-scale commentary on the Epistle to the Romans published in the Reformed tradition came from the pen of Zwingli’s successor in Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger. Bullinger had already lectured on Romans over a period of two years beginning in 1525 at the Cistercian monastery in Kappel.<sup>62</sup> Susi Hausamann has demonstrated Bullinger’s heavy dependence on Melanchthon’s 1522 *Annotationes* in these lectures, an influence particularly clear in Bullinger’s analysis of the text according to Melanchthon’s rhetorical-critical categories.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it is almost certain that Bullinger had a copy of Melanchthon’s 1532 *Commentarii* at hand, at

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<sup>62</sup> Parker, *Commentaries on Romans*, 14. Bullinger’s handwritten notes on the first five chapters of Romans are extant, and have recently been published in a critical edition, in HBW 3.1.

<sup>63</sup> “Schon in Melanchthons Rhetorik, dann aber vor allem im Argumentum zu seinen Annotationes findet sich der Hinweis darauf, daß der Römerbrief *rhetorica methodo* zu interpretieren sei.” Susi Hausamann, *Römerbriefauslegung zwischen Humanismus und Reformation: eine Studie zu Heinrich Bullingers Römerbriefvorlesung von 1525* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1970), 160. Hausamann also notes Bullinger’s familiarity with the commentaries by Origen, Ambrosiaster, Lefèvre d’Étaples, and Erasmus, as well as Luther’s “September Testament” and marginal gloss.



least in the later stages of writing his own commentary.<sup>64</sup> In both of these productions, however, Melanchthon's influence can be seen more in terms of the exegetical tools he supplies, while Bullinger's conclusions bear much more deeply the impress of his Swiss-based colleagues, Zwingli and Oecolampadius.<sup>65</sup>

This is perhaps clearest in Bullinger's elaboration of the *scopus* of the epistle, where Bullinger follows the lead of Melanchthon in identifying a unified argument to which the rhetoric of the letter tends, yet in elaborating the content of the *scopus*, he draws more freely on the language of his Swiss colleagues.

In summary, this the Gospel in a nutshell, and also the single *scopus* of this epistle: FAITH IS RIGHTEOUSNESS. This very thing is indeed the wisdom of Christians, and it cannot be found in the books of the philosophers, but from the oracles of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is spoken. Yet this must be observed in the first place, as John Oecolampadius has warned us to observe, that Righteousness is not, strictly speaking, to be attributed to our faith, as if it were our work. For this would be to squander faith, if I should, so to speak, have faith in my faith, as if it were something in me that God should reward. But for this reason righteousness is attributed to faith, that faith attributes everything to divine mercy.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The dedicatory epistle of Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*, to Albrecht of Mainz, is dated August 1532; MBW 1276 (T5:336). That of Bullinger's *Commentarius*, to Berchtold Haller, is dated February 1533 (HBW 2.3:59), making it entirely possible that Bullinger received a copy of the former work before completing his own. The first place in Bullinger's *Commentarius* where Melanchthon is quoted by name is in Rom 9:19, and then again at 11:15, where he paraphrases Melanchthon's opinion while preserving distinctive terms from the 1532 *Commentarii*. Bullinger, *Romans* (1533), 139; cf. MSA 5:278.

<sup>65</sup> Recent studies have demonstrated that Bullinger was no mere systematizer of others' ideas. Nevertheless, my point here is simply that Bullinger's exegesis of Romans arises from a specific intellectual context. On the former point, see Mark S. Burrows, "'Christus intra nos Vivens': The Peculiar Genius of Bullinger's Doctrine of Sanctification," *ZKG* 98, no. 1 (1987): 48-69. For an overview of Bullinger's work as an exegete of Romans, see Peter Opitz, "Bullinger on Romans," in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 148-65. Opitz unaccountably regards this commentary as having been published in 1537. Bullinger did publish in that year a volume containing commentary on all of Paul's epistles (and Hebrews), but the comments on Romans in this volume are simply a reprint of the 1533 edition.

<sup>66</sup> *In summa, hic est totius evangelii, huius quoque epistolae scopus unicus, FIDES EST IUSTICIA. Haec ipsa est etiam Christianorum sapientia, quae non discitur è philosophorum libris, sed spiritus sancti oraculis, ex ipso inquam Iesu Christi evangelio. Hic tamen in primis observandum, quod*

For Bullinger, as for Oecolampadius, the contrast is between faith in the mercy of God and faith regarded as one's own personal achievement. This is far less precise than the explanation of the *scopus* given in Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*: "humans are pronounced righteous on account of Christ."<sup>67</sup> Less precise, that is, in that it while it clearly associates righteousness with a certain kind of faith, it does not stipulate the manner in which that faith confers righteousness. By 1532 Melanchthon had settled on his fully forensic model, where *pronuntiari* is the key term (along with its cousins, *reputari* and *imputari*).

This divergence arising from Melanchthon's shift to a fully forensic understanding of justification has clear consequences for the exegesis of Rom 2. Whereas Melanchthon continues to view the first half of the chapter as a digression, and indeed, reinforces its irrelevance for Christians by means of the law-gospel distinction, Bullinger has no qualms with the idea of judgment according to works. For Bullinger, the digression (*digressiuncula*) begins not at 2:1, but at 2:6, and the digression involves the elaboration of a distinction between those who persevere in good and those who do evil in service of the broader point that "before God there is

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*Ioannes Oecolampadius observandum esse monuit, Iustitiam fidei nostrae, si exactè loquaris, non ita tribui, quasi operi nostro: hoc enim foret abuti fide, si, inquam, fide mea videar fidere, quasi dignum aliquid in me sit quod Deus remuneret: sed ideo tribui iustitiam fidei, quod fides totum tribuat divinae miserationi. Romans (1533), 16<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Oecolampadius, Romans (1525), 10<sup>t</sup>: neque iustitia ita tribuitur fidei nostrae, si exacte loquaris quasi operi nostro: hoc enim foret abuti fide, si fide mea videar fidere, quasi dignum aliquid in me sit quod remuneret: sed ideo tribuitur iustitia fidei, quia fides tribuit totum dei misericordiae.*

<sup>67</sup> *Et Paulus diserte ponit hanc propositionem : "pronuntiari homines iustos propter Christum."* MSA 5:30.

a penalty for evil and wicked deeds, just as there is a reward for good deeds and virtue.”<sup>68</sup> This is the primary point of the first half of chapter 2, and just as with Zwingli and Oecolampadius, there is no hint that Bullinger regards this as anything other than a straightforward affirmation of future judgment.

On the contrary, Bullinger explains this passage in terms that few medieval Augustinians would have found objectionable. While he seems to acknowledge that this text has been the source of some controversy in recent years, Bullinger strikes an irenic tone by appealing to Augustine’s anti-Pelagian concerns.

This passage would need to be examined in order to differentiate more broadly between reward and the merit of works, if it had not already been completely explained to the ancients by St. Augustine. And in our time many illustrious men, not only learned but devout, have been preoccupied with the same matter. A few words, therefore. Just as no one except the most impious has hitherto denied that there is evil in us and that for this evil we incur damnation by the just judgment of God, so also no one has denied that there is a reward to virtue.<sup>69</sup>

This sets the boundaries for debate: both Pelagianism and antinomianism are ruled out from the start, and Bullinger positions himself to present the Augustinian *via media*: God does reward our virtue, but only in a manner of speaking:

For all of our virtue is not from us but from God. Therefore when a reward is owed to virtue, it is certainly with respect to grace, not us. Accordingly, the Lord gives grace so that we may believe, and here faith is not idle but works; therefore, whatever happens by virtue of faith happens such that now the head always returns

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<sup>68</sup> *Nunc enim à speciali ad generale delabitur, & brevi quadam digressiuncula, quae maxime ad rem praesentem facere videbatur, demonstrat, apud deum esse mali scelerumque mulctam, sicut & boni virtutumque praemium. Romans (1533), 37<sup>f</sup>.*

<sup>69</sup> *Hic locus iam exigeret ut fusius de Praemio & operum merito differerem, nisi id apud ueteres D. Augustinus copiose admodum absoluisset: & nostro tempore multi cum eruditione tum pietate praeclari uiri idem praeoccupassent. Paucis ergo. Quemadmodum nemo hactenus nisi impiissimus quisque negauit malum ex nobis esse eique malo damnationem iusto Dei iudicio deberi, ita nemo negauit uirtuti suum praemium esse. Ibid., 38<sup>f</sup>.*

full circle. Therefore when the scripture attributes a reward to works, it does so in a human manner, for what does God reward (as Augustine says) but his own work?<sup>70</sup>

This explanation is in perfect harmony with that of Zwingli, though it is a far cry from Melanchthon. Both interpret Paul's affirmation of reward in connection with merit as a figure of speech, but tending to very different ends. Melanchthon sees Paul speaking in *more legis*—"in the manner of the law"—offering a dialectical counterpoint to the offer of the gospel. Bullinger sees Paul speaking in *humano more*—"in a human manner"—offering reward to human virtue understood as the fruit of grace.

This difference is further underscored in Bullinger's explanation of 2:13, "the doers of the law will be justified." Melanchthon, as we saw, treats this passage as pertaining to the *iustitia legis*, which is purely a matter of works: "the righteousness of the law is to do the law."<sup>71</sup> Bullinger, however, takes a different tack. Against the objection that no one can really be a "doer of the law" because all have sinned, Bullinger appeals to the suggestion of Ambrose/Ambrosiaster that "those who believe in Christ, whom the law promises, these fulfill the law."<sup>72</sup> The righteousness

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<sup>70</sup> *Omnis enim uirtus nostra non ex nobis sed ex Deo est. Ergo cum praemium uirtuti debeatur, id quidem gratiae non nostro respectu fit. Siquidem gratiam confert dominus ut credamus, hic fides non est otiosa, sed operatur, quicquid ergo fit fidei uirtute fit, adeo ut nunc caput semper redeat ad circulum. Ergo cum scriptura operibus mercedem tribuit, id humano more facit, quid enim remuneras bone Deus (ut inquit Augustinus) nisi tuum opus? Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Romans* (1532), 2:13; MSA 5:84.23.

<sup>72</sup> *Nemo autem Iudaeorum imo nullus hominum legem seruat, ergo nemo iustus est apud Deum, sed omnes peccatores sumus. Huc spectauit consilium Pauli, & non eo quo nonnulli trahunt contententes nostrae iusticiae salutem deberi. Quibus etiam ista D. Ambrosii explanatio potest obiici. Non hi (inquit) sunt iusti qui audient legem, sed qui credunt in Christum quem promisit lex, hi*

of the law, in other words, is not to do the law, but to believe in Christ. As Bullinger describes the *scopus* of the epistle, FIDES EST IUSTICIA.

### 2.1.6 Bucer (1536)

In 1536, Martin Bucer published one of the most impressive commentaries on Romans ever penned. Though tapering off in quantity, and perhaps in quality as well, toward the end of the epistle, few commentaries in the sixteenth century (or in any century, for that matter) match the work of Bucer in exegetical rigor, Patristic erudition, or theological profundity—especially on the first third of the text. So deep was Calvin’s admiration for Bucer’s work that he described it in a letter to Simon Grynaeus as “the last word” on Romans—this, we must add, as he was preparing his own commentary for publication.<sup>73</sup>

Before examining Bucer’s exegesis, however, a word must be said concerning the structure and arrangement of Bucer’s commentary. Parker, in his study of sixteenth-century commentaries on the book of Romans, notes the profuse arrangement of materials in Bucer’s *Metaphrases*: “the commentary on Romans is

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*faciunt legem: ita & Gentes incircumcise seruant legem.* Romans (1533), 39. This last sentence is lifted almost verbatim from Oecolampadius, *Romans* (1525), 23<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> *Tandem Bucerus, lucubrationibus suis emissis, veluti colophonem imposuit. Siquidem vir ille (ut nostri) praeter reconditam eruditionem, copiosamque multarum rerum scientiam, praeter ingenii perspicaciam, multam lectionem, aliasque multas ac varias virtutes quibus a nemine fere hodie vincitur, cum paucis est conferendus, plurimos antecellit. Hanc sibi propriam laudem habet, quod nullus hac memoria exactiore diligentia in Scripturae interpretatione versatus est.* Romans (1540), “Iohannes Calvinus Simoni Gynaeco.” COE 13:4. For a fuller treatment of Bucer’s *Rechtfertigungslehre*, see Karl Koch, *Studium pietatis: Martin Bucer als Ethiker* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962); Friedhelm Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus: eine Untersuchung zum Einfluss des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers (bis zum Evangelien-Kommentar von 1530)* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970); W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), esp. 48-70.

not one book but many, pressed together and not infrequently running over into confusion. Here are to be found within one binding a paraphrase of the Epistles [sic], a theological commentary, a simple commentary for the unlearnèd, and a set of essays on the theology of the Epistle—five books in one.”<sup>74</sup> In order to understand how Bucer reads any particular passage, therefore, we must work methodically through each stage of his commentary, noting how his thought develops through linguistic, historical, and doctrinal considerations toward an integration into his overall theological program.

In his comments on chapter 2 of the Epistle, we notice that Bucer deals with the problem of the relationship between faith and works in a *Conciliatio in Sectio 2* (vv. 5-10): *Conciliatio horum, deus reddit unicuique secundum facta sua, & nemo ex factis iustificabit.*<sup>75</sup> His answer is straightforwardly Augustinian: a man performs and perseveres in practicing the law because he has been declared righteous and accepted by God, who at the last judgment will render to each according to his deeds. This does not mean that a man is saved on account of his works, however, as those works themselves are a gift of God. The different uses to which the term “justification” are put, therefore, relate more properly to the order which God has

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<sup>74</sup> Parker, *Commentaries on Romans*, 37. Parker provides a very helpful outline of the structure of the commentary on 40-61. Also important for understanding Bucer’s exegesis of Romans is Bernard Roussel, “Martin Bucer: lecteur de l’épître aux romains” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Strasbourg, 1970).

<sup>75</sup> Parker omits this *Conciliatio* from his otherwise very thorough outline of the commentary. This oversight compromises his assessment of Bucer’s discussion in *Sectio 3*, which depends explicitly on the arguments made here in *Sectio 2*.

established in his economy of salvation, by which he bestows his gracious gifts—ultimately culminating in eternal life—on his fallen creatures, and this purely by grace.<sup>76</sup>

When Bucer moves on to consider justification in *sectio* 3, he reiterates many of the same points concerning the relationship between faith, works, and righteousness, but here he offers further considerations on the *ordo salutis*. In his *Conciliatio 2, HUIUS, Iustificari eos qui faciunt legem, cum illo, Neminem iustificari ex operibus legis*, Bucer observes once again that this statement of the Apostle in Rom. 2:13 seems to contradict what he says elsewhere—particularly in Rom. 3:20. As we have already noted, such attempts at reconciliation have become something of a commonplace in the exegetical tradition. We have surveyed here some of the more significant Patristic and medieval attempts; Parker surveys treatments of this passage in eleven major sixteenth-century commentaries, and his findings are curious: “The need to reconcile the two passages is seen not only in Caietan, Grimani, Guillaud, and Haresche, but also in Bucer, who also supplies a *Conciliatio*. A few writers (e.g., Bullinger, Melancthon, Pellicanus) virtually or entirely ignore the argument.”<sup>77</sup> Calvin, as we shall see, is also dismissive of such

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<sup>76</sup> *Proinde perstat, manetque semper verum, quod sola Dei gratia & misericordia iustificamur, id est, inter iustos deputamur, servamur, & accipimus quaecunque nobis Deus benefacit. Et nihil ominus hoc iuxta verum est, Reddi a deo unicuique secundum opera sua adeoque ex operibus iustificari nos, id est, iudicari consortes iustorum, haeredes vitae. Sed in hoc, secundum, &, ex, nihil plus significatur, quam ordo ille, quem Deus statuit, ut benefactis nostris sua beneficia rependat, & dignatio illa, qua Deus dignatur nos hoc honore, ut cooperemur illi ad nostram salutem iuxta illud Pauli: Cum timore & tremore vestram ipsorum salutem perficite. Romans (1536), Ch. 2, Sec. 2, Conc., 119.*

<sup>77</sup> Parker, *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 129.

efforts.<sup>78</sup> Yet Parker is wrong, I think, to conclude that the Protestant exegetes wholly ignore the issue. Melancthon's analysis of the text in rhetorical categories is designed to render these exercises superfluous—if the text in question is a *digressio*, directed *contra Iudaeos* for polemical purposes, it does not represent a direct challenge to the *scopus* of the epistle, the doctrine of justification by faith. Moreover, we have seen that in his 1532 *Commentarii*, he introduces the law-gospel distinction to further neutralize the exegesis of Catholic opponents who were deploying this passage as a proof-text against the Protestant view. In the following sections on Bullinger and Calvin, I will demonstrate that they are not so coy on this matter as Parker suggests, however the point still stands that most evangelical exegetes followed Melancthon in viewing the first half of Rom 2 as a rhetorical digression more or less irrelevant to Paul's main theme of justification by faith—with the significant exception of Martin Bucer.

Bucer's exegesis of this passage highlights the fact that what is at stake in this debate is more than simply an interpretive strategy for neutralizing Catholic assaults on the Protestant understanding of justification. At issue is the way in which the emerging Protestant soteriology relates God's justification of the ungodly in this life with the judgment of the world to come. In the language of scholastic theology, the question bears on the relation between the *iustitia Christi* (the merit of

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<sup>78</sup> “Calvin shows his perfect respect for the context by damning both sides roundly: ‘Those who misuse this verse to set up justification by works deserve to be laughed at by schoolboys. It is also inept and irrelevant to pour out long *quaestiones* for the solution of such a futile quibble” (Ibid.). In his 1539 edition of the *Institutio*, however, Calvin had added just this; the text remains in the 1559 edition at 3.17.8 (ET, 817-18).



Christ) and the *iustitia Dei* (the eschatological standard by which the *viator* will be judged, coterminous with the eternal law). According to Heiko A. Oberman, the heart of Luther's Gospel is that these two *iustitiae* "coincide and are granted simultaneously"—"The Last Judgment: Now!"<sup>79</sup> If the last judgment is *now*, then the supposed tension between Paul's statements in Rom. 2:13 and 3:20 is relieved in light of this *fait accompli*. On the other hand, this scheme puts the eschatological judgment described throughout scripture in a rather more ambiguous position: if the *viator* is not going to be judged according to the *iustitia Dei* at the last judgment—has already received the verdict, "not guilty"—then what exactly is going to happen?<sup>80</sup>

For Bucer, there is no such ambiguity. He begins his *Conciliatio* by affirming that "God will certainly judge us according to our deeds, and he will grant that we enter into eternal life if those deeds are worthy." By "keeping the law (*faciens legis*)," Bucer does not understand sinless perfection, but rather an earnest devotion to the precepts of the law, a devotion which of necessity arises from faith.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," *HTR* 55, no. 1 (1966): 1-26. This section heading appears in a reprinted version of this essay in *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986) 120.

<sup>80</sup> This ambiguity is fully apparent in Calvin's altogether anticlimactic treatment of the Last Judgment in *Institutio* 3.25.9, where the "judgment" seems to be little more than a ratification of God's prior declaration in justification. We have already noted Luther's eventual "abolition" of the Last Judgment for believers.

<sup>81</sup> *Deus utique secundum facta nostra iudicabit nos, uitamque aeternam adire iubebit, si illa bona fuerint, hactenus ergo recte dicitur, eos iustificari, hoc est, secundum eos in iudicio Dei iudicari, qui legem fecerint, hoc est, legis praeceptis serio studuerint, id quod scilicet non possunt non facere, qui Domino uere credunt.* *Romans* (1536). Ch. 2, Sec. 3, *Conc.*, 129.

Bucer affirms that this justification is in accordance with works, but he proceeds, in a thoroughly Augustinian manner, to subordinate it to grace:

This having now been said, these statements certainly do not conflict, with the result that we have amply commended the higher ones: that God saves us on account of his clemency alone and in consideration of Christ's merit, which, when we believe in Christ, is given to us and is ours. For those deeds themselves really are righteous which God has pronounced righteous in us; that is, God grants to us eternal life, there are works of Christ in us, with those gifts, from the mere grace and benevolence of God, that the goodness of God should be the first, sufficient, and total cause of our salvation. This is what those phrases, "Grace alone" and "by faith alone," describe, by which indeed we hold fast to this grace and we admit that we are justified, and not by works. In these phrases, indeed, is sought the first and *per se* cause of our justification, which no one can possess unless he has now been justified and possesses eternal life.<sup>82</sup>

Bucer then cites Augustine, from *De fide et operibus*, to the effect that "Good works follow when one has been justified, they do not precede that one may be justified."<sup>83</sup>

Thus, in its primary sense, justification is the ground and precondition of good works, the *gratia gratum faciens*. And, as with most of the medieval tradition, Bucer is adamant that there is no explanation for the conferral of this grace other than the goodness and benevolence of God. Like Augustine, however, Bucer

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<sup>82</sup> *Cum hoc iam dicto, nihil prorsus illa pugnant, ut abunde superius probauimus, Deum nos seruare ex sola sua clementia, & contemplatione meriti Christi, quod, cum Christo credimus, nobis donatur, nostrumque sit, Nam illa ipsa recte facta, iusta quae nos Deus iustificat, hoc est, nobis uitam aeternam adiudicat, Christi in nobis opera sunt, cum illo donata, ex mera Dei & gratuita beneuolentia, ut Dei bonitas semper prima, per se, & tota causa sit salutis nostrae, id quod istae locutiones exprimunt, Sola gratia, solaque fide, qua scilicet gratiam hanc amplectimur, & recipimus, nos iustificari, & non ex operibus. In hisce siquidem locutionibus, quae sit prima, & per se causa nostrae iustificationis queritur, quae nemo habere potest, nisi iam iustificatus, & uitae aeternae compos. Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Unde D. Augustinus, hoc, opera non iustificare, id ualere dicit, Bona opera sequi iustificatum, non praecedere iustificandum. De fide & operibus cap. 14. Ibid. Cf., Cum ergo dicit Apostolus arbitrari se iustificari hominem per fidem sine operibus legis; non hoc agit, ut percepta ac professa fide opera iustitiae contemnuntur, sed ut sciat se quisque per fidem posse iustificari, etiamsi legis opera non praecesserint. Sequuntur enim iustificatum, non praecedunt iustificandum. Fid. et op. 14.21; CSEL 41:61.25. Cf., Spir. et litt. 45; CSEL 60:199, cited above.*

realizes that in order to protect his doctrine of justification from the danger of Pelagianism, it is necessary to explain the justification according to works of Rom. 2 as derivative from justification in its proper sense. For Calvin, Luther, and most other Protestant theologians, good works become the by-products of this *gratia gratum faciens*; for Bucer, however, works of the law occupy a more significant position as the means by which God has chosen to materialize the righteousness first granted at the *initium fidei*:

Nevertheless, because God wills that we cooperate toward our salvation by means of our good works, at last to “work out our salvation” (Phil. 2:12), in the same way he has decided to measure out to us according to our deeds; and this is his way of justifying us—that is, of granting us eternal life—from works, but then, when the life of God has finally been granted to us, from the grace of God and the merit of Christ before the foundation of the world, through our election and the appointment of God before the ages were accomplished.<sup>84</sup>

In other words, “when God crowns our merits”—that is, when he declares us righteous at the last judgment—“he does nothing other than crown his own gifts.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Nihilominus tamen cum Deus uelit nos sibi bonis operibus ad nostram salutem cooperari, imo etiam eam perficere, κατεργάζεσθαι, Philipp. 2. ac ita statuerit nobis secundum nostra facta rependere, sit etiam suo modo iustificatio nostri, hoc est, adiudicatur nobis uita aeterna, ex operibus, sed tum, quando iam haec nobis uita Dei, ex gratia Dei, & Christi merito ante conditum mundum adiudicata est per electionem nostri, & propositum Dei ante saecula factum.* Ibid, 129-30. This “Zusammenwirken von Gott und Mensch” is, for Koch, “die Gefahr für [Bucers] Rechtfertigungslehre.” Koch, *Studium pietatis*, 46-47. For Bucer, however, this is simply God’s way (*suo modo*) of dealing with his people: God *wills* (*uelit*) that we cooperate, and he has *decided* (*statuerit*) to reward our deeds. Clearly, Bucer is speaking in the idiom of the *potentia Dei ordinata*, and the way to ascertain what the ordained will of God may be, for Bucer, is through exegesis of God’s will as revealed in scripture.

<sup>85</sup> *cum Deus coronat merita nostra, nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua.* Ep. 194.5; CSEL 57:190. Bucer again, on the eschatological justification according to works: *Ad hanc iustificationem concurrunt facta, sed ea ipsa quoque gratuita bonitatis Dei dona & opera sunt.* *Romans* (1536), 130.

So far, this Conciliatio could have been written by any medieval Augustinian. If there is anything innovative in Bucer's exegesis of this text, it is in the way he relates justification to predestination in the *triplex iustificatio* formula:

Therefore our justification is three-fold: that is, in three ways God grants to us eternal life. The first is that by which eternal life is destined for us, and this surely consists only in his goodness itself and with respect to the merits of Christ. The scholastics add the consideration of merits, which God of course foreknows in himself with respect to the future. But whence, pray does he foreknow these things, which no one has unless it is given by Him, and which He himself decrees to give when he decides to give salvation? The second is that by which he in some measure delivers eternal life now and offers its enjoyment, by the gift of his Spirit, in whom we cry, 'Abba father!' This justification, moreover, consists also in our faith, which God gives to us from his own free goodness and effects in us by his Spirit. The third is when he finally offers the substance itself and eternal life, or also those goods which we enjoy in this life, not merely in faith and hope. With this justification our deeds concur, but they themselves are gifts and works of God's gracious goodness.<sup>86</sup>

A number of comments are in order here. First, justification is here understood in terms of its ultimate end, eternal life. Forgiveness of sins, faith, and the gift of the Spirit are touched upon only obliquely and in subordination to the ultimate *telos* of justification, the *uitam aeternam*. Second, the overall shape of this schematic is one of *exitus* and *reditus*—that is, justification begins in the eternal will of God to elect certain individuals to eternal life, it is bestowed proleptically in space and time “the gift of the Spirit,” and it is consummated in the fulfilment of its end, the eternal

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<sup>86</sup> *Triplex itaque est nostri iustificatio, hoc est, trifariam nobis Deus uitam aeternam adiudicat. Prima est, qua uitam aeternam nobis destinat, ea constat utique sola ipsius bonitate, & respectu meriti Christi. Scholastici addunt respectum meritorum, quae Deum scilicet praeuidet in suis futura. Sed unde quaeso ea praeuidet, quae nemo unquam habuerit nisi ipso donante, quae & eo ipso donaturum se statuit, cum donare salutem statuit. Altera, qua uitam aeternam iam aliquo modo exhibet, & frui ea donat, donato suo spiritu, in quo clamamus Abba pater. Haec iustificatio constat praeterea etiam fide nostra, sed quam ipsam quoque nobis Deus ex sua gratuita bonitate donat, & suo in nobis spiritu efficit. Tertia, cum iam re ipsa, & plene uitam aeternam, uel etiam bona, quibus in hac uita fruimur, exhibet, non iam fide tantum & spe. Ad hanc iustificationem concurrunt facta, sed ea ipsa quoque gratuita bonitatis Dei dona & opera sunt. Ibid., Ch. 2, Sec. 3, Conc., 130.*

fruition of God's gracious will. Neither of these two points are particularly startling in relation to late medieval theology. What is surprising is the way in which Bucer ultimately equates justification, in its first aspect, with predestination. More research will need to be done on this topic in order to relate Bucer's understanding of justification and predestination more fully, but given our discussion up to this point, one may advance the following tentative thesis: given Bucer's construal of justification in terms of divine acceptance of the *person*, rather than merely of *works* (though he clearly holds the latter as well),<sup>87</sup> justification must ultimately be understood in terms of the divine will. Thus, *if God chooses to accept an individual into eternal fellowship, that choice is itself constitutive of acceptance*—in other words, choosing to accept *is* acceptance.

Despite his high regard for Melancthon's exegesis of Romans, Bucer differs materially from his Wittenberg colleague in viewing Paul's warnings of future judgment in Rom 2 not as a digression against Jewish opponents, but rather as a straightforward description of the climax of the Christian's earthly pilgrimage. While laying claim to the evangelical rhetoric of dissent in his appropriation of the terms *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, Bucer nevertheless understands these terms rather differently. In faith the merit of Christ "is given to us and is ours," yet not as something external or alien. Rather, "God wills that we cooperate toward our salvation by means of our good works," and those works are declared to be righteous

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<sup>87</sup> *Nam illa ipsa recte facta, iusta quae nos Deus iustificat, hoc est, nobis uitam aeternam adiudicat, Christi in nobis opera sunt, cum illo donata, ex mera Dei & gratuita beneuolentia, ut Dei bonitas semper prima, per se, & tota causa sit salutis nostrae.* Ibid., Ch. 2, Sec. 3, Conc., 129.

at the bar of God's judgment. Bucer thus preserves the Augustinian view of justification as a sanative process while redescribing it with the language of the new evangelical breakthrough.

## **2.2 The Consolidation of Protestant Exegesis**

My analysis of early Protestant commentary on the first half of Romans 2 has thus far demonstrated the existence of two main trajectories of interpretation, corresponding to the two nascent Protestant confessional camps, the Lutheran and Reformed. Though Luther's exegesis is somewhat anomalous to this pattern, the two Wittenberg exegetes I have examined, Melanchthon and Bugenhagen, deploy Melanchthon's rhetorical-critical approach to argue that Paul's warning of future judgment according to works in this passage is a digression from the main point of the epistle, which is justification by faith. Though Melanchthon never explicitly denies that believers will be judged according to their deeds, his strong opposition between the *iustitia legis* and the *iustitia fidei* put this eschatological judgment in an ambiguous position. The early Reformed writers I have examined, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Bucer, all categorically affirm an eschatological judgment according to works. Moreover, each of these writers seeks to reconcile this position with the new evangelical rhetoric of justification by faith by appealing to traditional Catholic exegesis of the text, most notably in Ambrose/Ambrosiaster and Augustine. In each of these commentators, judgment according to works is reconciled with justification by faith by glossing faith as the fount and source of good works. These interpretive trajectories began to converge, however, in the work of a prodigious

new talent from the south-German and Swiss scene, a young reformer whose labors as an exegete would set the direction for Reformed theology and biblical interpretation for centuries to come.

### **2.2.1 Calvin (1540)**

With the publication of his *Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* in 1540, the young Picard Jean Cauvin made good on his promise the previous summer of following up his dogmatic account of the Christian faith with a leaner style of biblical commentary, one that would focus on exegesis of the text at hand while avoiding “lengthy doctrinal discussions” and digressions into *loci communes*.<sup>88</sup>

While the contrast in Calvin’s style with that of his immediate predecessors has often been noted and lauded,<sup>89</sup> his debt to them in substance is often overlooked.

Yet Calvin himself would not have had it so. After enumerating the strengths and weaknesses of the works by Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Bucer, Calvin demurely sets out his own place in this new firmament of evangelical luminaries:

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<sup>88</sup> *Inst.* (1539), “Iohannes Calvinus Lectori,” in COS 3:6. Writing in 1969, T. H. L. Parker observed that the literature on Calvin’s NT commentaries was “meagre and disappointing.” In the intervening generation, however, such studies have become abundant, if uneven in quality. The following works are especially relevant to the present study: T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971); H. Paul Santmire, “Justification in Calvin’s 1540 Romans Commentary,” *CH* 33, no. 3 (1964): 294-313; Benoît Girardin, *Rhétorique et théologique: Calvin, Le commentaire de l’Épître aux Romains* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979); Joel E. Kok, “Heinrich Bullinger’s Exegetical Method: The Model for Calvin?” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 241-54; R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin’s First Commentaries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). And, of course, the essays in Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*.

<sup>89</sup> As, for example, in Richard C. Gamble, “*Brevitas et facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin’s Hermeneutic,” *WTJ* 47, no. 1 (1985): 1-17.

But as they often vary from one another, and thus present a difficulty to simple readers, who hesitate as to what opinion they ought to receive, I thought that it would be no vain labour, if by pointing out the best explanation, I relieved them from the trouble of forming a judgment, who are not able to form a judgment for themselves; and especially as I determined to treat things so briefly, that without much loss of time, readers may peruse in my work what is contained in other writings.<sup>90</sup>

This is not to suggest that Calvin views his task as merely providing a digest of what recent scholars have written—far from it. Calvin’s conception of the exegete’s work is “to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain”—the original intent of Paul is what he is after.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, it is remarkable how often Calvin’s conclusions regarding the *mens Pauli* cohere with and build upon the work of his evangelical colleagues. When Calvin tells his readers that his work summarizes the best of what Protestant exegetes have written, this is no mere self-deprecating gesture. Calvin is clearly aware that he is operating within a newly emergent exegetical tradition, and he intends to shape its course by synthesizing the most important exegetical insights from the evangelical scholars who have already blazed the trail.

And synthesis is exactly what Calvin performs in his interpretation of Romans 2. Calvin is the first exegete I have found in the Reformed tradition to

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<sup>90</sup> *Verum quia illi non raro inter se variant, atque ea res multam praebebat difficultatem lectoribus parum acutis, dum haesitant cuius sententiae potius debeant assentiri, putavi hunc quoque laborem non poenitendum fore, si optimam interpretationem indicando, subleveram eos a iudicandi molestia, quibus non satis firmum est a seipsis iudicium. Praesertim quum ita omnia succincte perstringere instituerem, ut non magnam temporis iacturam facturi essent lectores, apud me legend quae in aliis habentur. Romans (1540), “Iohannes Calvinus Simoni Gynaeco.” COE 13:5.13-21; CTS xx:xx.*

<sup>91</sup> *Et sane quum hoc sit prope unicum illius officium, mentem scriptoris, quem explicandum supsit, patefacere. Ibid., COE 13:3.9-11.*



apply Melanchthon's law-gospel hermeneutic to this passage, yet at the same time he preserves an essential insight from the Reformed appropriation of Augustine in his insistence that God does reward in us the operation of his own gifts of grace. Calvin never fully explains how these themes relate to one another—indeed, the relationship between Calvin's doctrine of justification and his eschatology remains underdeveloped throughout his career. Nevertheless, Melanchthon's law-gospel hermeneutic allows Calvin to secure a notion of justification by faith *alone*, while still making room for the sophisticated account of merit he develops elsewhere.<sup>92</sup>

Calvin's appropriation of Melanchthon's hermeneutic comes to the fore only toward the end of the passage, in dealing with Paul's assertion in 2:13 that "the doers of the law will be justified." As we have seen, Melanchthon explains this passage as Paul speaking in *more legis* in order to deflate the pretensions of the Jews. The Reformed, on the other hand, tended to describe this as an instance of the scripture speaking in *more humano* to underscore the importance of the law for Christian life. Calvin clearly sides with Melanchthon on this case, arguing that Paul's rhetoric is directed against the Jews, who thought that salvation could be attained through the law. Calvin's exegesis of this passage is worth quoting at length:

This anticipates an objection which the Jews might have adduced. As they had heard that the law was the rule of righteousness, they gloried in the mere knowledge of it: to obviate this mistake, he declares that the hearing of the law or any knowledge of

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<sup>92</sup> The latter is beyond the scope of the present study, but see Joseph P. Wawrykow, "John Calvin and Condign Merit," *ARG* 83 (1992): 73-90. Wawrykow, an authority on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, compares the two figures and arrives at the remarkable conclusion that Calvin "approximates, in his discussion of regeneration, key aspects of the Catholic notion of condign merit" (74).

it is of no such consequence, that any one should on that account lay claim to righteousness, but that works must be produced, according to this saying, “He who will do these shall live in them.” The import then of this verse is the following, — “That if righteousness be sought from the law, the law must be fulfilled; for the righteousness of the law (*Legis iustitia*) consists in the perfection of works.” They who pervert this passage for the purpose of building up justification by works, deserve most fully to be laughed at even by children. It is therefore improper and beyond what is needful, to introduce here a long discussion on the subject, with the view of exposing so futile a sophistry: for the Apostle only urges here on the Jews what he had mentioned, the decision of the law, — That by the law they could not be justified, except they fulfilled the law, that if they transgressed it, a curse was instantly pronounced on them. Now we do not deny but that perfect righteousness is prescribed in the law: but as all are convicted of transgression, we say that another righteousness (*aliam iustitiam*) must be sought. Still more, we can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works; for if they alone are justified by the law who fulfill the law, it follows that no one is justified; for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law.<sup>93</sup>

In other words, “the doers of the law” will be justified only in a purely hypothetical sense. Like Melancthon, Calvin draws a contrast between two kinds of righteousness, a “righteousness of the law” (*Legis iustitiam*) and “another righteousness” (*aliam iustitiam*), the “righteousness of faith” (*iustitia fidei*).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Prolepsis qua antevertit quam afferre Iudaei exceptionem poterant. Quia Legem audiebant esse iustitiae regulam, sola eius notitia superbiebant. Eam hallucinationem ut refellat, negat Legis audientiam, seu intelligentiam quicquam habere ponderis, ut iustitiam quis ex ea obtendat; sed proferenda esse opera, secundum illud, ‘Qui fecerit haec, vivet in ipsis’. Hoc igitur tantum valet praesens sententia, ‘Sei ex Lege iustitia quaeritur, impleri Legem oportere; quia in operum perfectione posita est Legis iustitia’. Qui hoc loco abutuntur ad erigendam operum iustificationem, etiam puerorum cachinnis sunt dignissimi. Proinde ineptum est et extra locum, huc longas de iustificatione quaestiones ingerere ad solvendum tam futile cavillum. Tantum enim urget apud Iudaeos Apostolus illud de quo meminerat, Legis iudicium, quod non possint per Legem iustificari, nisi Legem impleant; si transgrediantur, paratam mox esse in illis maledictionem. Nos vero non negamus praescribi in Lege absolutam iustitiam. Sed quia omnes transgressionis convincuntur, quaerendam esse dicimus aliam iustitiam. Quin ex hoc loco argumentari licet, neminem operibus iustificari. Si enim ii soli qui Legem implent, per Legem iustificantur, sequitur nullum iustificari, quia nullus reperitur qui iactare queat Legis complementum. Romans (1540), 2:13; COE 13:45.24-46.3.*

<sup>94</sup> The latter term is not specifically introduced in this context, but it is plain from the *Argumentum* that this is precisely what Calvin has in mind: “The subject then of [the first five] chapters may be stated thus: man’s only righteousness is through the mercy of God in Christ, which being offered by the Gospel is apprehended by faith.” *Romans* (1540), Arg.

Melanchthon notes that “the righteousness of the law is to do the law,” and Calvin heightens the effect by emphasizing that this means “perfection of works” (*perfectio operum*). The remainder of chapter 2 and the first half of chapter 3 prove the point that no one can perfectly fulfill the law, so another righteousness must be sought elsewhere. The logic of this argument is all in place in Melanchthon’s 1532 *Commentarii*, but it is made more explicit and forceful here in Calvin’s exposition: The “doers of the law” *would* be justified—if there were any. But there aren’t, so they won’t.

This does not mean, however, that Calvin wholly rejects the notion that “God will render to each according to his deeds” or relegates all judgment of believers’ deeds to the realm of the purely hypothetical. On the contrary, “the Lord, by visiting the wickedness of the reprobate with just vengeance, will recompense them with what they have merited (*meriti sunt*): and as he sanctifies those whom he has previously resolved to glorify, he will also crown (*coronabit*) their good works.”<sup>95</sup> Calvin is quick to add that this “reward” does not imply merit, underscoring the asymmetrical nature of the judgment: the reprobate are condemned according to their merits, while the good works of the elect receive reward.<sup>96</sup> In answer to the objection that this would make God a “respector of persons,” (2:11) thereby

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<sup>95</sup> *Reprobatorum enim malitiam iusta ultione si puniet Dominus, rependet illis quod meriti sunt. Rursum quia sanctificat quos ille statuit glorificare; in illis quoque bona opera coronabit, sed non pro merito.* Romans (1540), 2:6; COE 13:42.30-32.

<sup>96</sup> In the 1551 edition, Calvin further underscores the distinction between reward and merit: *Stulta autem consequential est, ex mercede statuere meritum.* COE 13:42.35-36.

undermining the gratuitousness of God's election, Calvin responds with a first formulation of what would become his signature doctrine of "double justification":

there is a twofold acceptance of men before God; the first, when he chooses and calls us from nothing through gratuitous goodness, as there is nothing in our soul which can be approved by him; the second, when after having regenerated us, he confers on us his gifts, and shows favor to the image of his Son which he recognizes in us.<sup>97</sup>

Here Calvin seems much closer to Bucer than to Melanchthon. Calvin never collapses predestination into justification, which is why he writes here of a *duplex*, rather than a *triplex acceptatio*. Nevertheless, there is a marked similarity, at least at a formal level, between the way in which Bucer and Calvin apply the language of justification both to God's acceptance of the sinner's person through faith and to the acceptance of the sinner's works at the Last Judgment.

It remains unclear, however, from Calvin's comments what role these works have in securing eternal life. Is it the case that good works are the formal cause of this final justification, such that no one will enter into eternal life without them? Bucer seems to lean in this direction when he writes that "God wills that we cooperate toward our salvation by means of our good works."<sup>98</sup> Or is it the case that

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<sup>97</sup> *Siquis autem hinc cavillettur, non esse igitur gratuitam Dei electionem, respondendum esse duplicem hominis acceptionem cooptat, quum nihil sit in anima nostra quod illi probari queat. Alteram qua ubi nos regeneravit, etiam cum suis donis amplectitur; ac quam in nobis recognoscit Filii sui imaginem, favore suo prosequitur.* *Romans* (1540), 2:11; COE 13:45.4-9. For a thorough consideration of Calvin's notion of "double justification," 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), 163-70.

<sup>98</sup> *Romans* (1536). Ch. 2, *Sec. 3, Conc.*, 129. Calvin shies away from such language. The closest he comes to making such a connection in this commentary is in 2:7, which he summarizes as follows: "the Lord will give eternal life to those who, by attention to good works, strive to attain immortality." This could simply mean, however, that the set of those who have been justified by faith and those who so strive are one and the same.

this second justification merely involves the distribution of rewards in addition to eternal life, after the latter has already been granted purely in response to faith? This, as we have seen, was the view of Origen.<sup>99</sup> Or is it the case that, as in the compromise formula at Regensburg, the eschatological justification is said to have two final causes? Calvin does not settle any of these questions here, nor is it the intention of this study to set out Calvin's considered view of the matter. What is clear, however, is that Calvin seems to be describing this eschatological judgment using two different idioms, the Lutheran-Melanchthonian law-gospel distinction and the Augustinian-Reformed language of God "crowning" his own gifts.

### **2.2.2 Melanchthon (1540, 1544)**

Calvin had finished his Romans commentary by August of 1539, if the dedicatory epistle to Simon Grynaeus is any indication, but it was not actually published until the following year. Melanchthon's 1540 commentary was completed by the end of 1539, however, making it all but certain that Melanchthon did *not* have access to Calvin's exegesis while he was writing.<sup>100</sup> This is a significant point, because between 1540 and 1544, when Melanchthon revised his *Commentarii* yet again, the

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<sup>99</sup> Calvin cites Origen four times by name in his commentary (though Parker has detected at least ten more allusions where the source is not identified), always unfavorably.

<sup>100</sup> The dedicatory epistle to this work, addressed to Landgrave Philipp of Hesse, is dated 1 January 1540. MBW 2336 (CR 3:896-901).

two reformers were thrown into close association through their joint endeavors in ecumenical dialogue with Catholic theologians at Regensburg.<sup>101</sup>

Calvin had arrived in Strasbourg in September of 1538, and in a letter to Guillame Farel the following month we learn that Calvin had exchanged letters with Melanchthon.<sup>102</sup> The two men met for the first time in February 1539 at a conference in Frankfort am Main sponsored by the electors Joachim of Brandenburg and Louis of the Palatinate to mediate between the Protestant Schmalcaldic League and the newly formed Catholic Holy League. Calvin came as part of the Swiss delegation, with the intent “to exchange thoughts with Melanchthon about religion and the concerns of the Church.”<sup>103</sup> The following year, Melanchthon, Bucer, and Calvin were all part of Protestant delegation at the imperial colloquy at Regensburg, where the compromise formula on “double justice” was agreed upon.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Taking the ornate rhetoric of their correspondence at face value, many scholars have concluded that Calvin and Melanchthon were the dearest of friends. Wengert, however, has argued convincingly that these protestations of devotion must be treated with care, conforming so closely as they do to classical literary canons and biblical norms. Timothy J. Wengert, “‘We Will Feast Together in Heaven Forever’: The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Philip Melanchthon,” in *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, ed. Karin Maag (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999), 19-44.

<sup>102</sup> MBW 2103 (T8:234-35).

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon, The Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 255.

<sup>104</sup> On the Regensburg Colloquy, see Lexutt, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch*; Anthony N. S. Lane, “Calvin and Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy,” in *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Genève: Droz, 2004), 233-63; “Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification? Reflections on Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy (1541),” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark A. Husbands and Daniel J. Trier (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 205-24.

Calvin and Bucer, as we have noted, had already elaborated similar notions in their commentaries on Romans regarding eschatological rewards for believers' good works. Melanchthon, however, had resolutely excluded any positive consideration of good works from justification in his exegesis of the text. This begins to change, however, beginning with the 1540 revision. Here Melanchthon allows that a "inchoate obedience" must of necessity follow after we have been justified by faith, but he vigorously denies that these "works" satisfy the demands of the law.<sup>105</sup> This is hardly a new idea for Melanchthon,<sup>106</sup> but it is curious that he introduces it here, as such a discussion can only muddy the distinction he is pressing in this context between the *iustitia legis* and the *iustitia fidei*. In 1544, however, Melanchthon goes a step further, allowing that these works begun after faith are in fact pleasing to God:

Therefore the meaning is: "he will reward according to works," that is, to the righteous he will give eternal life, that is, as the Gospel teaches, to those who are justified by faith. And it is necessary that obedience has begun in these. It pleases not because it satisfies the Law, but because the person has been reconciled by faith and acknowledges its weakness, and nevertheless believes that these acts of worship are pleasing to the Father because of Christ.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Et quidem Lex solet de fide tanquam de opere loqui, et tamen interim ex Evangelio sciendum est, quod fide gratis accipiatur iustificatio, quam postea necessario sequi debet nova & inchoata obedientia. . . . Quamvis enim fides & opera non sunt merita, tamen fides est instrumentum, quo accipimus reconciliationem, & quo efficimur filii Dei & cohaeredes Christi, & hanc necessario sequi debet nova obedientia, quae non satisfacit Legi. Quare non est meritum aut precium vitae aeternae, sed placet quia credimus Christo. Romans (1540), 31.*

<sup>106</sup> According to Wengert, Melanchthon first argued for the necessity of good works in the life of the justified believer in his 1534 *Scholia* on Colossians. Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 185-91.

<sup>107</sup> *Unde autem oriatur haec fides, docent promissiones seu Evangelium. Postea placent et reliqua opera a Deo mandata, quae sequi fidem necessario debent. Est ergo sententia: Reddet iuxta opera, id est, iustis dabit vitam aeternam, hoc est, ut Evangelium docet, fide iustificatis. Et in his necesse est esse inchoatam obedientiam, quae placet, non quia legi satisfaciat, sed quia fide reconciliata est*

In the last section I argued that Calvin draws on the work of both Melanchthon and his south-German and Swiss colleagues, resulting in a synthesis of what he takes to be the best Protestant exegesis on Romans. In the case of Melanchthon, the lines of influence are more difficult to trace, particularly as Melanchthon himself had arrived at remarkably similar conclusions regarding the necessity of good works in the Christian life and their standing before God long before Calvin.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, these conclusions did not find their way into his exegesis of Romans until much later. We may detect in the successive revisions of his commentary a two-fold pattern of development. First, beginning with the *Annotationes* of 1522 and continuing through each revision of the *Commentarii* in 1532, 1540, and 1544, we see a tendency to relativize Paul's warnings of future judgment with regard to the *scopus* of the epistle, the doctrine of justification by faith. Both through his rhetorical-critical approach to the text and the development of his distinctive law-gospel hermeneutic, Melanchthon makes the case with increasing force that the warnings of future judgment in this text have no bearing on the righteousness of faith. But second, beginning in 1540, Melanchthon reintroduces

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*persona et agnoscit suam infirmitatem, et tamen credit hos cultus propter Christum patri placere. Romans (1544); CR 15:576-77.*

<sup>108</sup> Wengert summarizes Melanchthon's view in the 1534 *Scholia* on Colossians in terms remarkably similar to Calvin's *duplex acceptatio*: "One almost detects a double imputation of righteousness here: one for the ungodly and the other for the works of the good conscience. Both were accounted as righteous 'propter Christum,' with the startling result that the obedience of the human being (not simply the work of the Holy Spirit) and the demand of the law (not simply the declaration of the gospel) had become the foci around which the Christian life now revolved for Melanchthon. *Law and Gospel*, 191.



the notion of Christian obedience back into his exegesis of Romans 2. It is probably idle to speculate why he does this—whether this represents a genuine development in his understanding of the text or whether his close association with Calvin and participation in the talks at Regensburg led him to highlight aspects of his thought which had hitherto gone unexpressed in connection with this text. In any event, one thing is certainly clear: by the mid-1540's, Melancthon and Calvin have effected a remarkable convergence in exegesis, such that we can no longer speak of two distinct trajectories of interpretation, a Lutheran-Melancthonian and an Augustinian-Reformed, as we could a decade earlier. What we have instead, is a distinctively Protestant interpretation.

**Part II:**  
**Justification and the Law in Romans 3**

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; <sup>26</sup>it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By a law of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.

——Romans 3:19-28

“By the law of works God says: ‘Do what I command!’ By the law of faith we say to God: ‘Give what you command!’”

——Augustine, *On the Letter and the Spirit*

“We all pray: ‘Give what Thou commandest,’ and yet we do not receive this power. We all believe and speak, we confess and act, and yet we are not all justified.”

——Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*

## Chapter 3: Justification Fulfilling the Law in Patristic and Medieval Exegesis

The Protestant affirmation of justification by faith carried with it from the very beginning an implicit contrast: if justification is by faith *alone*, then it is not by any works, merits or qualities inherent in the human being. Yet placed within its biblical context, Paul's claim in Romans 3 that "one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" raised a whole host of thorny exegetical and theological questions. What sort of law was Paul speaking of, and how does faith relate to that law? Is there any distinction to be made between the law of nature and the law of Moses? Between the ceremonial law and the moral law? And if justification comes apart from any or all of these kinds of law, what does Paul mean by the "law of faith"? Does this law of faith replace the "law of works," or it is another kind of "law" altogether?

The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century returned to these questions with a fresh set of exegetical tools and a new theological agenda, but this does not abrogate the fact that they were part of an ongoing interpretive tradition—even if, at times, their rhetoric and conclusions were sharply critical of that tradition. My goal in this chapter is to highlight some of the main trends in patristic and medieval interpretation of justification and law in Romans 3 prior to the Reformation. As we will see in the next chapter, the reformers lodged critiques of the tradition in general, as well as of specific exegetes, and it will aid our understanding of those sixteenth-

century debates if we take the time to understand these prior developments on their own terms before we turn to the ways in which the tradition was redirected in the debates of the sixteenth century.

Beyond merely setting the stage for what follows, however, I intend to make a larger point about the history of biblical interpretation itself. C. S. Lewis once observed that, “humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind.”<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is this “privilege” in greater evidence than in the history of biblical interpretation, a fact which has often been lost on modern observers, both early and late. The reformers of the sixteenth century not only advanced their own interpretations of these texts, but they often did so against the backdrop of a constructed history of exegesis. We shall examine this process in this following chapter. Two more recent studies on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Romans bear mention in this connection, however. The first is by Mark Reasoner, a New Testament scholar who samples a succession of premodern and modern exegetes, plotting their findings along a neat arc of *exitus* and *reditus* in an effort to demonstrate that the trajectory of Pauline interpretation over the last two millennia winds up exactly where he wants it: at a confluence of Origen and the “New Perspective” on Paul.<sup>2</sup> I will have occasion in what follows to disagree with several

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: a History of Interpretation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005). See, especially, the charming diagram on p. xxvii.

of the readings Reasoner presents on specific figures—most notably, Origen and Luther—but at a broader level, I wish to offer an alternative approach to the history of exegesis, one that emphasizes the polysemous and often conflicting state of the conversation in any given period. The history of biblical interpretation is not a simple progression from one “perspective” to another in linear succession. On the contrary, it involves the development of multiple streams of interpretation, each one in conversation with the others and drawing freely on a common store of exegetical lore handed down in the form of glosses, commentaries, sermons and other forms of interpretation. Prior to the fragmentation of Western Christendom in the Reformation, these streams coexisted more or less uneasily within the capacious skirts of Mother Church. In the aftermath of the Reformation, however, one’s exegesis of specific passages in Romans became increasingly tethered to confessional identity—whether Reformed, Lutheran, or Catholic. In this chapter I examine more than thirty treatments of Romans written between the third and fifteenth centuries, with especial consideration given to Origen, Augustine, the exegetical textbooks produced in the mid-twelfth century by the school of Laon and Peter Lombard. This wealth of exegetical material defies easy categorization, yet I argue that there are certain recurrent themes, as well as some general trends.

The second recent work which hovers in the background of this chapter is Thomas Scheck’s, *Origen and the History of Justification: the Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*. Scheck is a careful, if overly apologetic, reader of Origen, and his work is helpful in highlighting the importance of Origen’s Pauline exegesis

for the history of biblical interpretation. In my judgment, however, Scheck massively overstates his case when he concludes his survey of Origen's reception history with the assertion that "Catholic exegesis of Romans" is a "series of footnotes to Origen."<sup>3</sup> Although Scheck makes an important contribution in demonstrating the essential agreement between Origen and Augustine on this question, despite the differing contexts to which they addressed their exegetical labors, Scheck examines only one medieval exegete (William of St. Thierry) in any detail between Augustine and Erasmus. I have attempted to cover rather more ground in this chapter, and I am left with the strong impression that the shade who haunts the glosses and commentaries of the middle ages most doggedly is without question Augustine. I have found only two medieval exegetes who explicitly cite Origen in their treatments of Romans 3, the aforementioned William and Augustine Favaroni of Rome; scarcely a single one of the commentaries I encountered did not either quote explicitly from some treatise of Augustine or render an obvious paraphrase. Moreover, when the subtle differences between Origen and Augustine on the question of justification are teased out, as I undertake to do in the opening sections of this chapter, it will be clear that the history of Pauline interpretation on the question of justification and law in Romans 3 is, if not a series of "footnotes to

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: the Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 217. For a more extensive critique of Scheck's work, see my forthcoming review in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 60, no. 1 (2009).

Augustine,” then at least utterly incomprehensible apart from the basic interpretive framework he supplied.

This does not mean that Origen may be safely ignored, however. The reformers of the sixteenth century read both authors carefully, and while some of their sharpest barbs were reserved for Origen, I shall argue in this and the subsequent chapter that Reformation exegesis is by no means a wholesale rejection of the one and embrace of the other. Protestant exegesis of Romans—especially on the question of law and its relation to justification—shares certain key features with both of these north African theologians which can only be appreciated by a careful examination of their writings. To this I now turn.

### 3.1 Origen

Key to understanding Origen’s interpretation of Romans is his nuanced treatment of Paul’s homonymous use of the term “law” (*lex*, for νόμος).<sup>4</sup> “The Apostle mentions many kinds of law in this epistle,” Origen warns his readers, and “when he passes from one kind to another it is scarcely possible for this to be detected except by a reader who is sufficiently attentive.”<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, much of Origen’s exposition of

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<sup>4</sup> “Origène fait de l’homonymie du mot « loi », c’est-à-dire de la diversité de « sens » de ce mot et de la diversité des « réalités » auxquelles il renvoie, la clé de son interprétation de *l’Épître aux Romains* : on ne peut pas comprendre cette Épître si l’on n’accepte pas la diversité des lois dont il est question sous l’unique mot *nomos*.” Marguerite Harl, “Origène et la sémantique du langage biblique,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 26, no. 3 (1972): esp. 164-66. Cf. also Riemer Roukema, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen’s Commentary on Romans* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> *Romans*, 3.7.5; Hammond Bammel 1:229; FotC 103:210. Cf. *Philocalia* 9.

the second half of Romans 3 is aimed at parsing the shifting referents of *νόμος* and highlighting the theological significance of these moves for Paul's argument.

### 3.1.1 "Apart from the law . . . attested by the law"

Origen argues that the first half of Romans 3, up through verse 20, represents an appeal to natural law in order to establish that all humans, Jew and Greek alike, stand equally condemned at the bar of God's justice.<sup>6</sup> Commenting on vv. 19-20, Origen contends that Paul cannot be referring to the Mosaic law in this context because his argument is a universal one. "How shall it appear consistent," he asks, "that through this law, which governs one nation only in its stipulations, every mouth is shut and through it the whole world is held accountable to God?"<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Origen adduces the examples of Cain, Joseph's brothers, and Job as instances where knowledge of sin is clearly available before the law of Moses had

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<sup>6</sup> Failure to follow the logic of Origen's argument in this passage has led a number of recent scholars to suggest that Origen here contrasts the law of faith with the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Mark Reasoner even goes so far as to enlist Origen as an "early precedent for the new perspective [on Paul]," citing a passage later in the *CRm* (Hammond Bammel 8.6; 672.111-15; FotC 104:159) where Origen notes that "the works that Paul repudiates and frequently criticizes are not the works of righteousness that are commanded in the law, but those in which those who keep the law according to the flesh boast; i.e., the circumcision of the flesh, the sacrificial rituals, the observance of Sabbaths or new moon festivals. These, then, and the works of this nature are the ones on the basis of which he says no one can be saved." This comment, however, comes in the context of a discussion relating election and grace (Rom 11:6), and to take it as a gloss on Rom 3:20 ignores the fact that for Origen what is in view in Rom 3 is a discussion of the inception of justification and the life of virtue, a point at which the contrast between the law of faith and the law of works (which includes that natural law) is paramount. Moreover, the move Reasoner proposes requires that Origen oscillates continuously between different meanings of the law in this passage: natural law (3:19), Mosaic (ceremonial) law (3:20a), natural law (3:30b), Mosaic (ceremonial) law (3:21). Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle*, 25; Scheck, *Origen*, 49. As my analysis later in this chapter will show, at least two later medieval commentators, William of St. Thierry and Augustine Favaroni of Rome, understood Origen in the manner I am here suggesting.

<sup>7</sup> *Romans*, 3.6.1; Hammond Bammel 1:221; FotC 103:202-203.



been given.<sup>8</sup> Only natural law so transcends the particularity of space and time as to be capable of bearing the weight Paul puts on it at this stage in his argument.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, reading this passage in terms of natural law comes with the added benefit of depriving Origen's Gnostic opponents of a favorite proof-text used to denigrate the law of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> "Through the law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20), but this does not mean, "as the heretics accuse the God of the law," that the law itself is evil, for this knowledge comes *through* the law (*per legem*), not *from* the law (*ex lege*). Origen illustrates the point by comparing the law to the *ars medicinae*:

You don't think, do you, that medical science will be deemed to be the cause of sickness just because by means of it the nature of sickness is recognized? But just as it is indisputable that medical science is a good thing since it offers understanding of illness by which the one who wills can avoid illness, so also the law is good, through which means sin is detected and known.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Origen notes that Job "is acknowledged to have come before the law." Cf. *Cels.* 6.43.

<sup>9</sup> Note, however, that for Origen, not even natural law is universal. Children (*infantes*), "for whom the judgment of right and wrong does not yet exist," are exempt, a possibility which Origen also leaves open for the mentally incompetent (*impotes mentis*). *Romans*, 3.6.3; Hammond Bammel 1:223; FotC 103:204.

<sup>10</sup> Origen does not identify specific opponents in this passage, but such views were widespread among the various Gnostic groups. For example, the *Acta Archelai*, a text purporting to be a debate between Archelaus, Bishop of Kaskar in Mesopotamia, and Mani, founder of the eponymous Gnostic sect, during the reign of the Emperor Probus (276-82), has Mani quoting Romans 3:20 "with the view of detracting from the honor of the law, on the ground that the law itself is sin." *ANF* 6:214. Origen, writing ca. 245, is addressing a similar argument, and one that clearly had a wide circulation among Gnostic critics of the Mosaic law.

<sup>11</sup> *Romans*, 3.6.9; Hammond Bammel 1:227; FotC 103:208. Schelkle overstates his case, I think, when he writes that, "Zur Abweher dieser Vorwürfe läßt sich Origenes zu der—offenbar irrigen—Behauptung drängen, das Gesetz, das daneben hineinkam und die Sünde steigerte, sei nicht das Gesetz des Moses, sondern das Gesetz in unseren Gliedern." After all, Origen's *per/ex* distinction is sufficient to answer the Gnostic critique, and this would work equally well with either the natural or the Mosaic law. Karl Hermann Schelkle, "Kirche und Synagoge in der frühen Auslegung des Römerbriefs," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 134 (1954): 297.

Note, however, that even in this polemical context, where Origen is defending the law against its Gnostic despisers, its value is diagnostic rather than sanative, and Origen is not at pains to blunt the force of Paul's claim in the same passage that "no flesh will be justified by God by works of the law."<sup>12</sup>

Despite this important diagnostic role, the law plays no part in disclosing the righteousness of God. This is because for Origen there are in fact two kinds of righteousness, described by two kinds of law. Paul's rhetorical pivot from speaking of the natural law in the first half of the chapter to describing the righteousness of God "attested by the law and the prophets" (3:21) is intended, in Origen's view, to forestall the objection that if knowledge of sin is available through the natural law, then so must be its remedy. Yet Origen argues that this is precisely the possibility Paul wishes to exclude with his notion of justification by faith:

What he is saying, then, is this: It is not the case that, just as the knowledge of sin comes through the law, so also the disclosure of God's righteousness comes through the law. But God's righteousness is disclosed apart from the law. For the law of nature was able to reveal the nature of sin and bring to light the knowledge of sin; but the righteousness of God surpasses (*supercreditur*) and rises above (*satis eminet*) whatever the human mind can scrutinize by the natural senses alone. For the mind does not suffice, not so much for every kind of human righteousness (*quamcumque humanam*), but for grasping the righteousness of God and the judgments which descend from it, concerning which it is said that they are the great deep.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Origen paraphrases this clause as follows: "nothing that is flesh and that lives according to the flesh can be justified by the law of God," and he reinforces the law's impotence with intertextual glosses from Rom 8:7-8, Is 40:6, and Jn 6:63. *Romans*, 3.6.7; Hammond Bammel 1:226; FotC 103:207.

<sup>13</sup> *Tale est ergo quod dicit: non sicut per legem agnitio peccati ita et manifestatio iustitiae Dei per legem fit; sed sine lege manifestatur iustitia Dei. Poterat enim naturae lex arguere peccati naturam et notitiam eius ostendere; iustitia autem Dei supercreditur et satis eminet hoc quodcumque mens humana solis naturalibus sensibus potest rimari. Neque enim sufficit ad intellegendam et considerandam non quamcumque humanam sed ipsam Dei iustitiam et iudicia quae ex ipsa descendunt; de quibus dicitur quia sint abyssus multa.* *Romans*, 3.7.5; Hammond Bammel 1:229-30; FotC 103:210-11.

The law of nature is “of no help whatsoever” in grasping the *iustitia Dei*, he continues, “though it appears to understand something about human righteousness.”<sup>14</sup> The content of this *humana iustitia* involves perceptions about what is just “among men” (*inter homines*), and includes such maxims as the “Golden Rule.” The *iustitia Dei*, on the other hand, involves *doctrinae* which cannot be perceived naturally (*naturaliter sentire*), such as Christ’s commands not to practice one’s righteousness in public (Mt 6:1) and not to let the left hand know what the right is doing (Mt 6:3). These are the sorts of things “which the law of nature cannot declare.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, they must be revealed through a law of faith.<sup>16</sup>

This law of faith receives attestation in the law of Moses—“not the law of Moses according to the letter but according to the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> This is an important epistemological point for Origen: the righteousness of God disclosed by Christ is not merely to be taken on faith alone, but rather it represents an organic unity with the righteousness of God revealed in the Old Testament—“the one is rooted in the other

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<sup>14</sup> *Romans*, 3.7.6; Hammond Bammel 1:230; FotC 103:211.

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

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Romans* 4.1.1, where Origen concisely summarizes this point in a way that makes the parallel use of the term “law” even more obvious: “Up above [Paul] had set forth two kinds of laws, one of which he called the law of works and the other the law of faith. He says that through the law of faith the boasting of those who boast in the works of the law is excluded; moreover he has declared that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” Hammond Bammel 2.269; FotC 103:237.

<sup>17</sup> *Romans*, 3.7.8; Hammond Bammel 1:232; FotC 103:213. Cf. *Romans* 3.7.6, where Origen observes that “the Holy Spirit had recorded many things about God’s righteousness [in the law of Moses] through figures and enigmas (*per figuras et enigmata*).” Origen gives an additional, philological reason for his exegetical distinction between the natural law and the law of Moses. The former, he observes, is usually indicated by an anarthrous use of νομοῦ, where the latter is specified by the article. The distinction works well enough in Rom 3:21.

so that perfection comes from both.”<sup>18</sup> This is illustrated as clearly and forcefully as anywhere else in the commentary in Origen’s intertextual exegesis of Romans 3:25 with Exodus 25:10-22. “Although the Apostle has taught us many things about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which are to be marveled at,” Origen notes, “in this passage he has brought forth something even more admirable which I do not think is easy to find in other passages of Scripture.”<sup>19</sup> Origen notices Paul’s use of the term ἱλαστήριον (rendered *propitiatorium sive propitiatorem* by Rufinus), and he points out that this is the same term used in the book of Exodus (LXX) to describe the “mercy seat” placed atop the ark of the covenant. Since “it is certain that in nearly every passage, the Apostle’s meaning flows from the treasure chambers of the law and the prophets,” Origen understands these two texts as illuminating one another.<sup>20</sup>

Origen’s exegesis of Christ’s propitiatory role is exegetically rich and theologically profound. At ten full pages in the English text, it is also by far the most thoroughly developed literary theme in his exposition of Romans 3. Space precludes a detailed engagement with all the ways in which Origen understands the “mercy seat” of Exodus 25 as prefiguring Christ’s person and work, though given its

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<sup>18</sup> Scheck is correct to interpret this passage as countering a Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament, yet he cannot resist interpreting Origen’s statement in this passage that “faith alone (*fides sola*) . . . does not disclose the righteousness of God” as an affirmation of the unity of faith and works. Origen’s point in this context is purely epistemological, however. *Origen*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.1; Hammond Bammel 1.235; FotC 103:216.

<sup>20</sup> “It seemingly appears that the Apostle found the word ‘propitiatory’ in this passage and now has recorded it in his own writings, of which our current discourse is speaking. It also seems that this propitiatory which had been written about in Exodus referred to nothing other than the Savior and Lord since it says, ‘God pre-determined him as a propitiatory through faith.’” *Romans*, 3.8.2; Hammond Bammel 1.237; FotC 103:218.

significance for the later exegetical tradition, we must at least note some of the more important parallels.<sup>21</sup> Broadly speaking, Origen argues that by associating Christ with the mercy seat of ancient Israel, Paul is establishing that it is “through the sacrifice of himself” that Christ would “make God propitious to men.”<sup>22</sup> More specifically, the ἱλαστήριον of the old covenant serves as an image in “form and figure” for the “true propitiatory,” this in a number of suggestive ways.<sup>23</sup> First, the fact that the mercy seat, which covered the ark of the covenant, was overlaid with pure gold suggests the sinless nature of the “holy and pure soul of Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Second, the dimensions of the mercy seat itself point both to the divine and the human natures in Christ: its length of two and one half cubits is close enough to three to remind the attentive reader of the Trinity (yet not so presumptuous as to represent it precisely!), while its width of one and one-half cubits is halfway between numbers representing “single and unique status” and uncleanness, respectively. Accordingly, the width of the mercy seat represents Christ’s human nature, by virtue of which he mediates between God and fallen humanity.<sup>25</sup> Third, the cherubim point to “the

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<sup>21</sup> Modern biblical scholars have largely confirmed Origen’s supposition that Paul is developing an intertextual link with ancient Israelite cultic practices in this text, even if they have not followed him in all the details of his theological exegesis. Cf. Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 284-88.

<sup>22</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.1; Hammond Bammel 1.236; FotC 103:216.

<sup>23</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.3; Hammond Bammel 1.238; FotC 103:218.

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

<sup>25</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.4; Hammond Bammel 1.238-39; FotC 103:218-19. Origen is at no further pains to explain how “the number two, which is reserved for things consigned to bodies . . . is sometimes appointed even for unclean things.” For more on Origen’s exegetical numerology, Gerald Bostock,

fullness of knowledge” revealed in Christ.<sup>26</sup> That there are two cherubim clearly indicates the presence of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, and their spread wings make clear that these two “find such a great breadth and such a great volume that they are said not only to indwell [Christ’s soul] but to spread forth their wings and sometimes even fly about.” Fourth, this mercy seat sits atop the ark of the covenant, which represents Christ’s “holy flesh in which his blessed soul is placed.”<sup>27</sup> This ark encloses the “testimonies of God” regarding Christ’s suffering in the flesh. Finally, Origen points out that Christ has now become the locus of divine revelation, subsuming within himself the physical space where God would speak to his people.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.1.2 Justification *sola fide***

After arguing at length through allegorical exegesis that the knowledge of God’s righteousness in Jesus Christ does not rest upon mere faith alone, Origen turns in the final sections of Book 3 to explain how it is that faith alone may be said to justify. Origen’s remarks on justification *sola fide* in this passage have been variously interpreted, and scholarly opinion on this question runs the gamut from those who

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“Origen and the Pythagoreanism of Alexandria,” in *Origeniana Octava I*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 465-78. It is also worth underscoring the fact that for Origen, the role of “mediator” must be referred not to Christ’s deity but to his humanity.”

<sup>26</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.5-6; Hammond Bammel 1.240; FotC 103:219-20. As Scheck points out in the notes to this section, Origen is drawing on Philo’s allegorical exegesis in *On Moses 2* and in *Questions and Answers on Exodus 2.62*.

<sup>27</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.7; Hammond Bammel 1.240-41; FotC 103:221.

<sup>28</sup> *Romans*, 3.8.8; Hammond Bammel 1.242-42; FotC 103:221.

view his exegesis as “distinctly Protestant” to those who see it as expressing in seminal form the teachings of the Council of Trent.<sup>29</sup> Both of these approaches obscure what is really at stake in this context, however. Origen’s primary concern in his remarks on Romans 3:27-28 is neither polemical nor constructive, but rather apologetic. Paul’s statement that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” concerns Origen because it seems to conflict with the teaching on justification according to works that he had developed in the previous chapter.<sup>30</sup> His paraphrase of the text only heightens the tension: “[Paul] is saying that the justification of faith alone suffices, so that the one who only believes is justified, even if he has not accomplished a single work.”<sup>31</sup>

But Origen’s solution to this apparent conflict makes perfect sense in light of our conclusion in the last chapter that his understanding of God’s judgment can best be characterized as a justification by virtue, rather than strictly by works. Origen asks who it is that is justified by faith alone, and he produces two examples: the thief

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<sup>29</sup> For the former view, see Fred Gladstone Bratton, “Origen, The First Christian Liberal,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 8, no. 3 (1940): 140. See also Theresia Heither, *Translatio religionis: die Paulusdeutung des Origines in seinem Kommentar zum Römerbrief* (Köln: Böhlau, 1990). For the latter view, see Camille Verfaillie, “La doctrine de la justification dans Origène: d’après son commentaire de l’Épître aux Romains” (Université de Strasbourg, 1926); Scheck, *Origen*, 13-62.

<sup>30</sup> Origen’s understanding of the exegete’s task is rather different from that of contemporary interpreters: “It is incumbent upon us,” he writes, “as those who are attempting to defend the harmoniousness of the Apostle’s writings and to establish that they are entirely consistent in their arrangement,” to explain any apparent contradictions. *Romans*, 3.9.3; Hammond Bammel 1.248; FotC 103:226. Cf. 3.7.4: “What then? Shall we say that the Apostle is writing things that are mutually contradictory? That would indeed be the claim of a most distinguished commentator indeed!”

<sup>31</sup> *et dicit sufficere solius fidei iustificationem, ita ut credens quis tantummodo iustificetur etiamsi nihil ab eo operis fuerit expletum.* *Romans*, 3.9.2; Hammond Bammel 1.248; FotC 103:226.

on the cross to whom Christ said, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:24), and the woman who anointed Christ in Lk 7:36-50.<sup>32</sup> For Origen, justifying grace is given in response to faith. This grace drives out all vice and ungodliness, making the soul a suitable home for all the virtues.<sup>33</sup> If death immediately follows the reception of this grace, as with the thief on the cross, the soul possessed of these virtues will be able to pass the bar of God’s judgment because of their possession, and thus will have been saved *sola fide*, apart from the actual exercise of these virtues. On the other hand, when scripture speaks of faith saving under ordinary circumstances, as with the woman in Luke 7, we are to assume that what is in view is the inception of virtue, rather than the endpoint of its development. Origen’s warning at the end of this section makes this point perfectly clear:

But perhaps someone who hears these things should become lax and negligent in doing good, if in fact faith alone (*fides sola*) suffices for him to be justified. To this person we shall say that if anyone acts unjustly after justification, it is scarcely to be doubted that he has rejected (*spreuit*) the grace of justification. For a person does not receive the forgiveness of sins (*ueniam peccatorum*) in order that he should once again imagine that he has been given a license to sin; for the remission (*indulgentia*) is not given for future crimes, but only past ones.<sup>34</sup>

Two observations are in order. First, Origen’s notion of justification in this context seems to be synonymous with forgiveness of sins, and this *ueniam*, or *indulgentia*, is first and foremost a question of God’s disposition with regard to the sinner. Second,

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<sup>32</sup> “Furthermore in many passages of the Gospel we read that the Savior has used this phrase [i.e., ‘Your faith has saved you’] to say that the faith of the believer is the cause of his salvation.” *Romans*, 3.9.4; FotC 103:227.

<sup>33</sup> Cf., *Romans*, 2.1.3; Hammond Bammel 1:100; FotC 103:103-4.

<sup>34</sup> *Romans*, 3.9.4; Hammond Bammel 1.249; FotC 103:227-28.



it is not altogether clear from this discussion what, in Origen's mind, would constitute the sort of despising (*spernere*) of grace that would cause one to lose one's justification, and our discussion of this question in the previous chapter we noted a certain ambiguity on just this point. Justification by faith may only cover the remission of former sins, yet Origen is not such a rigorist as to insist that justified believers must continue in a state of sinless perfection in order to pass muster at the bar of God's judgment.<sup>35</sup>

We may summarize Origen's exegesis of Romans 3 in terms of two key insights which would be of critical significance for the later interpretative tradition. First, Origen thinks that Paul's argument regarding the powerlessness of the law to justify applies not only to the law of Moses, with its sacrifices and ceremonies, but also the law of nature. Both laws serve a similar function in revealing sin, yet the law of Moses serves the added purpose of attesting to Christ—"not the law of Moses according to the letter but according to the Spirit." Moreover, Origen contrasts the law of nature not only with the law of Moses, but with the "law of faith." The former is of no help in revealing the righteousness of God, though Origen grants that it is valid within certain bounds as an expression of human righteousness. The latter, however, contains precepts which cannot be derived from the law of nature, such as Christ's commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. The law of faith, therefore, reveals the *iustitia Dei* by expanding on the actual moral content of the natural law.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf., *Romans*, 2.7.8; Hammond Bammel 1:130; FotC 103:127

Origen does not directly compare this new law with the law of Moses, yet it is clear from his discussion that all three forms of law, natural, Mosaic, and the law of faith, serve a purely revelatory, rather than a sanative, or transformative, purpose.

The second major contribution of Origen's exegesis of Romans 3 involves his distinctive understanding of justification *sola fide*. The law in its various forms is powerless to save, but God forgives sins in response to faith alone. Of course, this way of describing the matter leaves out an important mediating term, that of virtue, which as we saw in Origen's exegesis of Romans 2 is the proximate cause of the soul being regarded by God as righteous: "How then shall it be just to convict a soul that is now filled with virtues, of the things it had committed when it was not yet a friend of the virtues?"<sup>36</sup> Yet for Origen, this infusion of the virtues is granted in response to simple faith, such that Origen seems to be reading Paul's argument for justification by faith as a sort of shorthand for the forgiveness of sins in conjunction with the inception of virtue.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, it would be anachronistic to view this as a sort of proto-Protestant solifidianism, as Origen neither draws a clear distinction between faith and virtue, nor does he regard this justification as anything more than an amnesty for sins committed *prior* to conversion. Yet it would be just as serious an error to regard Origen's views as an anticipation of later Tridentine orthodoxy. It

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<sup>36</sup> Romans, 2.1.3; Hammond Bammel 1:100; FotC 103:103-4.

<sup>37</sup> According to Scheck, "Origen seems to understand the Pauline slogan 'justification by faith' as synecdoche (*pars pro toto*). In the Pauline text the part (faith) is put for the whole (postbaptismal renewal). We are saved by faith, to be sure, but by a faith that is not exclusive of other theological virtues such as hope and love, obedience and holiness." Scheck, *Origen*, 52.

is Origen, after all, and not Luther, who introduces the term *sola fide* into the theological lexicon, and his paradigmatic *exempla*—the thief on the cross and the woman who anointed Christ—underscore the point that for Origen, the decisive transition from vice to virtue, and thus from death to life, is catalyzed by faith alone.

### 3.2 Augustine

The righteousness of God manifested apart from the law yet attested by the same is a persistent theme throughout Augustine’s corpus. Early in his career he cites Romans 3:21 in a manner entirely congruent with Origen’s exegesis against Manichaean opponents who sought to drive a wedge between the revelation of Christ and the scriptures of Israel.<sup>38</sup> So also, in a sermon on Matthew 16, Augustine elevates this text to the status of a hermeneutical axiom in explaining the symbolic role of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration of Christ.<sup>39</sup> Augustine’s most detailed exegesis of the text, however, comes in the course of his ongoing controversy with Pelagius and his followers, beginning with his treatise *On the Letter and the Spirit* in 412.<sup>40</sup> In a previous chapter I noted the significance of this text both as a reading of Romans in its own right and as an important point of access to the reception of Augustine’s

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, *c. Faust.* 12.5; CSEL 25:334; WSA I.20:128.

<sup>39</sup> “Moses and Elijah are talking with the Lord. In Moses we have the law, in Elijah the prophets. *When we put forward anything from the gospel, we back it up from the law and the prophets.* . . . What’s the meaning of Moses and Elijah speaking with the Lord? Listen to the apostle: Through the law, he says, comes knowledge of sin; but now without the law the justice of God has been manifested (Rom 3:21). There you have the Lord together with Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets bearing witness to him.” *S.* 79A; PL 38:493; WSA III.3:348, emphasis mine.

<sup>40</sup> For a summary of this controversy and bibliography, see Eugene TeSelle, “Pelagius, Pelagianism,” in *ATA*, 633-40.

Pauline exegesis in the early modern period. I shall discuss the second point more fully in the next chapter, but here a more detailed examination of the aims and structure of *De spiritu et littera* is in order, as Augustine's exegesis of Romans 3 in this treatise stands at the very heart of one of his earliest and most fundamental critiques of Pelagianism.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine's literary engagement with Pelagianism began in the winter of 411/12, when at the request of Count Marcellinus, he composed a short treatise in answer to the teachings of Caelestius, one of Pelagius' early disciples. This work in two books, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism*, was supplemented by a third when a copy of Pelagius' *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans* fell into Augustine's hands later that spring. In the first two books, Augustine had argued that infant baptism was necessitated by Adam's fall and that no human being had ever lived a sinless life except for the Mediator. In the third book, composed as an epistle to Marcellinus, Augustine's argument became more tightly focused on Pauline exegesis in response to Pelagius' arguments against the transmission of original sin in Romans 5.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> My analysis of the structure of *Spir. et litt.* in this and the following paragraph follows that of Meyer, "Augustine and Paul," esp. 369-72. According to Peter Brown, Augustine considered this treatise "his most fundamental demolition of Pelagianism." Peter R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 2000), 374. Meyer points out, however, that it "has not served as a major resource for the reconstruction of Pelagius's teaching or of the main points of Augustine's response" (368).

<sup>42</sup> *Pecc. mer.* 3.1, CSEL 60:128; WSA I.23:121. In this work, Pelagius purports merely to report the views of "those who are opposed to the transmission of sin by generation." Later in the controversy, of course, this tacit approval is made explicit.

This focus on Romans becomes even sharper in *De spiritu et littera*, written later the same year in response to a follow-up question from Marcellinus. In *Pecc. mer.*, Augustine had allowed that sinless perfection was a hypothetical possibility for human beings, but one never actualized in human experience *post lapsum*.<sup>43</sup> In *Spir. et litt.* 1-3, Augustine easily diffuses the objection that a hypothetical proposition must be instantiated in order to be a real possibility—consider the passing of a camel through the eye of a needle—and moves on to reformulate his own counterthesis: “The issue is not *whether* the self needs God’s help to achieve righteousness but *why* and by *what* means.”<sup>44</sup> Pelagius and his followers claim that human beings attain righteousness because “God created [them] with free choice (*libero uoluntatis arbitrio*) and, by giving the commandments, he teaches them how they should live.”<sup>45</sup>

We, on the other hand, say that the human will (*humanam uoluntatem*) is helped to achieve righteousness in this way: Besides the fact that human beings are created with free choice of the will (*libero arbitrio*) and besides the teaching by which they are commanded (*doctrinam . . . praecipitur*) how they ought to live, they receive the Holy Spirit so that there arises in their minds a delight in and a love for that highest and immutable good that is God, even now while they walk by faith, not yet by vision.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Marcellinus’ letter is not extant, but Augustine summarizes his concerns as follows: “You wrote back that you were disturbed by my statement in the second of the two books. I had said that it was possible for a human being to be sinless, if with the aid of God’s power the will is not lacking, but that apart from the one in whom all are brought to life, there has been no one and will be no one in whom this perfection is to be found while in this life. It strikes you as absurd to say that something is possible when we have no example of it.” *Spir. et litt.* 1, CSEL 60:155; WSA I.23:150.

<sup>44</sup> Meyer, “Augustine and Paul,” 370.

<sup>45</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 4, CSEL 60:157; WSA I.23:151.

<sup>46</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 5, CSEL 60:157; WSA I.23:151.

Moreover, this gift of *doctrina* is not only insufficient apart from the gift of the Holy Spirit, but it actually “increases the evil desire by its prohibition.”<sup>47</sup> *The letter kills*, in other words, *but the Spirit gives life* (2 Cor 3:6).

In order to prove this thesis, Augustine guides Marcellinus through a close reading of selected passages in Romans, drawing on the third chapter in particular to demonstrate the impotence of the law apart from the power of the Spirit. After his initial remarks in pars. 1-7, Augustine sets out his sanative view of justifying grace in pars. 8-13 as a healing mercy extended not because human beings know God or are upright of heart, but that they may become so.<sup>48</sup> Then, beginning in par. 14, he turns to specific exegetical objections raised by the Pelagians. The first is a rather simplistic claim, for which Augustine gives no attribution, that God is “the source of our justification inasmuch as he gave the law.”<sup>49</sup> This Augustine easily disposes of by recourse to Rom 3:20, a text which denies the possibility of justification *ex lege*. Nor will it do to claim that the law which is unable to justify is merely the ceremonial law of the Jews, for when Paul claims that “the knowledge of sin came through the law” in this text, he further specifies its content later in the letter when he argues that “I knew sin only through the law, for I would not have known desire

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<sup>47</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 6, CSEL 60:158; WSA I.23:152.

<sup>48</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 11, CSEL 60:162; WSA I.23:155.

<sup>49</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 14, CSEL 60:165; WSA I.23:157.

(*concupiscentiam*), if the law had not said, ‘You shall not desire (*non concupisces*)’” (Rom 7:7; Ex 20:17).

A more subtle objection to Augustine’s position comes with the claim that the law itself does not justify, but rather by revealing God’s righteousness it allows human beings to know and choose the good—in other words, “one is not justified through the command of the law, but through free choice” (*per liberum arbitrium*).<sup>50</sup> Ironically, this objection represents precisely the position that Augustine himself had set out in his *Commentary on Statements in the Letter to the Romans* of 394/95.<sup>51</sup> Here, however, he stresses the revealed character of the *iustitia Dei* over against the presumption of any righteousness originating in humanity:

He said, *The righteousness of God has been revealed*. He did not say: The righteousness of human beings (*iustitia hominis*) or of our own will (*iustitia propriae uoluntatis*). He said: *The righteousness of God*, not that by which God is righteous, but that with which he clothes a human being when he justifies a sinner.<sup>52</sup>

Here, of course, is the distinction between the active and passive righteousness of God so critical for Luther and the reformers. It is important to note here, however, that Augustine introduces this distinction not to drive a wedge between the *iustitia Dei* and the human will, but rather to argue that since it is the will itself which is corrupt, that which restores the will cannot originate in the will, *proprium uoluntatis*.

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<sup>50</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 15, CSEL 60:166; WSA I.23:158.

<sup>51</sup> *Quod si uocatus uocantem secutus fuerit, quod est iam in libero arbitrio, merebitur et spiritum sanctum per quem bona possit operari, in quo permanens—quod nihilominus est in libero arbitrio—merebitur etiam uitam aeternam, quae nulla possit labe corrumpi. Ex. prop. Rm. 52, CSEL 84:35.*

<sup>52</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 15, CSEL 60:167; WSA I.23:158.

“It is not that this comes about without our will; rather, the law shows that our will is weak so that grace may heal our will and so that a healthy will may fulfill (*impleat*) the law, without being subject to the law or in need of the law.”<sup>53</sup> And indeed, the law and the prophets themselves testify that this is so: the former, by highlighting human inability and the latter by foretelling the ultimate solution.<sup>54</sup>

This emphasis on the revealed character of the *iustitia Dei* raises two interrelated issues for Augustine’s understanding of law in Romans 3. The first has to do with the relationship between the two testaments and the question of continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the Church; the second has to do with the continued relevance of the moral law to the Christian life. If the righteousness of God is revealed in Christ, in what relationship does this “law of faith” stand to the “law of works” practiced by the Jews? Here Augustine is careful not to allow any facile mapping of this distinction onto the Old and New Testaments. The people of God under the old covenant were given both moral precepts and ceremonial obligations; the former are still in force under the new covenant, and even though the latter are no longer binding on Christians, the sacraments of the new covenant are. The law of works was given in external form and promised only temporal rewards, yet the law of faith is given internally and promises spiritual rewards:

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<sup>53</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 15, CSEL 60:168; WSA I.23:159. Cf. *c. ep. Pel.* 1.18.13.

<sup>54</sup> “The law bears witness, because by commanding and threatening and yet justifying no one it indicates clearly enough that human beings are justified by the gift of God through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The prophets bear witness, because the coming of Christ has fulfilled what they foretold.” *Spir. et litt.* 15, CSEL 60:167; WSA I.23:158.



The law of works written upon stone tablets and its reward, that promised land which the carnal house of Israel received when it was set free from Egypt, pertains to the Old Testament. So too, the law of faith written in our hearts and its reward, the beauty of contemplation which the spiritual house of Israel will perceive once it has been set free from this world, pertains to the New Testament.<sup>55</sup>

Even so, the spiritual benefits of the new covenant were available in proleptic form insofar as the law and the prophets pointed forward to Christ.<sup>56</sup> Augustine is not at pains to develop this theme more fully in *De spiritu et littera*, however, in other contexts he makes clear that he regards the “but now” of 3:21 as signaling not a clean pivot from *carnalis* to *spiritalis*, but rather a more decisive clarification and manifestation of the latter. Consider, for example, an image of this relationship Augustine develops beginning in 416:

When [Paul] says “made manifest” (3:21) he shows that it then existed but was like that dew which Gideon asked; then it was not visible on the fleece, but now it is made manifest on the ground around. Since, then, the Law without grace could not have been the death of sin but its strength—as it is written: “The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law”—as many flee for refuge from the face of sin enthroned to grace, lying manifest, as it were, on the ground, so at that time few fled to it for refuge, invisible as it were, on the fleece. Indeed, this division of times belongs to the depth of riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God. . . .<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 41, CSEL 60:194; WSA I.23:175.

<sup>56</sup> In his treatise of 418 *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, Augustine makes this point explicit: “Although the law given through Moses could not remove from anyone the reign of death, there were, nonetheless, at the time of the law men and women of God, not living under the law that terrifies, convicts, and punishes, but under grace that delights, heals, and sets free. . . . They were cleansed by the same faith as we are.” *Gr. et pecc. or.* 2.25.29, CSEL 42:188; WSA I.23:447.

<sup>57</sup> *Ep.* 177, PL 33:770; FotC 30:104. This letter, signed by Augustine and four other North African bishops, was a warning to addressed to Pope Innocent against Pelagius and his followers, and it summarizes many of the themes developed in his earlier anti-Pelagian writings. Augustine would deploy this same analogy two years later in *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, this time weaving in imagery of the temple veil and concluding with a rather ominous anti-Jewish twist: “Through the law there came not healing, but the knowledge of sin, as the apostle teaches when he says, ‘For knowledge of sin came through the law. But now the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law, though the law and the prophets have borne witness to it’ (Rom 3:20-21). Therefore, if it has been revealed, it existed at that time, but was hidden. The veil of the temple signified its being hidden, and that veil was torn at Christ’s death to signify its revelation. At that

The new covenant makes manifest the *iustitia Dei* as the motive power which actualizes the demands of the old covenant, yet it is important to underscore that for Augustine, the actual content of those demands remains unchanged in the transition from old to new. Returning to *concupiscentia* and the commandment he takes as paradigmatic for the entire Decalogue, Augustine notes that the New Testament is no less rigorous in its expectations for the moral life: “I want to know, then, if anyone would dare to ask me whether the law of faith does not say, *You shall not desire.*” If no, then “what reason is there why we who live under it do not sin without a care and with impunity?” But if yes, then “why is it also not called the law of works?”<sup>58</sup> The resolution to this seeming paradox returns Augustine to one of his most fundamental insights and the point of departure for his controversy with Pelagius: “by the law of works God says: Do what I command! By the law of faith we say to God: Give what you command!”<sup>59</sup>

If the law of faith does not set aside the law of works, but rather enables its fulfillment, then the law is still of continuing value to Christians, even after the

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time the grace of the one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus, existed in the people of God, but it was hidden as rain upon fleece—a rain which God bestows on his heritage, not as something due, but as gratuitous. But now, with the fleece squeezed dry, that is, with the Jewish people rejected, it lies revealed in all the nations as upon the threshing floor.” *Gr. et pecc. or.* 2.25.29, CSEL 42:189; WSA I.23:449.

<sup>58</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 21, CSEL 60:173; WSA I.23:163.

<sup>59</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 22, CSEL 60:174; WSA I.23:164. Cf. *Conf.* 10.31.45: “Give what you command, and command what you will.” According to Duval, it was Pelagius’ angry reaction to this passage in *Confessiones* in the presence of Bishop Paulinus of Nola which precipitated his conflict with Augustine. Yves-Marie Duval, “La date du « De natura » de Pélagie. Les premières étapes de la controverse sur la nature de la grâce,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 36, no. 2 (1990): 257-83.

reception of grace. After all, the law commands not only to terrify sinners, but also “in order to remind (*admoneat*) us of what faith should do.”<sup>60</sup> This point is not always clear from Augustine’s rhetoric, however. When arguing *contra Pelagianos*, Augustine emphasizes the powerlessness of the law apart from grace. When exhorting his congregation to a life of virtue, however, Augustine often emphasizes the abiding value of the law’s commands as a testimony to Christ and as a guide for the Christian life. In a sermon on the narrative of Christ’s transfiguration in Mt 17, for example, Augustine explains the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Christ in the cloud to both subordinate and secure the place of the law relative to Christ:

As to Moses and Elijah, that is to say, the law and the prophets, what do they avail unless they are conversing with the Lord? Unless they bore witness to the Lord, who would read the law, who the prophets? Notice how neatly the apostle puts it: *For through the law comes knowledge of sin; but now without the law, the justice of God has been manifested—that’s the sun (ecce sol)—attested by the law and the prophets (Rom 3:20-21)—that’s the brilliance (ecce splendor).*<sup>61</sup>

The metaphor is a suggestive one. Augustine’s way of viewing grace as “an inner light that shines like the sun above us” is widely known, and its importance for the medieval philosophical tradition has been thoroughly documented.<sup>62</sup> In this context, however, Augustine describes the law as the *splendor* of the sun, suggesting a certain convergence between grace and law in illuminating the mind of the *viator*.

In the previous chapter, we noted that Augustine views justification as having two

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<sup>60</sup> *Spir. et litt.* 22, CSEL 60:174; WSA I.23:164.

<sup>61</sup> S. 78; PL 38:491; WSA III.3:341.

<sup>62</sup> Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38; Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1962), 159-60.

aspects, ingressive and progressive. The law plays no part in the initiation of justifying grace, but it is indispensable to the ongoing process of transformation in grace. Accordingly, Augustine chides Peter, who observes that “it is good for us to be here” and proposes setting up lodging:

Come down, Peter. You were eager to go on resting on the mountain; come down, preach the word, press on in season, out of season, censure, exhort, rebuke in all long-suffering and teaching (2 Tm 4:2). Toil away, sweat it out, suffer some tortures, so that by means of the brightness and beauty of right and good activity (*per candorem et pulchritudinem rectae operationes*), you may come to possess in charity what is to be understood by the Lord’s white garments.<sup>63</sup>

It is not sufficient, in other words, to rest content with the justification apart from the law which is granted through faith alone. The *viator* is called to toil, sweat, and suffer, reflecting the brilliance (*splendor*) of the law in the brightness (*candor*) of her *rectae operationes*. Thus is the righteousness of God revealed in the law—“Do what I command!”—actualized through the righteousness revealed by faith in Christ—“Give what you command!”

We may conclude our discussion of Augustine’s exegesis of Romans 3 by comparing the insights he develops against the earlier exegesis by Origen. For both men the contrast between the law of faith and the law of works is understood in terms of the moral content of the law, rather than the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation. However, whereas Origen views the law of works and the law of faith as contrasting only in content—that is, the law of faith reveals additional

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<sup>63</sup> *Descende, Petre: requiescere cupiebas in monte, descende, praedica verbum, insta opportune, importune, argue, hortare, increpa, cum omni longanimitate et doctrina. Labora, desuda, patere aliqua tormenta: ut quod in candidis vestimentis Domini intelligitur, per candorem et pulchritudinem rectae operationes in charitate possideas.* S. 78; PL 38:492; WSA III.3:342.

precepts not entailed by the law of nature—Augustine sees a much more fundamental contrast. Indeed, we might almost say that Augustine’s use of the term “law” in these two contexts is equivocal, while the contrast for Origen is univocal: the law of nature is a set of commands for Augustine, while the “law” of faith is something different, an inward gift of grace which empowers the *viator* to obey the law. Both Augustine and Origen have an important place for the life of virtue renewed by the gift of grace, but Augustine is far more specific in defining the law of faith as finding its ultimate end, or goal, in the law of works. It is perhaps ironic in this regard that the reformers should have preferred Augustine’s exegesis so much more strongly to that of Origen, but as we shall see in the remainder of the chapter, the shadow of both exegetes looms large over the exegetical tradition in the following thousand years.

### **3.3 The Twelfth-Century Glossae and Later Medieval Trajectories**

Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between justification and works of the law was summed up for many medieval exegetes in the oft-quoted maxim, *Sequuntur enim opera iustificatum, non praecedunt iustificandum*: “Works follow from justification; they do not precede that one may be justified.”<sup>64</sup> This pithy tag was often cited in glosses on Romans 3 to demonstrate that when Paul wrote of justification *per fidem sine operibus legis* (Rom 3:28), it was *opera praecedentes*,

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<sup>64</sup> *F. et op.* 14.21; PL 40:211.

not *opera sequentes*, which were excluded.<sup>65</sup> These latter were not only not excluded from justification, but they were its goal and object: the law of faith empowers the *viator* to actualize the law of works. Depending on whether he was writing against the Pelagians or preaching to his own flock, Augustine could stress either the powerlessness of *iustitia humanis* or the necessity to “sweat it out” and attain to eternal life by means of *rectae operationes*. Medieval theologians in the twelfth century also adapted their exegesis to the polemical needs of the moment, often citing early Christian sources such as Augustine in support of decidedly non-Augustinian positions. Two major trends stand out in the tradition of monastic biblical interpretation which came to full flower in the middle decades of the twelfth century. First, the view of Origen and Augustine which contrasted the law of faith with works of the moral law lost ground, for a time, as a competing tradition emerged in the school of Anselm of Laon. This tradition, drawing on the work of Ambrosiaster and Haimo of Auxerre, read Paul’s argument in Romans 3 in terms of the exclusion of the Jewish practices such as circumcision and Sabbath-keeping, not the moral or natural law. Second, with this understanding of justification apart from works of the *ceremonial* law in place, medieval exegetes were able to place the emphasis more heavily on works of the moral law as standing in synecdoche for the entire process of grace-empowered transformation. These trends were not

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<sup>65</sup> Thus, for example, Hervé de Bourg-Dieu (c. 1080-1150) on Rom 3:28: *Vere, inquit, per legem fidei exclusa est gloriatio tua, qua de legis observatione tuebas, quia nos apostoli arbitramur, id est certi sumus, justificari quemlibet hominem per fidem sine operibus legis praecedentibus. . . . Sequuntur enim justificatum, non praecedunt justificandum.* In *Commentaria in epistolas divi Pauli*, PL 181:642a.

uncontested, however. Beginning in the latter half of the twelfth century, a resurgent Augustinianism seems to have restored the dominance of the earlier view, though the tradition remained polysemous on these questions up through the fifteenth century.

### **3.3.1 The Twelfth Century: The Glossa Ordinaria and Peter Lombard's Magna Glossatura**

Two of the most important works of biblical exegesis produced during the twelfth century were the *Glossa ordinaria* of the Laon school and Peter Lombard's *Collectanea in omnes d. Pauli apostoli epistolas*, more commonly known as the *Magna glossatura* (written between 1135-36 and 1142-43).<sup>66</sup> We encountered these works briefly in Chapter 1; in this section we will give them more extended consideration, as they illustrate the interpretive challenges faced by exegetes attempting to read Paul *ad litteram* in conversation with patristic and early medieval writers. The *Glossa ordinaria* is a composite work, a collection of authoritative comments (or glosses) on the text of scripture assembled over a period of several centuries and offering a “representative selection of extracts from the Fathers and masters from the third century to the early twelfth century.”<sup>67</sup> It appears to have been given its final form by Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), who, according to Beryl Smalley, was “certainly” responsible for the sections on Paul, the Fourth Gospel and

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<sup>66</sup> Artur M. Landgraf, *Introduction à l'histoire de la littérature théologique de la scolastique naissante* (Montréal: Institut d'études médiévales, 1973); Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Margaret T. Gibson, “The Twelfth-Century Glossed Bible,” in *Studia Patristica 23*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 232-44.

<sup>67</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 66.

the Psalms. The *Gloss* quickly established its place as the standard biblical commentary for use in the schools, a position it maintained well into the sixteenth century. On the Pauline epistles, however, the *Gloss* was soon displaced as a teaching tool by the work of Peter Lombard.<sup>68</sup> Peter's work is a transitional piece in terms of its genre: it builds on the earlier method of patristic extract on a verse-by-verse basis, but Peter also incorporates lengthy theological excurses, or *quaestiones*, into his discussion. This practice would eventually feed into the development of the *summae*, which began as nothing more than collections of these *quaestiones* removed from the commentaries in order to make the latter more manageable. In the *Gloss*, therefore, we can see the raw materials of the medieval exegetical tradition drawn together in a semi-authoritative form, while in the Lombard's *Magna glossatura* we see an early attempt to shape those materials into a more systematic whole.

We have seen that for both Origen and Augustine, Paul's argument in Romans 3 turns on a contrast between the moral law—whether expressed in the law of nature or of Moses—and the “law of faith.” Not so with the *Gloss*. Commenting on Rom 3:20, “by works of the law no flesh shall be justified,” the text explains that

those works of the law are meant which were established and marked off in the law to be ceremonial and figurative, and which never had the power to cleanse the conscience. Indeed, if they were performed with charity and devotion, then this is

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 64. See also Marcia L. Colish, “Peter Lombard as an Exegete of St. Paul,” in *Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 71-92; *Peter Lombard*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen, *The Gracious God: Gratia in Augustine and the Twelfth Century* (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 2002), 343-50.



not because they have been instituted for justification but as an outward sign of future things and for exposing the infirmity of our sin. This is because the law came not to remove sins, but to make them plain and to punish them.<sup>69</sup>

Anselm is not the first medieval commentator to regard the *opera legis* of 3:20 as referring solely to *cerimonialia et figuratiua*. Ambrosiaster had suggested this interpretation in the mid-fourth century,<sup>70</sup> and medieval commentators seem to have been more or less evenly divided as to whether the works of the law by which no flesh will be justified referred to moral works, or simply ancient Jewish ceremonies, such as circumcision, new moon festivals, and Sabbath observance.<sup>71</sup> The final phrase of the extract above is a direct quotation from an exposition of the Pauline corpus by Haimo of Auxerre (d. ca. 855).<sup>72</sup> Haimo glosses Rom 3:20 by pointing

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<sup>69</sup> *Ex operibus le. Opera legis dicuntur quae cum [in] lege instituta et terminata sunt ut erant cerimonialia et figuratiua quae nunquam valuerunt conscientiam mundare. etiam si cum charitate et deuotione fierent quia non fuerunt instituta in iustificationem sed in futurorum significationem et peccati infirmitatis ostensionem. quia lex non venit peccata sed tollere sed ostendere et punire. Gl. ord., Rom 3:20; cf. PL 114:479c.* We do not currently have modern critical edition of the *Glossa ordinaria*. I have based my reading on a facsimile reprint of a late fifteenth-century manuscript and checked it for accuracy against the edition in Migne. The latter is not wholly reliable, but in places where the Latin of the manuscript is obscure, the readings in Migne sometimes clarify the sense of the passage. My translation in the body of this chapter reflects my own judgment in these matters, but in the notes I indicate by means of brackets where the text in Migne differs from the manuscript.

<sup>70</sup> *In ep. Rom. 3:28; PL 17:80d.*

<sup>71</sup> The following medieval exegetes make no distinction here between moral or ceremonial aspects in excluding *opera legis* from justification: Cassiodorus (c. 485-583), *Expositio s. Pauli epistolae ad Romanos*, PL 68:430d; Rhabanus Maurus (c. 780-856), *Enarrationum in epistolas b. Pauli libri triginta 2*, PL 111:1338d-1340c; Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089), *In omnes Pauli epistolas Commentarii cum glossula interjecta*, PL 150:116b; Bruno the Carthusian (c. 1030-1101), *Expositiones in omnes epistolas Pauli*, PL 153:40-41; The following restrict the sense of *opera legis* primarily or exclusively to the ceremonial elements of the Mosaic law: Pelagius (c. 354-420/40), *Ex. xiii ep. Pauli ad Rom.*, de Bruyn, 81; Haimo of Auxerre (d. ca. 855), *In d. Pauli epistolas expositio*, PL 117:390b; Sedulius Scotus, *Collectanea in omnes b. Pauli epistolas*, PL:103:41c; Atto of Vercelli (c. 885-961), *Expositio epistolarum d. Pauli*, PL 134:162d; Gilbert of Poitiers (c. 1076-1154), *Quell.* 33; Peter Abelard (1079-1142), *Com. in ep. Rom.*, 2.3, CCCM 11:100.

<sup>72</sup> *Lex enim non venit peccatum tollere, sed ostendere et punire. In d. Pauli ep. ex.*, PL 117:390b. Migne wrongly attributes this text to Haimo of Halberstadt; cf. Eduard Riggenbach, "Historische

out that the Mosaic law can be divided into two parts, “mysteries” and “precepts.” The former have ended (*cessavit*) with the coming of Christ, but the latter remain in force. Thus, when Paul writes that no one will be justified by “works of the law,” he means that no one will be justified by such practices as circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, or sacrifice, “for it is impossible for the blood of goats to take away sins.”<sup>73</sup>

What is implicit in Haimo is made explicit in the *Gloss*, when Anselm directs his readers to understand *opera legis* as “ceremonial, not moral, which certainly justify and are brought to perfection in the Gospel.”<sup>74</sup> As we have seen, both Origen and Augustine have an important place for works in their explanations of justification, but both stop well short of claiming that it is the works themselves which justify. For Origen, it is the presence of virtue which drives out guilt, and the

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Studien zum Hebräerbrief,” in *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur* 8.1, ed. Theodor Zahn (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1907).

<sup>73</sup> *Quia ex operibus legis non justificabitur omnis caro coram illo. Lex Moysi bifariam dividitur, quoniam in mysteriis et praeceptis continetur. Secundum mysteria et sacramenta cessavit adveniente Christo, quia finis sive completio legis est Christus. Secundum praecepta autem adhuc manet, quia servandum est: Non adorabis deos alienos; honora patrem tuum et matrem, et caetera praeceptorum dicta. Ergo ex operibus legis, id est ex circumcisione carnali et sabbati custodia, et victimis legalibus non justificabitur post Domini adventum omnis caro, id est omnis homo, vel omnis carnaliter vivens, et carnaliter ea observans, quia omnia Christo adveniente velut umbra cessaverunt. PL 117:389c. Et quare non justificabantur ex operibus legis? Quoniam impossibile erat sanguine hircorum auferri peccatum, et quisquis operatur justitiam et in ea confidit, contra Deum tumendo superbit. PL 117:390b.*

<sup>74</sup> *Non iusticia. Secundum ceremonialia intellige non moralia. quae utique iustificandae et in euangelio consummantur. Gl. ord., ibid.* I have been unable to identify a source for this extract. The tag at the head of the comment, *Non iusticia*, is problematic, because while its position on the page is that of a lemma, it does not correspond to any phrase in the biblical text. The grammar of the sentence, with its imperative *intellige*, appears to be a direct address to the reader, and therefore suggests that this may be original material.

good works which follow therefrom have a secondary and derivative character.<sup>75</sup>

Augustine argues that the law of faith empowers the believer to fulfill the law of works, but his entire polemic against the Pelagians hinges on his contention that it is not the works themselves which justify. Works of the moral law are indeed “brought to perfection in the Gospel,” yet it is not the works themselves which justify for Augustine. Anselm must have been aware that many of his most venerable patristic sources held that Paul was contrasting the law of faith with the works of the *moral* law, yet the *Gloss* insists on precisely the opposite view.<sup>76</sup> In many other contexts, the *Gloss* does not seem to be advancing a particular exegetical agenda, but rather presents a “representative selection” of the exegetical options on offer from the Fathers onward.<sup>77</sup> In this instance, however, it appears as though the consensus patristic position has been deliberately suppressed.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Recall Origen’s explanation, highlighted in Chapter 2, that good works “represent and form the mind of the one who is doing them.” *Romans*, 2.1.2; Hammond Bammel 1:100; FotC 103:103.

<sup>76</sup> I have identified four different works of Augustine from which Anselm quotes verbatim in his exposition of Rom 3:19-31: *Spir. et litt.* 15 (lemma: *Testificata*), cf. CSEL 60:167; *f. et op.* 14.21 (lemma: *Iustificari ho[minem]*), PL 40:211; *En. Ps.* 31[2].4.7 (lemma: *Iustificari ho[minem]*), CCSL 38:227; *E.* 194.3.1 (lemma: *gratis*), CSEL 57:182. In three of these four, Augustine is quite clear in taking the *non concupisces* of the tenth commandment as paradigmatic for “works of the law” in this context, thereby eliminating the sort of facile division between moral and ceremonial works we see in the *Gloss*.

<sup>77</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 66.

<sup>78</sup> Smalley points out that “the *Gloss* on St. Paul was based on an earlier compilation,” since it has many glosses in common with an earlier apparatus (Ibid, 65). It is quite possible, therefore, that Anselm is merely transmitting these selections, rather than making them himself. On the other hand, the stature of the works in question make it unlikely that so distinguished a scholar as Anselm was familiar with them only second-hand.

We get some inkling as to what was at stake in this exegetical move for the theologians of the twelfth century when we examine the way in which Peter Lombard builds on the *Gloss* in his own exposition of the text. Peter reproduces virtually all of the material from the *Gloss*, yet he prefaces it with an appeal to the early Augustine and interlards his exegesis with discussion of several *quaestiones*. Beginning with the lemma for 3:20, Peter, like Origen before him, observes a point of transition in the text: “Here [Paul] begins to discuss the law more fully, in order to show that righteousness is not from it.” He continues:

It is as if he should say: I am speaking in order that the whole world should be made subject to God—and that it ought, because it is certain that no flesh will be justified before him (that is, before God), even if they appear to be righteous before men. No flesh—that is, no person, no one living according to the flesh. “And therefore those who believed in Christ when they were under the law came to the grace of faith not because they were righteous but in order to become so.” Moreover, this pride of those who boast in works of the law has been destroyed, lest the grace of faith appear unnecessary and they should believe that works of the law justify.<sup>79</sup>

Peter’s initial paraphrase of this gloss is followed by a quotation which comes, significantly, from Augustine’s early *Expositio Epistolae ad Galatas* (394/95). This work was composed approximately two years prior to Augustine’s *volte-face* on the questions of grace and free will in his *Ad Simplicianum* of 396. Ever since his public debate with Fortunatus in 392, Augustine had been engaged in a running dispute against the Manichees, a dispute centered largely on the interpretation of the Pauline

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<sup>79</sup> *Quia ex operibus, etc. Hic incipit agere plenius de lege, ut ostendat justitiam non esse ex ea; quasi dicat: Dico ut omnis mundus subditus sit Deo: quod debet, quia certum est, quod ex operibus legis, non justificabitur coram illo, scilicet coram Deo, etsi coram hominibus, omnis caro, id est homo, vel carnaliter vivens; et ideo illi qui cum sub lege essent Christo crediderunt, non quia justi erant, sed ut justificarentur, venerunt ad gratiam fidei. Destruitur autem hic superbia glorientium de operibus legis, ne gratia fidei videretur non necessaria, sed etiam opera legis justificare crederentur. Col. in ep. Rom. 3:20; PL 191:1358c.*

epistles.<sup>80</sup> Augustine, opposing the moral determinism of his former coreligionists, argued in a series of exegetical works during this period that the Apostle Paul “neither condemns the Law nor takes away man’s free will.”<sup>81</sup> Rather, by an act of uncoerced free will, human beings merit the grace of faith through God’s mercy.<sup>82</sup>

In the passage on which Peter Lombard draws in glossing Rom 3:20, Augustine is defending Paul against the charge of hypocrisy arising from the fact that Paul observed the ceremonial laws of the Jews, yet when he came to Jerusalem with Barnabus and Titus, he did not compel Titus to be circumcised (Gal 2:1-3). In so doing, Augustine observes, “he merely warned against placing one’s hope for salvation in unessential things (*superfluis*), even though he himself might honour a custom (*consuetudinem*) among them so as not to offend the weak.”<sup>83</sup> It is thus within this context of a dispute over the applicability of these “customs” that Augustine expounds Gal 2:15-16, a passage with close parallels to Rom 3:20:

If, then, those who were trying to compel the Gentiles to live like Jews had also learned what Peter had learned from the Lord—how to be *gentle and humble of heart*—then at least they would have been drawn by the example of that great man’s correction to imitate him and would not have supposed that the gospel of Christ was a sort of debt paid for their righteousness. Instead, *knowing that a person is justified not by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ*—that is, a person fulfils the works of the law when his weakness is aided not by his own merits but by the grace of God—they would not have demanded from the Gentiles carnal observances of the law but would have known that the Gentiles could fulfil spiritual works of the

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<sup>80</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians,” *Recherches augustiniennes* 23 (1988): 89-92.

<sup>81</sup> *Ex. prop. Rom.* 13-18.1; cited in Fredriksen, “Body/Soul,” 90.

<sup>82</sup> *Ex. Gal.* 32.3; Plumer, 183.

<sup>83</sup> *Ex. Gal.* 15.1-2; Plumer, 143.

law through the grace of faith. *For by works of the law* (that is, if people attribute them to their own power and not to the grace of the merciful God), *no flesh* (in other words, no person, or none who think in a carnal way) *will be justified*. And therefore those who believed in Christ when they were already under the law [*sub lege*] came to the grace of faith not because they were righteous but in order to become so.<sup>84</sup>

Peter quotes only the last sentence of this extract, followed immediately by a paraphrase of another a few lines below emphasizing the destruction of boastful pride.<sup>85</sup> It is these extracts which set the stage for Peter's repetition of the *Glossa ordinaria*'s claim that the works Paul excludes from the justification of faith in Rom 3:20 are *cerimonialia et figuratiua*, not *opera moralia*. These latter, Peter agrees, "certain justify."<sup>86</sup> Clearly, however, this is not the argument advanced by Augustine in his commentary on Galatians—at least not directly. Augustine is arguing that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith, but the contrast is not a straightforward one between faith and ceremonial practices, but rather between works (whether carnal or spiritual) performed in faith and works (whether carnal or spiritual) performed in reliance on one's own power rather than on God's grace.

Augustine does not directly address the issue of whether carnal works—that is, *opera ceremonialia et figuratiua*—might justify if performed in faith, though he might be read as denying this possibility in the final sentence of the extract above when he concludes that "those who believed in Christ when they were already under

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<sup>84</sup> *Ex. Gal.* 15.14-17; Plumer, 147.

<sup>85</sup> *Destruxit autem superbiam gloriantem de operibus legis, quae destrui et deberet et posset, ne gratia fidei uideretur non necessaria, si opera legis etiam sine illa iustificare crederentur. Ex Gal.* 16.6; Plumer, 146.

<sup>86</sup> *Col. in ep. Rom.* 3:20; PL 191:1358c.

the law came to the grace of faith not because they were righteous but in order to become so.” At any rate, this appears to be the sense in which the Lombard interprets Augustine’s remarks and why he adds this extract as a preface to the *Gloss*’s distinction between ceremonial and moral works of the law. If those who already *sub lege* were not righteous when they came to faith, this raises for Peter the question of the salvation of the Patriarchs: “Surely Moses, David, and other good men were not justified by works of the law?” They were indeed justified, Peter concludes, but not by works. Rather, they were saved just as we are—simply (*modo*) by faith in Christ.<sup>87</sup> Yet Peter immediately adds the all-important qualifier: “Regarding the law, we are speaking of ceremonial works, as it is said [in the *Gloss*], not moral works, which certainly justify and are brought to completion in the Gospel.”<sup>88</sup>

What to make of this? The Lombard’s statement, echoing the *Gloss*, that works of the moral law “certainly justify” seems rather jarring when set in the context of a long tradition of Augustinian exegesis emphasizing the secondary and derivative character of human moral effort as a result—not a cause—of the interior renewal brought about by grace. I have been able to identify no medieval writer up

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<sup>87</sup> *Hic item quaeritur: Nunquid Moyses, David et alii boni ex lege non fuerunt justificati? Ad quod dicitur: Fuerunt quidem justificati, sed non ex operibus legis. Unde Petrus ait: Quid tentatis nobis imponere jugum, etc.? (Act. XV.) Sicut ergo nos salvamur modo per fidem Christi, sic et illi salvabantur. Col. in ep. Rom. 3:20; PL 191:1359a.* By the time Peter is writing, the appeal to Moses and David as righteous exemplars under the old covenant has become something of a rhetorical set-piece, as is the solution offered here. Cf., Bruno the Carthusian, *Ex. in om. Ep. Pauli*, PL 153:40b.

<sup>88</sup> *De lege autem loquimur secundum caeremonialia, ut dictum est, non secundum moralia, quae utique justificant, et in Evangelio consummantur. Col. in ep. Rom. 3:20; PL 191:1359b.*

this point who baldly asserts that “works justify,” with no further qualification. It is especially surprising to encounter this statement in the work of a theologian who cleaved so steadily to the legacy of Augustine.<sup>89</sup> And yet, Augustine was hardly Peter’s sole *auctoritas*. As Philipp Rosemann has pointed out, “Peter employed the *Glossa ordinaria* as a mine for authoritative quotations from the Fathers and early medieval theologians, but also as an authority in its own right when the *Glossa* left sources unidentified or offered comments due to Anselm and his school.”<sup>90</sup> In such cases, Peter seems to have conceived of his task as clarifying received exegesis, rather than overtly censoring or criticizing it.<sup>91</sup>

In this case, clarification comes in the form of a lengthy *quaestio* toward the end of the chapter, in which Peter deals with an issue that had vexed Augustine in *De Spiritu et littera*: why is the Gospel not described as a “law of works,” since it too commands right action? Peter’s answer is the same as Augustine’s: the law of

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<sup>89</sup> According to one recent estimate, Augustine’s works “stand out, unrivalled, as [the] principle source of *originalia*” in Peter’s literary enterprise, contributing more than 1,100 first-hand and derivative quotations. Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>91</sup> This is precisely the reputation Peter seems to have developed in his own era. According to one thirteenth-century source, *Hic* [i.e., Peter Lombard] *etiam glossaturum super psalterium et epistolas Pauli, ab Anselmo laudunensi per glosulas interlineares marginalesque distinctam, et post a Gilberto Porree continuative productam latius apertiusque explicuit*. William of Nange, cited in Rydstrom-Poulsen, *Gracious God*, 344. The Lombard’s approach contrasts with that of his contemporary, William of St. Thierry (c. 1085-1148), who rejects the opinion of the *Glossa* in favor of the more expansive understanding of law taken in this context by Origen. William even reproduces Origen’s distinction between the arthrous and anarthrous uses of the Greek term; *Ex. in ep. Rom.*; PL 180:578a; cf. Origen, *Romans* 3.7.6, Hammond Bammel 1:232; FotC 103:213.



works commands, the law of faith empowers.<sup>92</sup> Yet this immediately leads Peter into difficulties, because if it is the ceremonial aspects of the law which are powerless to justify, as he has maintained above, following the *Gloss*, then it would seem to follow that the law of faith empowers believers to fulfill the ceremonial law of the old covenant.<sup>93</sup> Clearly, this will not do. Peter works hard to salvage Augustine's logic for his cause by purging his paraphrase of these extracts from *De Spiritu et littera* of any references to concupiscence and the moral law, but toward the end of the *quaestio* he seems to acknowledge defeat, granting that “works of the law” can be read in two different ways according to two different *auctoritates* and not attempting any further harmonization:

We indeed hold that the law of faith justifies, a fact made clear on the authority of faith itself. It is as if the apostle says: “Righteousness is truly through faith. We, therefore”—meaning the apostles—“maintain that a man”—any man, even a gentile—“is justified through faith without works of the law”—fleshly works (that is, without circumcision, new moon festivals, or Sabbath observance), or without any moral works of the law at all.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Quare ergo et ipsa non dicitur lex factorum? Ad quod breviter dicam, quod lex quae dicitur operum, minando imperabat, sed gratiam facienti non praestabat. Lex autem quae dicitur fidei, opera quidem mandat, sed credendo impetrat, ut fiant, et illa opera sequuntur iustitiam. . . . Lex autem operum, ubi jubebantur opera, sed non dabatur gratia. Per legem operum dicit Deus homini: Fac quod iubeo; per legem fidei dicit homo Deo: Da quod iubes. Ideo enim iubet lex ut admoneat quid faciat fides, ut cui iubetur, si non potest, sciat quid petat. Si autem continuo potest et obedenter facit, debet etiam scire quo donante possit. Col. in ep. Rom. 3:27; PL 191:1364b-c. Cf., quid igitur interest? breuiter dicam. quod operum lex minando imperat, hoc fidei lex credendo impetrat. . . . ac per hoc lege operum dicit deus: fac quod iubeo, lege fidei dicitur deo: da quod iubes. ideo enim iubet lex, ut admoneat quod faciat fides, id est ut cui iubetur, si nondum potest, sciat quid petat; si autem continuo potest et oboedienter facit, debet etiam scire quo donante possit. Spir. et litt. 22; CSEL 60:175; WSA I.23:164.*

<sup>93</sup> A fact not lost on later commentators, such as Hugh of Saint-Cher, who labors to alleviate this difficulty in a lengthy comparison of the ceremonies of the old covenant with the sacraments of the new. Cf. *Post. in ep. Pauli*, 7:26<sup>r</sup>-27<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> *Arbitramur enim quod lex fidei iustificet, ab auctoritate sua ostendit. Quasi dicat: Vere per fidem iustitia est. Nos enim, apostoli sic, arbitramur, scilicet hominem quemcunque etiam gentilem, iustificari per fidem sine operibus legis, carnalibus, id est sine circumcissione, aut neomeniis, aut*

The former of these options is lifted directly from Ambrosiaster.<sup>95</sup> The latter is an implicit recognition of Augustine’s position, an impression reinforced by the fact that Peter immediately follows this up by outlining the standard Augustinian distinction between *opere praecedentes* and *opera sequentes*.<sup>96</sup> This distinction, of course, would be entirely beside the point if Peter were sticking to his earlier affirmation that justification is given apart from the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. In solving the problem of how the Gospel can be called a “law of faith,” therefore, Peter implicitly abandons that line of interpretation which runs from Ambrosiaster to the *Glossa ordinaria*. In the following centuries, as we shall see, this implicit abandonment is made increasingly explicit.

### 3.3.2 Trajectories in High Scholasticism and the Later Middle Ages

Our survey from the second half of the twelfth century onward must needs be much more cursory in its coverage and tentative in its conclusions. This is owing in part to the state of the materials available, and in part to the nature of the sources

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*veneratione Sabbati, vel sine operibus legis quibuslibet etiam moralibus. Col. in ep. Rom. 3:27; PL 191:1364c-d.*

<sup>95</sup> *Arbitramur enim justificari hominem per fidem sine operibus legis. Gentilem dicit hominem pro certo haberi, quod justificetur credens, nulla faciens opera legis, id est, sine circumcissione, aut neomeniis, aut veneratione sabbati. In ep. Rom. 3:28; PL 17:80d.*

<sup>96</sup> Peter reworks a number of extracts from the *Gloss* in this *quaestio*, all of Augustinian origin, though he is more explicit than his source in recognizing the implications of this argument. Colish points to this passage, *inter alia*, as summarizing “the contemporary consensus position” on justification in the twelfth century: “nothing man knows or does before God grants him faith can increase his merit.” Moreover, “to be salvific, faith must combine assent and trust with the live that informs the good deeds bonding Christians to each other and to God. Justifying faith, then, is the faith the works in love.” Finally, “while good works done before or without faith have no merit, good works done in faith and love do have merit.” Colish, *Lombard*, 1:213.

themselves. In contrast with the patristic and early medieval periods, there exists no comprehensive critical edition to compare in scope and ambition with tools such as the Migne's *Patrologia Latina* or the more recent *Corpus Christianorum*.

Moreover, scholarship on high and late scholastic theology has tended to focus more on philosophical and systematic-theological themes, rather than on the history of biblical interpretation—especially in the centuries following the thirteenth. Though many of these commentaries exist only in manuscript form, scattered throughout libraries in western Europe, enough material is now available, combining older editions, facsimile reprints, and digital images, to sketch at least a preliminary profile of the exegetical discussion on the question of law in Rom 3 as it developed from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.<sup>97</sup>

As we saw in the previous section, medieval exegetes were more or less evenly divided on the question of law in the second half of Romans 3 up through the time of Peter Lombard in the middle of the twelfth century. The Lombard's work reproduces the exegetical conclusion of the earlier glosses, a tradition dating back at least to Ambrosiaster, that Paul's affirmation of justification by faith is meant to stand in contrast with Jewish practices such as circumcision and Sabbath observation, not in contrast with works of the moral law. Yet the logic of Peter's

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<sup>97</sup> I am aided in my efforts by the wealth of commentary on Rom 3:20-31 made available by Heinrich Denifle in the first volume of his *Luther und Luthertum, Quellenbelege: Die abendländischen Schriftausleger bis Luther über Justitia Dei und Jusitificatio* (Mainz: Verlag von Kirchheim, 1905). Though selected with a sharply polemical purpose and not always meeting modern expectations for critical editing, this work remains invaluable as a source of medieval biblical commentary, as most of the texts assembled therein are still available only in manuscript archives. Denifle's volume focuses almost exclusively on three passages in the epistle: Rom 1:17, Rom 3:20-31, and Rom 10:3-4, so only the present chapter will benefit from the range of sources contained in the *Quellenbelege*.

*quaestio* on this subject subverts this conclusion, invoking the language and authority of Augustine to argue that justification is granted apart from any preceding moral achievement, yet granted in order to empower the believer to fulfill the expectations of the moral law (in either its written or natural form). In terms of its organization and argumentation, Peter's work is clearly a transitional piece, but this may be true of its conclusion on this matter, as well. My research suggests that in the centuries following the Lombard's *Magna glossatura*, medieval exegetes were almost unanimous in rejecting any distinction between the moral or the ceremonial law in this context. I have examined eighteen commentaries written over a span of the following three centuries, from Robert of Melun (1100-1167) in the mid-twelfth century to Denis the Carthusian (1402-1471) in the mid-fifteenth. Only two of these—the very first and the very last, in fact—agree with Ambrosiaster and the *Gloss* in reading an opposition between faith and *observationes caerimonialium*. A brief survey of this exegesis will demonstrate the marked swing toward the views of Augustine on this question in the centuries prior to the Reformation.

One of the first commentaries on Romans following the publication of the *Magna glossatura* was written by Robert of Melun, a former student of both Peter Abelard and Hugh of Saint-Victor, a man whom Colish describes as one of the Lombard's "chief competitors."<sup>98</sup> In a work entitled, *Questiones de epistolis Pauli*, probably written between the years 1145 and 1155, Robert addresses the same

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<sup>98</sup> Colish, *Lombard*, 1:65.

question we have seen Augustine and Peter essay to answer, the difference between the law and the gospel. In the course of this discussion, Robert draws a distinction between those things contained in the written law which are properly of the nature of law (*de Lege et in Lege*) and those things which, though contained in the written law, are not (*in Lege et non de Lege*). The former include *ritus cerimoniarum et legalium observantiarum* which do not justify, while the latter include precepts of the moral law (e.g., the Decalogue) and the natural law. These precepts, about which the Lord says, “This do, and live,” do not belong to the law, but to the gospel.<sup>99</sup> This move allows Robert to maintain the traditional contrast between justification and works of the law (*de Lege*) while freeing him to include the moral content of the old covenant—including the Decalogue—within the ambit of the new.<sup>100</sup> This distinction, ingenious as it may be, was not widely adopted in subsequent exegesis, perhaps because it almost entirely submerges *lex naturalis* into the category of

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<sup>99</sup> *Vel potest dici, quia eorum que sunt in Lege, alia sut de Lege et in Lege, alia in Lege et non de Lege: sicut eorum que sunt in hac villa alii sunt in hac villa et de hac villa, alii sunt in hac villa et non de hac villa. Ea igitur que sunt in Lege et de Lege non iustificant, ut sunt illi ritus cerimoniarum et legalium observantiarum. Illa vero que sunt in Lege et non de Lege, ut illa decem precept decalogi, que potius naturalia sunt quam ab aliquo instituta—unde in his renovation est naturalis legis, que etiam in tempore gratie observanda sunt, cum sinde eorum observatione salute nullus posit consequi—illa, dico, observata, vitam conferunt eternam. Unde et Dominus: Hoc fac, et vives, Non igitur ea que Legis sunt iustificant, sed ea que Evangelii. Hec enim Evangelii sunt, et non Legis. Quest. de ep. Rom 3:22; ORM 2:57-58.*

<sup>100</sup> Ulrich Horst, *Gesetz und Evangelium: das Alte Testament in der Theologie des Robert von Melun* (Munich: F. Schöningh, 1971), 10.

gospel at a time when natural law was becoming an integral part of moral theology.<sup>101</sup>

Robert of Melun draws a strong contrast between justifying faith and the law, but at the cost of gutting the law of its moral content. Most medieval exegetes from the late-twelfth century on were unwilling to do this, opting instead for the Augustinian distinction between *opera praecedentes* and *opera sequentes* to explain how justification comes apart from works of the law without subverting the law's moral claim on humanity. The majority of these exegetes simply assumed this perspective without bothering to argue for it or consider any alternatives.<sup>102</sup> Occasionally, a commentator would repeat the formula of the *Gloss*, but then qualify it so heavily in Augustinian terms as to render its meaning amenable to the current consensus.<sup>103</sup> Some, however, took time to address explicitly the exegesis of the

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<sup>101</sup> Michael Bertram Crowe, *The Changing Profile of the Natural Law* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), 115.

<sup>102</sup> Cf., Peter the Chanter (d. 1197), *Comm. in ep. Paulinas*, 3:21-22, *Quell.*, 89; John of la Rochelle (c. 1190-1245), *Postilla in ep. Pauli*, 3:20, argues that Paul *monstravit defectum liberi arbitrii constituti sub lege naturali et sub lege scripta; sub lege naturali quantum ad gentiles, sub lege scripta ad iudeos, et ostendit quod sub utraque non meruerunt salute, immo condemnationem [sic]. Quell.*, 124; Godfried of Blénau (d. 1250), *Postilla super ep. Pauli*, 3:21-22, *Quell.*, 132; Peter of Tarantaise (c. 1230-76), *Postillae in ep. Paulinas*, 3:28: *per fidem sine operibus legis ceremonialibus vel etiam sine operibus moralibus fidem precedentibus. Quell.*, 150; Nicholas of Gorran (1232-1295), *Postillae in ep. paulinas*, 3:21-22, *Quell.*, 155; Giles of Rome (1243-1316), *Postilla in ep. Rom.*, 3:21-22, *Quell.* 175; Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, 3:20-22, *Quell.*, 190-91.

<sup>103</sup> Cf., Alexander of Alexandria (1270-1314), *Postilla in ep. ad Rom.*, 3:21-22, *Quell.*, 181-82; Peter Czech of Pulk (d. 1425), *Super ep. Rom.*, 3:28, repeats Peter Lombard's solution almost word-for-word: *sine operibus legis carnalibus, i.e. sine circumcisione nel neomeniis aut veneratione sabbati, vel etiam secundum glossam, sine operibus legis quibusdam, etiam moralibus, fidem [precedentibus], non sequentibus, sine quibus inanis est fides, Quell.*, 242.

older *magistri*. Thomas Aquinas gives a compact argument for the Augustinian view, but for reasons purely inherent to the logic of the text:

A work of the Law is of two kinds: one is proper to the Mosaic Law, as the observance of ceremonial precepts; the other is a work of the Law of nature, because it pertains to the natural law, as “You shall not kill, you shall not steal,” etc. Now some [*quiddam*] take the Apostle’s words as referring to the first works, namely, that the ceremonials did not confer the grace through which people are made righteous. But this does not seem to be the Apostle’s intent, for he immediately adds: “since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” But it is clear that sins are made known through prohibitions contained in the moral precepts. Consequently, the Apostle intends to say that by no works of the Law—even those commanded by the moral precepts—is a person justified in the sense that justice would be caused in him by works, because, as he states below (11:6): “But if it is by grace it is no longer on the basis of works.”<sup>104</sup>

Hugh of Saint-Cher, a contemporary of Thomas and fellow Dominican, also notes that “the masters say that it is ceremonial,” but, he notes drily, “the reason for this cannot be given.” Against this view, Hugh appeals to Augustine’s discussion of the law in *De doctrina Christiana* before launching into an extended discussion of the ways in which the sacramentals of the old covenant are taken up and fulfilled in the practices of the new.<sup>105</sup> Peter John Olivi (1248-98), a Franciscan trained by students

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<sup>104</sup> *Quoddam quidem est proprium legis Mosaicae, sicut observatio caeremonialium praeceptorum; quoddam est opus legis naturae, quia pertinet ad legem naturalem, sicut: non occidas, non furtum facias, et cetera. Quidam ergo hoc intelligunt dictum esse de primis legis operibus, scilicet quod caeremonialia gratiam non conferebant per quam homines iustificantur. Non tamen ista videtur esse intentio apostoli, quod patet ex hoc quod statim subdit per legem enim cognitio peccati. Manifestum est autem quod peccata cognoscuntur per prohibitionem moralium praeceptorum, et ita apostolus intendit, quod ex omnibus operibus legis, etiam quae per praecepta moralia mandantur, non iustificatur homo, ita quod ex operibus in eo causetur iustitia, quia, ut dicitur infra XI, 3: si enim per gratiam, iam non ex operibus. Super Rom. 3.2.*

<sup>105</sup> *Caeremonialia. Dicunt magistri quod caeremoniale est, cuius ratio reddi non potest. Sed quae sit differentia ad morale plenissime determinatur, ab Augustino in libro de doctrina christiana. Post. in ep. Pauli, 7:26<sup>v</sup>.*

of Bonaventure, also rejected the exegesis of the *Gloss*,<sup>106</sup> as did two aptly-named Hermits of St. Augustine, living roughly a century apart, Augustine of Ancona (1275-1328, a.k.a, Augustinus Triumphus)<sup>107</sup> and Augustine Favaroni of Rome (d. 1443). Both of these exegetes appealed to their namesake against the *Gloss* tradition, but the latter also cites Origen's opinion that "when the Apostle says, 'for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin,' he is speaking of the natural law, and not of the law which was given only to the people of Israel."<sup>108</sup>

The only medieval commentator I have encountered who argues exegetically for the position taken by the *Gloss* tradition in the years between Peter Lombard and the Reformation is Denys the Carthusian (1402/3-1471).<sup>109</sup> Denys is widely

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<sup>106</sup> *Notandum, quod secundum glosam per opera legis intelligit sola opera ceremonialia. Sed si inspiciatur mens apostolic hic et infra et precipue cap. 7, et mens Augustini in pluribus locis, apostolus etiam intendit loqui de lege moralium mandatorum et de operibus moralibus non procedentibus ex fide seu gratia, sed vel ex timore pene, vel ex timore erubescencie humane, vel ex presumptione, vel ex amore honoris, vel ex quacumque consuetudine seu ass[u]e faction non mota a fide. Postillae in ep. Rom., 3:20, Quell., 159.*

<sup>107</sup> *Postillae in epistolas Pauli, 3:28, Quell., 169-70.*

<sup>108</sup> *Origenes autem dicit quod de illa lege loquitur naturali, que non appropriata est alicui populo, sed generaliter omnes homines apprehendit, quin ymmo et celestas potestates. Similiter cum apostolus dixit per legem enim cognitio peccati, dicit Origenes, quod loquitur de lege naturali et non de lege, que data fuit tantummodo populo Israhelitico. . . . Patet igitur quid Origenes circa hunc passum senserit. Ex. super ep. Pauli Rom., 3:21, Quell., 225.* Apparently, Origen's views on the matter were well known in the fifteenth century.

<sup>109</sup> One additional writer who seems to have held to this view is Peter Auriol (c. 1280-1322), a Franciscan theologian who taught at Bologna and Paris and is best known for his massive commentary on the Lombard's *Sentences* and for his radical teachings on apostolic poverty. Peter was also a commentator on scripture, though not in the traditional genres of gloss and exposition. In 1319, Peter published his *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae Scripturae*, a summation of his lectures on the Bible over the previous three years at the University of Paris. This work is not a commentary, so much as a treatise on the scripture, an attempt to organize the contents of the canon into an ordered, theoretical whole. As such, there is very little actual exegesis contained therein, but according to Philip Krey, the *Compendium* became "a standard textbook in the later Middle Ages." Philip D. W. Krey, "The Apocalypse Commentary of 1329: Problems in Church History," in *Nicholas*



regarded as an encyclopedic digest of late medieval exegesis—a sixteenth-century editor of his literary corpus went so far as to claim that “he who reads Denys reads everything”<sup>110</sup>—but in this instance, Denys gives a reading which not only seems out of tune with his contemporaries, but entirely ignores their arguments.

“because by works of the law,” that is, by observation of the ceremonial precepts of the law—for example, sacrifices, circumcision, and the keeping of sacred occasions—“no flesh will be justified,” that is, no person, “before him,” meaning before God, that one might be accepted by God on account of such deeds. Indeed it is impossible for the blood of goats and of calves to take away sins or secure grace. For grace is given, not because these deeds are meritorious in themselves, or from the performance of the deed (*opere operato*), but from the faith and devotion of the observant—that is, by reason of the ones performing the deeds (*ratione operis operantis*). Works of the moral law truly justify, yet not without faith in Christ and the grace of God.<sup>111</sup>

Denys, like many before him, uses this passage as an opportunity to contrast the sacramentals of the old covenant with the sacraments of the new: the former merely symbolize grace and are thus effective only when performed with the proper disposition (*ex opere operantis*), while the latter not only symbolize but effect the

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*of Lyra* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 267. Peter summarizes the argument of Romans 3 as follows: *Quarto vero agit de circumcissione et ceteris ceremoniis contentis in lege Mosaica, per hoc excludens secundum rationem, qua praeferebant se fideles Iudaei Gentilibus fidelibus. . . . Deinde concludit, quod nunquam per legem, sive per legales observationes fuit iustitia Dei, nec per opera legalia, sed semper per fidem mediatoris. Compendium* (Florence, 1896), 249.

<sup>110</sup> Petrus Blomevenna, *Epistola Nuncupatoria* to Denys’s commentary on Genesis, DCO 1:88; cited in Denys Turner, “Wisdom Within or Without: Denys the Carthusian and the Predicament of Late Medieval Mysticism,” in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 142.

<sup>111</sup> *Quia ex operibus legis, id est observatione caerimonialium praeceptorum legis, videlicet sacrificiorum, circumcissionis, et selemnitatum custodia, non justificabitur omnis caro, id est homo, coram illo, scilicet Deo, ut acceptus sit ei per talia. Impossibile etenim est sanguine hircorum et vitulorum auferri peccata, aut gratiam adipisci. Non enim gratiam conferebant, nec meritoria erant ex se, seu opere operato, sed ex fide et devotione observantium, id est ratione operis operantis. Opera vero praeceptorum moralium justificabant, non tamen sine fide Christi et gratia Dei. En. in ep. Rom., 3:20; DCO 13:30d.*

grace they represent (*ex opere operato*).<sup>112</sup> Unlike the majority of these previous exegetes, however, Denys restricts the referent of the term solely to the moral law. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, yet a number of tensions are visible even in his short exegesis of this passage.

Denys is the first (and only) medieval exegete I have encountered who describes justification in terms of divine acceptation (*acceptatio divina*) in this context: what is at stake are the conditions under which a person is accepted (*acceptus sit*) by God, and here Denys is keen to ensure the priority of moral criteria in this judgment. These works truly (*vero*) justify—that is, they contribute to making a human being acceptable in God’s sight—yet not apart from faith and grace. Denys goes on to stipulate that this faith must be a “formed” faith (*fides formata*), observing that faith is the “foundation” (*fundamentum*) of righteousness, and in so doing we recognize this as a species of the classic scholastic elaboration of justifying faith as the faith which works through love.<sup>113</sup> Yet for Denys, it is works, rather than faith, which stand in synecdoche for the ongoing process resulting from faith.

This shift is evident as well in Denys’s treatment of the contrast between the law of faith and the law of works in 3:27. The Mosaic law is called a law of works on account of its ceremonial precepts. These were “most oppressive and laborious in their innumerable observances,” as evidenced by Peter’s description of “a yoke

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<sup>112</sup> Cf., Hugh of Saint-Cher, *Post. in ep. Pauli*, 7:23<sup>r</sup>-24<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> *En. in ep. Rom.*, 3:22; DCO 13:31a.

that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). But in explaining the contrast with the law of faith, Denys appeals to the authority of Augustine:

Moreover, according to Augustine, the law of Moses is called a law of works, because it commanded by threats (*minando imperabat*), but it did not supply the grace to perform [what it commanded]. The gospel law is truly called a law of faith, because it commands works and obtains by believing the grace to perform them.<sup>114</sup>

This description is clearly an allusion to *De spiritu et littera* 13.22, where Augustine contrasts the *lex operum* with the *lex fidei*:

What the law of works commands by its threats (*minando imperat*) the law of faith obtains by its faith. The former says, *You shall not desire* (Ex 20:17); the latter says, *Since I knew that no one can be continent unless God grants this and to know from whom this gift comes was itself the mark of wisdom, I went to the Lord and pleaded with him* (Wis 8:21). . . . Accordingly, by the law of works God says: Do what I command! By the law of faith we say to God: Give what you command!<sup>115</sup>

Two observations are in order here. First, although Denys invokes the authority of Augustine, his allusion to *De spiritu et littera* carefully avoids any mention of the concupiscence that marks out for Augustine the law of works as a law of *moral* works, not simply a law of ceremonial observances. Second, Denys also shifts, if ever so subtly, the relationship between these two laws to a more univocal basis. For Augustine, the law of works is a set of commands containing clearly defined moral content. The law of faith, however, is a “law” only in an equivocal

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<sup>114</sup> *Secundum Augustinum autem, lex Moysis dicitur, factorum, quia minando imperabat, sed gratiam faciendi non praestabat. Lex vero evangelica vocatur lex fidei, quoniam opera mandate, et credendo gratiam faciendi acquirit. En. in ep. Rom., 3:27; DCO 13:32c.*

<sup>115</sup> *Quod operum lex minando imperat, hoc fidei lex credendo impetrat. Illa dicit: non concupisces, ista dicit: cum scirem quia nemo esse potest continens, nisi deus det, et hoc ipsum erat sapientiae, scire cuius esset hoc donum, adii dominum et deprecatus sum. . . . ac per hoc lege operum dicit deus: fac quod iubeo, lege fidei dicitur deo: da quod iubes. Spir. et litt. 13.22; CSEL 60:175; WSA 1.23:164.*

sense—it is a *ratio* interior to the creature which empowers the believer fulfill the demands of the law of works, but it is not itself a new set of commands. The law of faith does not negate the law of works for Augustine, but in contrast with the view of Origen, the law does not add new content, nor does it command in its own voice. In the law of works, God commands humanity; the law of faith, by contrast, is something by which human beings implore divine aid. This multivalent understanding of law is blunted, however, in Denys's more univocal reformulation: here the law itself commands works, as well as obtains the grace to perform them (*Lex vero evangelica vocatur lex fidei, quoniam opera mandate, et credendo gratiam faciendi acquirat*). For Augustine, the law of faith does not negate the moral demands of the law of works; rather, the law of faith finds its ultimate end, or goal, in the law of works. Denys, however, collapses the two into one another, making it much more difficult to draw a clear distinction between law and gospel.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In the following chapter we will take up the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Romans 3 in the sixteenth century, but before doing so let us pause to make some general observations regarding the shape of the patristic and medieval discussion. On the relation of justification to law, and the many attendant questions this relation raises, it is clear that the pre-Reformation exegetical tradition is neither unified, nor does it proceed in a linear, incremental manner. The reformers in particular made broad generalizations about medieval exegesis, and when we encounter these charges in their sixteenth-century context we will be in better position to assess their accuracy.

Modern interpreters have also made similar assertions, but if my argument in this chapter proves nothing else, I hope it will be clear that medieval exegesis cannot be regarded as a univocal story of degeneration—either to a semi-Pelagian superstition awaiting redemption at the hands of Luther, or to a scholastic wasteland set in convenient foil to the progress of late twentieth-century biblical studies. Rather, medieval exegetes inherited a range of interpretive materials on these questions, materials which they continued to rework and deploy in the service of their own ongoing theological projects.

On the question of what law, exactly, is contrasted with the faith which justifies in Romans 3:20 and 3:28, two main strands can be discerned in this tradition. One dates back to Origen and Augustine, and holds that Paul is claiming that God justifies the ungodly apart from any human achievement mandated by law, whether moral, judicial, or ceremonial. Here the accent falls most heavily on the powerlessness of human agency and the gratuitousness of grace, yet with the important proviso that it is only *preceding* works of the law which are excluded from consideration, not the works which follow the gift of justifying grace. The other tradition dates back as far as Ambrosiaster and has a strong following among the monastic commentators of the early middle ages. It is enshrined in two of the most important medieval exegetical textbooks, but quickly falls from favor after its ambiguous exposition at the hands of Peter Lombard. Here the accent falls more heavily on the powerlessness of the Jewish sacramentals to justify, and the contrast with the sacraments of the church is often made explicit. Whereas the Origenian-

Augustinian line of interpretation stresses a transition from moral impotence to moral empowerment, a transition summed up in Augustine's dictum that "works follow from justification; they do not precede that one may be justified," the alternate reading preferred by these medieval commentators is so concerned to safeguard the claims of the moral law that it often blurs the distinction between the commands of the law and the grace which empowers their fulfillment. This is most clearly seen in the insistence of several commentators that "works of the law truly justify." It is widely known that patristic and medieval theologians were often wont to describe Paul's idiomatic expression of "justification by faith" in terms of a synecdoche—that is, justification is said to be "by faith" because faith the beginning, or source, of the entire process of grace-empowered transformation, a transformation which creates virtue and results in good works.<sup>116</sup> What we have seen here is that the synecdoche can at times cut both ways, such that the *pars* which is taken *pro toto* is often not faith, but works. The reformers themselves recognized the tendency of earlier exegetes to view faith in synecdoche for all the gifts of grace, and it drove them nuts.<sup>117</sup> I shall argue in the next chapter, however, that the theological moves which allowed for works of the law to occupy this position represents an even more basic point of divergence.

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<sup>116</sup> Scheck helpfully emphasizes this aspect in Origen's understanding of justification.

<sup>117</sup> G. R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 124-27.

## Chapter 4: Between St. Paul and St. Augustine: Martin Luther and the Righteousness of God

All the heart of Europe was heaving,  
Crushed out with enslaving lies,  
She looked all around in her anguish,  
He heard her bewildered cries,—  
The cries of the death-stricken nations;  
Overshadowed with stifling night,  
He opened the Book of blessing,  
And the kingdom owned its might. [. . .]

He heard the shouts of the foemen;  
They were thousands,—he but one;  
The legions of Rome were advancing,  
He stood there a lonely man.  
The eternal volume clasping,  
Heaven's rescript of life and death,  
He spoke the delivering watchword,  
That "the just shall live by faith."

——"Luther," Horatius Bonar (1883)<sup>1</sup>

The allure of the story is hard to shake: the lone monk, wrestling with the scriptures through long, dark nights of the soul, rediscovers the Christian Gospel in a single verse of Paul's epistle to the Romans—an intellectual and existential breakthrough not only for Martin Luther, but also for all of Western civilization. Scholars in recent years have tended, on the whole, to rather less bombast in their accounts of Luther's break with the Catholic Church, but the basic narrative of a solitary insight into Pauline theology sparking a conflagration which led to the reform or

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Catholic Presbyterian* 10 (1883): 338-41.

fragmentation of Western Christendom retains a powerful hold on the imagination of many scholars. Raising the stakes for many of these scholars is Luther's own claim that his "rediscovery of the Gospel" represented not only a more faithful reading of Paul, but of Augustine as well.

My goal in the final two chapters of this work is to argue for a more nuanced view of the relationship between early evangelical Pauline exegesis and the previous centuries of patristic and medieval interpretation, charting the emergence of a distinctly Protestant approach to Paul's Gospel which stood increasingly at odds with that earlier tradition. In this chapter I begin with a look at the fabled "Tower Experience," as Luther himself narrated his development at various points in his later career. My goal here is not to solve all of the myriad biographical and theological problems raised by Luther's various accounts, but rather to open up space for a fresh reconsideration of Luther's early Pauline exegesis by getting it out from under the shadow of his later autobiographical reflections. I begin with a look at Luther's celebrated 1545 account of his "breakthrough," comparing it with a letter to Staupitz composed in 1518, not long after the start of the indulgence controversy, and I argue that both of the major options scholars have given for Luther's *Durchbruch* suffer from serious difficulties. Following the suggestion of one recent Luther biographer, I argue that the search for any dramatic breakthrough or "conversion" experience in Luther's early exegetical writings must be tabled in favor



of a more developmental approach, one that allows us to consider the 1515 lectures as both a product, and as a critique, of late medieval Augustinianism.<sup>2</sup>

Having cut—or at least frayed somewhat—the Gordian knot binding the interpretation of Luther’s Pauline exegesis to his later break with Rome, I turn to an examination of Luther’s commentary on Romans 3 in 1515, where I conclude that Luther’s reading of Paul is decidedly *not* Protestant. On the contrary, it begins with many of the same basic Augustinian assumptions and categories which we have seen developed throughout the medieval period by a long line of monastic and scholastic commentators. In contrast with Luther’s later accounts, however, what we see in these pages is not a movement away from late medieval theories of justification inspired in part by Augustine, but rather the beginnings of a critique of Augustine himself. That Luther sides with Augustine against many of the late medieval nominalist theologians on the questions of grace and predestination is well known, but what I shall be arguing here is that even as Luther is becoming *more* Augustinian in certain ways, he is becoming *less* Augustinian in others.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Luther’s comments on this passage suggest that he is beginning to call into question the basic

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<sup>2</sup> The label “Augustinian” is itself a contested category, and one that can be applied to a variety of different phenomena. Steinmetz lists five different ways in which the term is used by historians of the late medieval period: 1) as a description of the theology of the Latin West in general; 2) the theology of the Augustinian Order; 3) a group of theologians within the Augustinian Order who purportedly are more faithful to Augustine’s teaching than the other, merely nominal, Augustinians of their order; 4) a tendency to embrace the more controversial aspects of Augustine’s teaching, especially on predestination and concupiscence, with little or no concession to popular scruples; 5) the embodiment, in contrast with Pelagianism, of a theological tendency within Christian thought which transcends the original thought of either figure (*Luther and Staupitz*, 13-15).

<sup>3</sup> To state the case in terms of Steinmetz’s typology, Luther becomes *more* Augustinian in the fourth, and possibly even in the fifth sense, even as he becomes *less* Augustinian in the first and second senses.

Augustinian grammar of justification as a transformative process. The way in which Luther makes sense of this process in light of his own existential struggles may foreshadow aspects of the later Protestant *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*, but it is still a long, long way away: Luther has simply posed a problem his later followers will struggle to solve.

#### **4.1 Luther and the Tower: Was There a “Reformation Breakthrough” in Pauline Exegesis?**

In Chapter 2 I noted the tension in Luther’s early exposition of Romans between certain commonplaces Luther received from the late medieval exegetical tradition and the emergence of several key concepts in his new understanding of justification. Up to this point, however, I have avoided direct engagement with one of the most controverted and intractable issues in Luther research: the dating of the so-called “Reformation Discovery.” I come in this chapter, however, to the central Pauline text in the Reformation debates over justification, and the issue of Luther’s *Durchbruch* can be deferred no longer. In his *glossa* and *scholia* on the second half of this chapter, Luther lays the foundation for a critique of the Augustinian synthesis which will be fundamental to subsequent Protestant exegesis, yet he does so several years before his break with the Roman Catholic church over the matter of indulgences and at least three years prior to the point at which his own new understanding of justification became clear to him—by his own most celebrated account, at least.<sup>4</sup> This raises an issue critical for my study: how are we to

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<sup>4</sup> I shall deal with the precise chronology of this account below.

understand Luther's early exegesis of Romans in light of his later assertions that it was a single insight into Paul's theology that led to his "rediscovery" of the Gospel—and subsequently, his break with the Roman Catholic church? Scholars arguing for an early date for Luther's "Reformation breakthrough" tend to regard his new understanding of justification as driving his critique of the reigning Catholic orthodoxy of salvation, while those opting for a later date locate the impetus for these developments elsewhere. I shall argue in this section that there are serious interpretive difficulties with both approaches, difficulties which make the search for a dramatic breakthrough in Luther's thinking on this question highly problematic.

#### **4.1.1 The 1545 *Rückblick***

Most students of Christian history with even a passing knowledge of the Reformation are familiar with Luther's own account of his theological breakthrough, written in the preface to his collected Latin writings in 1545. This text has been the starting point for most scholarly attempts to pinpoint a date for the emergence of Luther's new theology, and I reproduce the relevant passage here in its entirety:

Meanwhile, I had already during that year returned to interpret the Psalter anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skilful, after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1[:17], "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable

sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” 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.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “righteousness of God.” Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God’s righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God’s righteousness with which we are justified was taught. Armed more fully with these thoughts, I began a second time to interpret the Psalter. And the work would have grown into a large commentary, if I had not again been compelled to leave the work begun, because Emperor Charles V in the following year convened the diet at Worms.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Vorrede zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgaben seiner lateinischen Schriften* (1545), LW 34:336-338. The Latin for the first and final paragraphs from this extract is critical to my argument: *Interim eo anno iam redieram ad Psalterium denuo interpretandum fretus eo, quod exercitator essem, postquam S. Pauli Epistolas ad Romanos, ad Galatas, et eam, quae est ad Ebraeos, tractassem in scholis. Miro certe ardore captus fueram cognoscendi Pauli in epistola ad Rom., sed obstiterat hactenus non frigidus circum praecordia sanguis, sed unicum vocabulum, [Rom 1:17] quod est Cap. I: Iustitia Dei revelatur in illo. Oderam enim vocabulum istud ‘Iustitia Dei’, quod usu et consuetudine omnium doctorum doctus eram philosophice intelligere de iustitia (ut vocant) formali seu activa, qua Deus est iustus, et peccatores iniustosque punit. . . . Postea legebam Augustinum de spiritu et litera, ubi praeter spem offendi, quod et ipse iustitiam Dei similiter interpretatur: qua nos Deus induit, dum nos iustificat. Et quamquam imperfecte hoc adhuc sit dictum, ac de imputatione non clare omnia explicet, placuit tamen iustitiam Dei doceri, qua nos iustificemur. Istis cogitationibus armatior factus coepi Psalterium secundo interpretari, et processisset opus in magnum commentarium, nisi denuo per comitia Caroli V. Imperatoris Vuormatiam sequenti anno vocatus opus coeptum deserere fuissem coactus.* WA 54:185.12-20, 186.16-24.

At first blush, this would seem to be a fairly straightforward account of an intellectual and religious breakthrough which took place sometime after Luther had finished his lectures on Hebrews in 1518<sup>6</sup> and before he began his second series of lectures on the Psalms in early 1519.<sup>7</sup> It has proven notoriously difficult to read it this way, however, for reasons both internal and external to the text, and historians have pointed to virtually every conceivable date between 1509, when Luther took his bachelor of theology, and 1519 as the actual moment of the breakthrough.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout much of the twentieth century, majority opinion favored an earlier dating for Luther's *Turmerlebnis*, an assessment based in large part on the analysis of Luther's early theological development.<sup>9</sup> In 1958, however, Ernst Bizer shook up

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<sup>6</sup> The standard dating for the Hebrews lectures has them concluding no later than March 26, 1518, with the end of the spring semester. Kenneth Hagen, *A Theology of Testament in the Young Luther: The Lectures on Hebrews*, SMRT 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 5. Bayer, however, argues that the lectures ran into the summer semester as well, concluding in September. Oswald Bayer, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 203-206.

<sup>7</sup> These lectures, printed the following year in Wittenberg under the title *Operationes in Psalmos* by Johann Grüneberg, represent Luther's first major published commentary. The dating of the lectures remains contested, but Gerhard Hammer gives the most plausible reconstruction of the evidence, arguing that the lectures must have begun no earlier than January of 1519 and no later than March 22, in *Archiv zur Weimarer Ausgabe der Werke Martin Luthers*, vol. 1, *D. Martin Luther, Operationes in psalmos, 1519–1521*, part 1, *Historisch-theologisch Einleitung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), 107-113.

<sup>8</sup> In a fragment of his *Tischreden* dating from 1532, Luther alludes to this experience as having taking place in the "tower (*thurm*)" of the monastery where he was living (WATr 3:228, §3232a-c). Accordingly, scholars have taken to describing this as Luther's "tower experience (*Turmerlebnis*)."<sup>9</sup> For surveys of the scholarly literature on the *Turmerlebnis* issue, see Kenneth Hagen, "Changes in the Understanding of Luther: the Development of the Young Luther," *ThS* 29, no. 3 (1968): 478-93; Rolf Schäfer, "Zur Datierung von Luthers reformatorischer Erkenntnis," *ZThK* 66, no. 2 (1969): 151-70; Bernhard Lohse, ed., *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther: neuere Untersuchungen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Major interpreters holding to an early date (pre-1517) for the *Turmerlebnis* include Karl Holl, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die

the world of Luther studies with a trenchant argument in favor of a later date more in line with Luther's own *Rückblick* of 1545.<sup>10</sup> There had earlier been several notable holdouts from the early dating prior to this point.<sup>11</sup> But Bizer's work sparked a reexamination of the *Turmerlebnis* problem, and many scholars in the last fifty years have opted for a later dating, downplaying the innovations of Luther's early theological work or redefining the content of his "discovery" to locate the turning point in closer proximity to other key evangelical developments.<sup>12</sup>

This is not to suggest that consensus has been reached on the question. Many scholars seemed to have been tiring of the debate, and some to have regarded it as beyond resolution, when the world of Luther scholarship was shaken up once again

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Frage der Heilsgewissheit " in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), 91-130; Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1953), 4:63-78; Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," *ZThK* 48, no. 2 (1951): 172-230; Heinrich Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," *ARG* 53, no. 1-2 (1962): 1-60; David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: an Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 68-95. So also, with important qualifications, Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwartzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 166-67.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex auditu. Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> For example, Hartmann Grisar, *Luther*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1911), 1:50; Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1951); Axel Gyllenkrok, *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung in der frühen evangelischen Theologie Luthers* (Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1952).

<sup>12</sup> Major interpreters holding to a late date (post-1517) for the *Turmerlebnis* include Hubert Jedin, "Luthers Turmerlebnis in neuer Sicht: Bericht über Ernst Bizer, 'Fides ex auditu' (1958)," *Catholica* 12 (1958):129-138; Ernst Wolf, "Luther, Martin," *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* (Göttingen, 1959), 2:1166; F. Edward Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); Kurt Aland, *Der Weg zur Reformation: Zeitpunkt und Charakter des reformatorischen Erlebnisses Martin Luthers* (Munich: Kaiser, 1965); Otto Hermann Pesch, "Zur Frage Luthers reformatorischer Wende: Ergebnisse und Probleme der Diskussion um Ernst Bizer, Fides ex auditu," *Catholica* 20, no. 3 (1966); Bayer, *Promissio*; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaaf, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 1:221-37.

in 2006 by the suggestion that there was in fact no “Reformation breakthrough”—at least not in the way Luther narrated it.<sup>13</sup> The publication of Volker Leppin’s biography of Luther was greeted by a storm of criticism, mainly from German scholars, in reaction to his suggestion that Luther’s *Rückblick* of 1545 was a largely fictitious account constructed to suit his later aims.<sup>14</sup> As Leppin himself has recently put it:

To overstate the case slightly, if Martin Luther looks back on his “pre-Reformation” period, he does so with the sense of being right to have left this earlier phase behind. There is thus at least a possibility that he, like other converts, tended to paint his past in the darkest possible colours in order to bathe his present life in that much more light. It is possible that during his actual time in the monastery he did not perceive medieval piety as negatively as he expressed later. Perhaps his development originally was not at all in opposition to the late medieval world of piety, but he instead utilized the helpful aspects that it offered. Methodologically, one must then ask whether the later accounts, particularly when they are stirring, really correspond to the earlier course of events, or did Luther project his later understandings on them?<sup>15</sup>

This, it seems to me, is an essential question, and one which must be constantly kept in mind as we examine Luther’s early exegesis of Romans.

The problem one immediately encounters in reading Luther’s lectures on Romans against the backdrop of his ongoing theological development is the problem of the *iustitia Dei*—the “righteousness of God.” This *unicum vocabulum* Luther later

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<sup>13</sup> Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the blistering review by Dorothea Wendebourg, “Kann auch anders,” in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (19.2.2007). Less polemical, but also critical on this issue, are the following reviews: Eike Wolgast, in *Historische Zeitschrift* 285 (2007): 197-200; Albrecht Beutel, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 132 (2007): 1221-1224; Thomas Kaufmann, in *ARG, Literaturbericht* 36 (2007): 17-19. Leppin responds to his critics in, “Streit um Luther? Gerne! Eine Antwort,” *Luther* 79, no. 1 (2008): 49-52.

<sup>15</sup> Leppin, “Martin Luther, Reconsidered for 2017,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2008): 376-77.

represents as the crux of his whole inner struggle, and it was his solution to this “problem” which opened wide the gates of paradise. Luther’s 1545 *Rückblick* makes two things inescapably clear:

1. The content of his breakthrough was centered on a transition from an active to a passive understanding of the *iustitia Dei*.<sup>16</sup>
2. This insight was of the utmost existential importance for him—a true “conversion” experience.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This point is reinforced by the recent rediscovery of another, second-hand account of Luther’s *Turnerlebnis* recounted by one of Luther’s students, Johannes Bugenhagen, in the preface to his 1550 commentary on Jonah. Like the 1545 account, Bugenhagen’s version centers on Luther’s understanding of Romans 1:17: “Father Luther often told me in the presence of many others: ‘I used to be amazed at Paul’s argument for the justification of the ungodly and to rejoice in Scripture when I read the exceptional consolation of the Holy Spirit and God’s promises of grace in Christ, but I did not understand it because I was a most righteous monk, being confident in my works and merits, in monastic vows, and my rules and observances. . . . And therefore this phrase, ‘the righteousness of God,’ in the Epistle to the Romans, which Paul wrote to us as a highest consolation against our righteousness . . . was poison to me, and I abhorred it. . . . For I understood, as did all those who were under the pope, that what was called the righteousness of God was nothing other than certain judgment and the wrath of God against my sins, that is, the righteousness of the law.” And like the 1545 account, Luther also associates his conceptual breakthrough with Augustine, although here Augustine seems to play more than a merely confirmatory role: “But then I read in Augustine: ‘the righteousness of God, that is through faith in Christ, which God imputes to us unworthy people and so justifies the ungodly freely through grace,’ as it says in Book IV of *De Trinitate*, which is also quoted in the Sentences of the Master, Book III, distinction 35: ‘It is said that the righteousness of God is not only that by which he [God] is righteous, but also that which he gives humans when he justifies the ungodly.’” Bugenhagen’s account also echoes Luther’s earlier *Rückblick* in describing how this discovery served as a new point of entry into the scriptures for Luther: “Thus the door was first opened to me and I entered into all the Holy Scriptures and the gospel of Christ, by understanding this phrase alone: the righteousness of God.” Martin Lohrmann, who recently translated and commented on this hitherto overlooked text, points out that “Bugenhagen (or Luther himself) embellished the text with evangelical phrases such as ‘per fidem Christi,’ ‘Deus imputat nobis,’ and ‘gratis per gratiam,’ phrases which occur in neither Lombard nor Augustine,” pointing out that “these inaccuracies may further validate Bugenhagen’s claim that his account was built upon Luther’s direct testimony.” Lohrmann, “A Newly Discovered Report of Luther’s Reformation Breakthrough from Johannes Bugenhagen’s 1550 Jonah Commentary,” *LQ* 22, no. 3 (2008): 324-30.

<sup>17</sup> The word “conversion” is a loaded term, and I have struggled to come up with a better one. For modern readers, it carries a whole raft of associations stemming from later pietism and revivalist traditions, associations which have no real place in late medieval understandings of conversion. In the Latin of the Vulgate, *conversio* indicated first and foremost a moral transformation, a turning from sin and an embrace of true religion. Throughout the middle ages, the term was also used of the



Of the two major interpretive options on offer for a punctiliar dating of this *Turmerlebnis*, neither can adequately account for both of these key facts.

Those who favor an early date correctly point out that Luther had begun to interpret the *iustitia Dei* in the passive sense long before 1518. Consider, for example, Luther's gloss of the term in a marginal note to Rom 3:21 in early 1515:

Blessed Augustine in chapter 9 of *On the Spirit and the Letter* says: “‘The righteousness of God’; he did not say ‘the righteousness of man’ or ‘the righteousness of one’s own will,’ but ‘the righteousness of God,’ *not that righteousness by which God is righteous but that righteousness with which He covers (induit) man when He justifies the ungodly.*”<sup>18</sup>

In his later account, Luther explicitly says that he encountered this text in Augustine *after* he had made the discovery on his own: “Later (*postea*) I read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God’s righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes (*induit*) us when he justifies us.”<sup>19</sup> Clearly the conceptual insight was in place long before

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decision to enter the monastic life. None of these meanings really captures what is going on with Luther, however. Marilyn J. Harran’s study, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), identifies at least four ways in which Luther uses the term *conversio*: 1) the initial acceptance of the tenets of the Christian faith (e.g., by Jews and heretics); 2) the unrepeatable entrance to the Christian life, occurring for Luther in baptism; 3) contrition, or penitence; 4) an event involving a dramatic personal transformation—as in the classic conversion narratives of Paul and Augustine (22). It is in the fourth sense that I use the term in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> *B. Augustinus c. 9. de spi. et lit.: ‘Iustitia Dei: non dixit “Iustitia hominis”, “Iustitia proprie voluntatis”, Sed “Iustitia Dei,” non qua Deu iustus est, sed qua induit hominem, cum Iustificat Impium.* WA 56:36.11-13; LW 25:30; emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> The account by Bugenhagen in 1550, however, seems to suggest that it was the Augustine text which catalyzed Luther’s breakthrough insight. Luther also sets out his passive reading of the *iustitia Dei* in the *scholion* on Rom 1:17: “In human teachings the righteousness of man is revealed and taught, that is, who is and becomes righteous before himself and before other people and how this takes place. Only in the Gospel is the righteousness of God revealed (that is, who is and becomes righteous before God and how this takes place) *by faith alone*, by which the Word of God is believed, as it is written in the last chapter of Mark (16:16): ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’ For the righteousness of God is the cause of salvation.

the point in time indicated by Luther's 1545 account, but it is difficult to discern any trace of the existential breakthrough Luther was to associate with this development decades later. Neither in the glosses, nor in the *scholia*, is there any indication that this concept represented a breakthrough by which the author "was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, Luther's exposition of the *iustitia Dei* in Romans 3 draws on the common stock of late medieval textual glosses in presenting what is to all appearances a workmanlike, if somewhat idiosyncratic, variation on late medieval Augustinian soteriology<sup>21</sup>—an exercise which surely would have been relegated to the dustbin of historical oblivion had not its author become embroiled in a heated controversy over indulgences two years later. There is simply no suggestion, either in Luther's own lecture notes or in the surviving *Nachschriften* from his students, that the passive understanding of the "righteousness of God" along the lines set down by Augustine in *De spiritu et littera* was regarded by Luther or his students as a revolutionary theological development.

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And here again, *by the righteousness of God we must not understand the righteousness by which He is righteous in Himself but the righteousness by which we are made righteous by God*. This happens through faith in the Gospel. Therefore blessed Augustine writes in chapter 11 of *On the Spirit and the Letter*: "It is called the righteousness of God because by imparting it He makes righteous people, just as "Deliverance belongs to the Lord" refers to that by which He delivers." LW 25:151 (emphasis mine).

<sup>20</sup> Oberman points to the extract from Rom 3:21 cited above (WA 56:36.11-23), characterizing it as follows: "In his marginal notes to verse twenty [sic] he [Luther] interpreted the righteousness of God as he was to describe in 1545: a liberating discovery." This is a strange characterization, as there is nothing whatever in the passage which suggests either that Luther regarded this interpretation as a new discovery or as a liberation.

<sup>21</sup> That Luther's "new" understanding of the *iustitia Dei*, *pace* Augustine, turned out to be standard exegetical practice in the later middle ages prompted Denifle's contemptuous dismissal of Luther as "nur ein Halbwisser, ein Halbgebildeter." Heinrich Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung: Quellenmässig dargestellt*, 2 vols. (Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1904), 1:523.

This incongruity, in my judgment, is a serious obstacle for assigning an earlier date to Luther's purported *Turmerlebnis*.

Scholars who favor a late date for the *Turmerlebnis* have had to wrestle with a different set of difficulties. Chief among these is the problem of reconciling Luther's early lectures on the Psalms and Romans with his later insistence that it was a new understanding of the *iustitia Dei* which proved decisive. As I have already shown (and as many of these scholars have acknowledged), this "new" understanding of the righteousness of God was already present in Luther's comments on Rom 1:17 in 1515, and some have pointed to "passive righteousness" in substance, if not in terminology, as early as the Psalms lectures in 1513.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, scholars favoring a late date have attempted to redefine the content of Luther's "Reformation discovery" in order to align later theological developments with the chronology of the 1545 *Rückblick*. Bizer, for example, argued that the turning point for Luther was not some new understanding of Rom 1:17, but rather

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<sup>22</sup> According to Kenneth Hagen, Luther does not actually use the term *iustitia Dei passiva* until his treatise *De servo arbitrio* in 1525 (WA 18:768.36). Hagen, "Development," 481. According to Emmanuel Hirsch, Luther describes the righteousness of God in precisely this sense, however, in his comments on Ps 31:2, where Luther notes that the Psalmist appeals to the *iustitia Dei* for mercy, setting up a contrast with the *iustitia hominum*: *In te solo, quia derelictus in passione, domine speravi, non confundar sicut impii in eternum, sed sufficit ad tempus hoc passionis: in iusticia tua, quia iustus es Iudex, quia secundum iusticiam hominum putant me iuste crucifixum* (WA 3:163.14-17). This is all Luther has to say on the matter at this point, as Hirsch acknowledges, though he concludes that "eine deutlichere Stelle, daß die *iustificatio dei passiva* allein ein neues Verständnis von Röm 1, 17 nicht erschließt, kann es nicht geben." In, "Initium theologiae Lutheri," in *Festgabe für Julius Kaftan*, 150-69 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1920), 162. See also Ozment's discussion of Luther's scholion on Ps. 84, in *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509-16) in the Context of their Theological Thought*, SMRT 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 168-73.

his new theology of the Word as “the means by which God justifies humans.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to reinterpret Luther’s *Durchbruch* in accordance with his ongoing theological development comes from Oswald Bayer. According to Bayer, the “essence” of Luther’s breakthrough. . . lies not in the discovery of a *iustitia dei* that can be separated from the manner and medium of the self-disclosure of God’s righteousness in the trustworthy message of the promise of salvation (*promissio*).<sup>24</sup> Rather, Luther’s “Reformation Discovery,” strictly speaking, is a hermeneutical breakthrough: “That the linguistic sign is itself the reality, that it represents not an absent but a present reality.”<sup>25</sup> God’s pronouncement of the sinner as just, in other words, is not merely a descriptive word (*Heissel-Wort*); rather, it is a “deed-word” (*Thettel-Wort*), a word which creates what it commands.<sup>26</sup> This analysis may well capture what is most revolutionary in Luther’s reforming theological program in 1518, but it takes us a long way from Luther’s own description of his development as he remembered it in later years.

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<sup>23</sup> Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Bayer, “Luther as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed., Donald McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 83, n. 10. Bayer here summarizes findings from his earlier study, *Promissio*, esp. 68f., 249-53.

<sup>25</sup> According to Bayer, Luther “made [this discovery] first (1518) in reflection on the sacrament of penance. That the sign itself is the reality means, with reference to the absolution, that the sentence “I absolve you of your sins!” is no judgment which only ascertains what already exists, therefore assuming an inner, divine, proper absolution. Rather, the word of absolution is a speech-act that first establishes a state of affairs, first creates a relationship—between the one in whose name it is spoken, and the one to whom it is spoken and who believes the promise. “Luther as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture,” 76.

<sup>26</sup> Cf., Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 115-17.

To restate and summarize my survey of the debate, it seems that situating Luther's early Romans exegesis vis-à-vis his later description of his own theological breakthrough runs into an insoluble dilemma. If the *Turmerlebnis* is placed relatively late in Luther's development (i.e., 1517-1519), it is difficult to account for the fact that in the 1515 Romans lectures Luther is already relying explicitly on Augustine's formulations from *De spiritu et littera* in his passive construal of the *iustitia Dei*. Advocates for the later dating, such as Bayer, have acknowledged this difficulty and argued that Luther's breakthrough was not, in fact, connected in any significant way with the concept of the *iustitia Dei* in Rom 1:17, as he himself asserted in 1545. Bayer may well be correct in describing Luther's *real* breakthrough as having taken place in 1518, but if so, then it is not a breakthrough driven primarily by Luther's exegesis of Romans—and therefore, it lies beyond the scope of my argument in this chapter. If, on the other hand, the *Turmerlebnis* is placed early in Luther's career (i.e., 1513-1515), then it is difficult to explain both how unexceptional is Luther's exegesis of Paul's Gospel in so many ways (see section 4.2, below) and why these lectures bear no trace whatever of the radical existential breakthrough the concept of the *iustitia Dei passiva* became for Luther in later years.

#### **4.1.2 The 1518 Letter to Staupitz**

The 1545 preface, however, is not the only document we possess in which Luther narrates his early theological development. On May 30, 1518, Luther sent a copy of his *Explanations of the Theses Concerning the Value of Indulgences*, along with a

cover letter to his old friend and mentor, Johannes von Staupitz. In this letter, Luther elaborates on how his own understanding of the sacrament of penance had developed in the context of the indulgence controversy. Of particular interest here is the way in which this early account both anticipates and differs from the language of Luther's later *Rückblick* of 1545:

Reverend Father: I remember that during your most delightful and helpful talks, through which the Lord Jesus wonderfully consoled me, you sometimes mentioned the term "*poenitentia*." I was then distressed by my conscience and by the tortures of those who through endless and insupportable precepts teach the so-called method of confession. Therefore I accepted you as a messenger from heaven when you said that *poenitentia* is genuine only if it begins with love for justice and for God (*iusticiae et dei*) and that what they consider to be the final stage and completion is in reality rather the very beginning of *poenitentia*. Your word pierced me like the sharp arrow of the Mighty. As a result, I began to compare your statements with the passages of Scripture which speak of *poenitentia*. And behold—what a most pleasant scene! Biblical words came leaping toward me from all sides, clearly smiling and nodding assent to your statement. They so supported your opinion that while formerly almost no word in the whole Scripture was more bitter to me than *poenitentia* (although I zealously made a pretense before God and tried to express a feigned and constrained love for him), now no word sounds sweeter or more pleasant to me than *poenitentia*.<sup>27</sup>

Both of these accounts, the 1518 letter accompanying the *Resolutiones* and the 1545 *Rückblick* in the preface to the Latin works, are set in the context of Luther's own existential struggles with conscience (*Anfechtungen*) and his personal

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<sup>27</sup> *Memini, Reverende pater, inter iucundissimas et salutare fabulas tuas, quibus me solet dominus Ihesus mirifice consolari, incidisse aliquando mentionem huius nominis 'poenitentia', ubi miserti conscientiarum multarum carnificumque illorum, qui praeceptis infinitis eisdemque importabilibus modum docent (ut vocant) confitendi, te velut e caelo sonantem excepimus, quod poenitentia vera non est, nisi quae ab amore iusticiae et dei incipit, Et hoc esse potius principium poenitentiae, quod illis finis et consummatio censetur. Haesit hoc verbum tuum in me sicut sagitta potentis acuta, coepique deinceps cum scripturis poenitentiam docentibus conferre, Et ecce iucundissimum ludum, verba undique mihi colludebant planeque huic sententiae arridebant et assultabant, ita, ut, cum prius non fuerit ferme in scriptura tota amarius mihi verbum quam 'poenitentia' (licet sedulo etiam coram deo simularem et fictum coactumque amorem exprimere conarer), nunc nihil dulcius aut gratius mihi sonet quam 'poenitentia'. Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute (1518), WA 1:525.4-21; LW 48:65-66.*

quest for a gracious God. Both center on the transformation of a particular biblical concept from one which torments Luther to one which becomes his “sweetest word.” In both accounts, a shift in perspective on one problematic term opens up whole new vistas in Luther’s understanding of the Bible. Yet there are also significant differences. In the 1545 account, Luther represents his struggle as first and foremost “an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul,” while in the earlier letter to Staupitz, Luther is focused on the relationship between the Latin term *poenitentia* and the Greek *μετάνοια*.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, while the 1545 account narrates a punctiliar breakthrough after the completion of the Hebrew lectures (and thus in the spring or summer of 1518 at the latest), the Staupitz letter presents a sequence of conceptual developments all taking place *prior* and leading up to the indulgence controversy, beginning in 1517:

*After this (Post haec) it happened that I learned—thanks to the work and talent of the most learned men who teach us Greek and Hebrew with such great devotion—that the word poenitentia means metanoia in Greek. . . .*

*Then (Denique) I progressed further and saw that metanoia could be understood as a composite not only of “afterward” and “mind,” but also of the [prefix] “trans” and “mind” . . . so that metanoia could mean the transformation of one’s mind and disposition. . . .*

*Continuing this line of reasoning, I became so bold as to believe (His inhaerens ausus sum putare) that they were wrong who attributed so much to penitential works that they left us hardly anything of poenitentia, except some trivial satisfactions on the one hand and a most laborious confession on the other. It is evident that they were misled by the Latin term, because the expression poenitentiam agere suggests more an action than a change in disposition; and in no way does this do justice to the Greek metanoein. . . .*

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<sup>28</sup> For the philological background to the development in early modern humanism, see Erika Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 153.

*While this thought was still agitating me (Haec mea cum sic ferveret meditatio), behold, suddenly (subito) around us the new war trumpets of indulgences and the bugles of pardon started to sound, even to blast, but they failed to evoke in us any prompt zeal for the battle. . . .*

*Finally (denique) they taught impious, false, and heretical things with so much authority—temerity, I wanted to say—that if anyone muttered anything in protest he was immediately a heretic destined for the stake and guilty of eternal damnation. Since I was not able to counteract the furor of these men, I determined modestly to take issue with them and to pronounce their teachings as open to doubt.<sup>29</sup>*

The similarities between these two accounts are strong enough that many scholars have taken them to refer to the same event in Luther's intellectual-spiritual biography.<sup>30</sup> Yet the differences between the two are such that it seems unlikely they can easily be harmonized. Some scholars have pointed to the odd grammar of Luther's Latin at a critical point in the 1545 account: *Miro certe ardore captus fueram cognoscendi Pauli in epistola ad Rom.*<sup>31</sup> The verb *captus fueram* is a double perfect: taken literally, this could indicate that Luther is referring to a time still earlier than the point indicated in the previous sentence, *Interim eo anno iam redieram ad Psalterium denuo interpretandum fretus eo*. This might ease some tension with regard to the chronology, allowing us to read the 1545 account as referring to a point in time prior to the indulgence controversy in 1517. But it does not solve the two major discrepancies, namely: 1) that the 1545 memoir gives an

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<sup>29</sup> WA 1:525.24-526.23; LW 48:66-67 (emphasis mine).

<sup>30</sup> So, for example, Brecht (*Luther*, 1:225), who considers the *Resolutiones* as corroborating evidence for the late dating of the *Turnerlebnis*. Surprisingly, however, Brecht gives no serious attention to the differences between the two accounts.

<sup>31</sup> On the grammar of this passage, see Heinrich Bornkamm, "Luthers Bericht über seine Entdeckung der iustitia Dei," *ARG* 37 (1940): 117-28.



account of a dramatic, punctiliar breakthrough, whereas the 1518 letter suggests a sequence of smaller developments; 2) that the 1545 account centers on the concept of the *iustitia Dei*, while the 1518 account focuses instead on the practice of *poenitentia*.

I am inclined to accord priority to the 1518 account, for three reasons: first, the letter to Staupitz is written in much closer proximity to the events it narrates, and it seems far less likely that Luther might have confused the chronology, as some proponents of the early dating have suggested he did in the 1545 account.<sup>32</sup> Second, although we can discern echoes of the 1518 account's language in the later preface, the latter seems to me a far more sensational account than the former—and therefore it ought to be regarded with rather more suspicion. Finally, the 1545 preface was clearly written for public consumption, while the letter to Staupitz in 1518, though Luther can hardly have regarded such correspondence as strictly private, is not quite so obviously a public relations set-piece. Many scholars have noted the striking parallels between Luther's conversion narrative in 1545 and other classic Christian *exempla*, the two most famous being the account of St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 and Augustine's *Confessiones*.<sup>33</sup> As Brian Cummings has

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Karl Holl, "Der Neubau der Sittlichkeit" in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), 195-96, n. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Oberman even goes so far as to write of a "Turmerlebnis tradition," citing such late medieval figures as Thomas Bradwardine, Richard FitzRalph, and John Gerson, as well as contemporaries of Luther, such as Gasparo Contarini and John Calvin. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 111.

recently pointed out, however, the differences between these accounts are just as significant. Luther's memoir, above all, highlights the centrality of *lectio divina* as locus of God's saving grace: "By reading he was converted, and by reading he hopes to convert his readers."<sup>34</sup> Luther's 1545 memoir thus models for his readers the way Christian salvation is mediated by the biblical text—to put it in terms the Reformation would later make famous, justification *sola fide* comes about *sola scriptura*. These themes fit well with Luther's theology late in his career, but it seems unlikely that Luther the mendicant friar would have narrated his experience thus prior to his break with Rome.

Even if we take Luther's 1518 letter to Staupitz as the primary account of his *reformatische Wende*, however, it is clear that Luther's conversion narrative is already being shaped to support a theological agenda. As Leppin argues,

It is clear that in the year 1518 Luther perceived the discovery of a new understanding of penance as utterly constitutive for his present existence. Accordingly, he interpreted his past in such a way that a biographical-psychological emphasis corresponded to its theological significance, which was made evident through the unexpectedness, as well as the transcendent and comprehensive character of the discovery. But in 1545 he saw the doctrine of justification as utterly constitutive for his theological existence and now reinterpreted this autobiography accordingly.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.

<sup>35</sup> "Für das Jahr 1518 gilt, dass Luther die Entdeckung eines neuen Bußverständnisses als schlechterdings konstitutiv für seine gegenwärtige Existenz wahrnahm. Entsprechend re-konstruierte er seine Vergangenheit so, dass diesem theologischen Gewicht ein biographisch-psychologisches entsprach, dessen Bedeutung durch die Unerwartetheit, den Jenseitsbezug und den umfassenden Erschließungscharakter herausgestrichen wurde. 1545 aber sah er die Rechtfertigungslehre als schlechterdings konstitutiv für seine theologische Existenz an und rekonstruierte nun dies autobiographisch." Leppin, *Luther*, 116. Leppin, of course, is not the first writer to suggest that Luther has fashioned a self-identity to fit his polemical aims. Denifle baited Protestant theologians nearly a century ago with taunts that "Luthers Ordensleben, so wie er später darstellt, seine

Seen in this light, Luther's successive accounts of his own "breakthroughs" may tell us more about the development of his theological self-understanding at the time they were written than they do about his earlier career.

Taking the 1518 account as primary makes much more ambiguous the link between Luther's Pauline exegesis and his "Reformation breakthrough": it was not his agonizing battle with that single word in Paul which sparked the decisive breakthrough, but rather the suggestion from Staupitz that he interpret *poenitentia* more broadly than hitherto he had done—this, set in the context of the growing furor over the sale of indulgences. It may well be that later in his career, Luther was in a better position to see how his developing views on justification in Romans had laid the groundwork for his reevaluation of the concept of penance in 1517-1518, when an idea which had been lying dormant in his mind suddenly began to glow in the dark. But hindsight can bring both clarity and obscurity, and Luther's later accounts of his supposed breakthrough may serve only to distract from a sober assessment of his early exegetical work on its own terms.

## **4.2 Justification in the Romans Lectures (1515)**

Luther's account in 1545 of his "Reformation Breakthrough" suggests that he found peace for his conscience by understanding Paul's use of the term *iustitia Dei* in a passive, rather than an active sense, and that later he found this insight confirmed in

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Bekenntnisse von seinem Gelübde, von seinen Bußwerfen, von seinem Ausgangspunkt, usw. größtenteils dem Reiche der Fabel angehören." *Luther und Luthertum*, 1:xxiv.

Augustine's treatise *De spiritu et littera*. A careful examination of Luther's first lectures on Romans, however, suggests that his development moved in exactly the opposite direction. Luther's exegesis of the second half of Romans 3 makes clear that Augustine's understanding of the passage, as transmitted by the late medieval exegetical tradition, is actually the starting point from which Luther's struggles began. Luther's reading of this text begins with a fairly conventional set of terms and expectations, but his exegesis probes the adequacy of Augustine's formulations at a number of key points. Though hardly "reformational" at this point, Luther's exegesis of Romans in 1515 foreshadows important developments in later Protestant theology which would come to serve as boundary markers for confessional Protestant identity—particularly the notion of the believer's assurance of salvation. Though Luther does not himself supply the solutions in this text, his exegesis of Romans in light of the Augustinian synthesis can be seen as posing a set of fundamental questions for which later Protestant exegesis of Paul would work to find an answer.

#### **4.2.1 The Augustinian Point of Departure**

Luther's understanding of justification in 1515 can best be described as "uneasily Augustinian."<sup>36</sup> It was not "Protestant," and it was not "reformational." This

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<sup>36</sup> Scholarly assessments of Luther's relationship to Augustine at this point in his career vary widely, breaking down at a number of different fault lines. For those, such as Karl Holl, who view Luther's teaching on justification as a sanative process, a *reale Gerechtmachung*, the tension is not particularly acute. For those, however, who see Luther's views as evolving toward something more like the later confessional doctrine, opinion on the early Luther's relation to Augustine usually aligns with judgments on the dating of the *Turmerlebnis*. Those favoring an early date for the breakthrough tend regard Luther in opposition to Augustine; see, for example, Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," 1-60. Those favoring a late date, unsurprisingly, see Luther as standing in

becomes clear in light of the following three considerations. First, while the later Luther and virtually all evangelicals and Protestants following him are keen to drive as much rhetorical space as possible between faith and good works, Luther in 1515 has no such concern.<sup>37</sup> In his exegesis of Rom 3:20, for example, Luther begins with the stock medieval attempt to reconcile Paul and James on the question of justification by faith *alone* by distinguishing between *opera legis* and *opera fidei*. The former are performed “outside of faith and grace . . . at the urging of the law,” while the latter are “those which are done out of the spirit of liberty and solely for the love of God.”<sup>38</sup> Luther is careful to note that works of the law “add nothing” to justification (*nihil cooperantur*), but faith and the works which flow therefrom are regarded as a conceptual unit.<sup>39</sup> Thus, “faith justifies with its own works (*cum suis operibus*). . . . Does something other than faith in Christ *with its good works* seem to be required for justification?”<sup>40</sup> The answer is clearly *no*. In a line of reasoning later

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greater continuity. Jared Wicks, for example, sees Luther “striving” in the Romans lectures “to let Paul and Augustine speak afresh,” concluding that Luther’s *Rechtfertigungslehre* at this point is still a “Catholic synthesis” developed from Augustinian sources. Wicks, *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther’s Early Spiritual Teaching* (Washington, D. C.: Corpus, 1968), 111, 113. According to Uuras Saarnivaara, “Luther’s basic conception of justification is as yet essentially Augustinian. . . . Here and there is found evidence of a deepening insight, but even such deepening occurs within the framework of the Augustinian conception.” *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther’s Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1951), 82-82. One need not concur with Saarnivaara’s evaluation of Luther’s insights as “deeper” than those of Augustine to appreciate the basic point that in 1515, Luther is still operating within a framework that is recognizably Augustinian.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. my analysis of the “first wave” Protestant confessions in the 1520’s, pp. xx-xx.

<sup>38</sup> WA 56:248.5-17; LW 25:234.

<sup>39</sup> WA 56:248.15-16.

<sup>40</sup> WA 56:249.12,17-18; emphasis mine.

made famous in his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), Luther argues that works derive their character from the one performing them, not from the intrinsic nature of the deed.<sup>41</sup> In thoroughly Augustinian fashion, however, he goes on to stipulate that the personal transformation effected by justification takes place “for the performance of the works of righteousness (*ad facienda opera Iustitiae*),” a teleological spin we saw repeated throughout medieval transmission of Augustine’s exegesis in the previous chapter. Moreover, without these works, faith is dead:

Therefore, when St. James and the apostle say that a man is justified by works, they are contending against the erroneous notion of those who thought that faith suffices without works, although the apostle does not say that faith justifies without its own works (because then there would be no faith, since, according to the philosophers, “action is the evidence that form exists,” but that it justifies without the works of the Law. Therefore justification does not demand the works of the Law but a living faith which produces its own works.<sup>42</sup>

We have already seen later Protestant writers arguing that works are a necessary *consequence* of justifying faith, but here Luther draws on an Aristotelian notion of

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<sup>41</sup> Here the analogy is to the transformative power of ordination: “If a layman should perform all the outward functions of a priest, celebrating Mass, confirming, absolving, administering the sacraments, dedicating altars, churches, vestments, vessels, etc., it is certain that these actions in all respects would be similar to those of a true priest, in fact, they might be performed more reverently and properly than the real ones. But because he has not been consecrated and ordained and sanctified, he performs nothing at all, but is only playing church and deceiving himself and his followers. It is the same way with the righteous, good, and holy works which are performed either without or before justification” (WA 56:248.18-33; LW 25:235). In 1520, the principle is stated much more succinctly: “The following statements are therefore true: ‘Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works.’ Consequently it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person” (LW 31:361).

<sup>42</sup> *Igitur quando b. Iacobus et Apostolus dicunt ex operibus hominem Iustificari, contra falsam intelligentiam disputant eorum, qui fidem sine operibus suis sufficere putabant, Cum Apostolus Non dicat, quod fides sine suis propriis operibus (quia tunc nec fides esset, cum ‘operatio arguat formam adesse’ secundum philosophos), Sed sine operibus legis Iustificat. Igitur Iustificatio requirit non opera legis, Sed viam fidem, quae sua operetur opera.* WA 56:249.5-11; LW 25:235; emphasis mine.

form widely accepted in the later middle ages to argue for an even more integral relationship: no works, no faith.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in his *scholia* on Rom 4:7, Luther explicitly identifies justifying righteousness with an interior quality of the soul: “The righteousness which we have from God is itself the very inclination toward good and aversion toward evil, inwardly given by grace; but works are the fruits of righteousness.”<sup>44</sup>

Second, though Luther’s Christocentrism has been noted from an early point in his career—often described in terms of the post-Reformation slogan, *solus Christus*<sup>45</sup>—it is clear that in 1515 Luther has in some ways a much more expansive notion of what faith in Christ actually entails. Glossing the term *iustitia Dei* in 3:22, Luther points out that “the faith in Christ by which we are justified is not a matter of believing only in Christ or in the Person of Christ, but in all things which pertain to Christ.”<sup>46</sup> This observation then becomes the occasion for an extended polemic against “the proud and the heretics” who reject certain elements of the church’s teaching. It is not enough, Luther explains, simply to believe what the Gospels say about Christ—his birth, suffering, and death. Necessary also for salvation are the

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<sup>43</sup> The editors of the Weimar Ausgabe text note that “in seiner Auseinandersetzung des aristotelischen Begriffes der Form fügt [Jodocus] Trutvetter, [one of Luther’s teachers at the University of Erfurt] *Summa in totam physicen* I c. 1 (Bl. b ii) bei: *Hinc in proverbio dicitur: Operatio arguit formam sicut transmutatio materiam.*”

<sup>44</sup> *Iustitia nostra ex Deo Est ipsa ipsa Inclinator ad bonum et declinator a malo interior per gratiam data, opera autem sunt potius fructus Iustitiae.* WA 56:271.11-13.

<sup>45</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), 129-36.

<sup>46</sup> WA 56:251.12-14; LW 25:237.

things which pertain to Christ (*ea, que sunt ipsius*). “And what are these things? The church, of course, and every word which proceeds from the mouth of a leader (*prelati*) of the church or from the mouth of a good and holy man is the Word of Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Since Christ cannot be divided, one either accepts the teaching of the church *in toto*, without qualification, or one rejects Christ.

This, however, raises a problem for Luther, a problem which highlights just how far Luther is from his later view of justification as providing liberation for the troubled conscience:

For since we are unable to know whether we really do live in every word of God and deny none (since many words are spoken by the spiritual leader, many by the brethren, many in the Gospel and in the writings of the apostles, and many to us inwardly by God) *we can never know whether we are justified or whether we believe*. We should, therefore, consider our works as works of the Law and humbly admit that we are sinners, seeking to be justified solely by His mercy. For although we are sure that we believe in Christ, yet we are not certain that we believe in all the words which pertain to Him. And thus it is uncertain that we “believe in Him.”<sup>48</sup>

Not only is this *not* “reformational,” but it poses—without answer—one of the central questions that later Reformation theology was designed to address: the believer’s assurance of salvation. Luther does not, in 1515, think this is a genuine possibility—at least not directly. In answer to this perplexing situation, Luther asserts that “we must humble ourselves greatly” (*in immensum nos oportet*

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<sup>47</sup> WA 56:251.24-25; LW 25:238.

<sup>48</sup> *Quia cum non possimus scire, an in omni verbo Dei viuamus aut nullum negemus (cum multa a prelato, multa a fratribus, multa in euangelio et Apostolis, multa interne nobis a Deo dicantur) nunquam scire possumus, an Iustificati simus, an credamus. Idcirco, tanquam opera nostra sint opera legis ęstimemus, et humiliter peccatores simus in sola misericordia eius Iustificari cupientes. Quamquam enim certi simus nos in Christum credere, non tamen certi sumus nos in omnia, que ipsius sunt, Verba credere. ac per hoc etiam ‘in ipsum Credere’ incertum est.* WA 56:252:17-25; LW 25:239; emphasis mine.



*humiliari*).<sup>49</sup> But, contrary to some interpreters, Luther does not simply rest content with the traditional monastic focus on humility as the key to salvation.<sup>50</sup> Rather, these remarks provide the point of departure for a critique of the received Augustinian categories which frame the terms of Pauline exegesis.

#### **4.2.2 The Synthesis Breaks Down: “We pray . . . and we do not receive”**

Protestant theology is often represented as a “rediscovery of Augustine’s doctrine of grace, with a subsequent critique of his doctrine of the church.”<sup>51</sup> There is much to be said for this characterization, particularly insofar as the reformers drew explicitly on Augustine in attacking what they viewed as the semi-Pelagianism of late medieval theology.<sup>52</sup> On the question of whether human beings can merit any reward or favor from God without the aid of grace, the mainstream reformers sided unequivocally with Augustine. On the question of *how* that grace is given, however, they came to a strikingly different conclusion.

Augustine, as I argued above in Chapter 1, operates with a fundamentally transformative model: justification is a process whereby the believer is transformed by the power of grace from *iniustus* into *iustus*, enabling the pilgrim finally to stand

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 209.

<sup>52</sup> There was, of course, a tradition of Augustinian theology in the later middle ages “which stressed the centrality of grace for justification and which minimized, without eliminating, the significance of the human contribution” (Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, 33). There were also those, against whom the reformers vociferously reacted, who so stressed the role of human agency in salvation as to make a muddle of Augustine’s basic categories, even while laying claim to the same. See, for example, Heiko A. Oberman’s classic study of the thought of Gabriel Biel, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*.

before the judgment seat of God and be vindicated as righteous because that is precisely what grace has made her to be. The Protestant reformers came to view justification not as a gradual process of transformation, but as a decisive declaration of God's favor. This is not merely a tweaking of Augustine's basic model of justification; it is a wholesale restructuring of it. Contrast the view I am presenting here with that of McGrath: "The most accurate description of the doctrines of justification associated with the Reformed and Lutheran churches from 1530 onwards is that they represent a radically new interpretation of the Pauline concept of 'imputed righteousness' set within an Augustinian soteriological framework."<sup>53</sup> Not only does this characterization set the emergence of this viewpoint far too early (as I argued in the Introduction to this work), but more significantly it underestimates the extent to which Protestant theology altered that "Augustinian soteriological framework." A still more accurate description of this process might be that the Protestants took one of Augustine's fundamental insights, the absolute dependency of fallen humanity on grace, and set it within a radically new soteriological framework. Seizing the initiative afforded by the fact that Augustine's theology of grace had often been "entertained," in Gibbon's memorable phrase, "with public praise, and secret reluctance," the reformers pilloried their opponents as having departed from the great saint's teaching, even as they themselves worked to rewrite it.

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<sup>53</sup> *Iustitia Dei*, 209.

But this process of rewriting Augustine did not happen overnight, nor was it always performed with conscious intent. Indeed, there is overwhelming evidence that many of the first- and second-generation reformers initially thought of themselves as recovering an earlier patristic consensus—a consensus with deep roots in the exegesis of Origen and Augustine, in particular. In the following chapter I will examine the ways in which these figures struggled to work within the traditional Augustinian framework in their exegesis of Romans, a position that both Melancthon and Calvin finally had to admit was untenable. In this section, however, I aim to show that while Luther’s early exegesis of Romans does not give evidence of any radical “breakthrough” in his understanding of Paul or the *iustitia Dei*, it does give some of the first perceptible hints of dissatisfaction with Augustine’s model of justification, a critique which would gain a much sharper edge in the following generations. Contra McGrath (and others), the reformers did not simply plug their new notion of imputed righteousness into the Augustinian system; rather, a set of existential and religious concerns convinced them that the system itself required modification, but only as these modifications unfolded, and one change led to another, did the extent of the restructuring become apparent to its authors.

The fundamentally existential problem which motivated this revision of Augustine we have already seen displayed in Luther’s exegesis of Romans, the problem of the believer’s assurance of salvation. Luther’s solution to this problem begins with the standard Augustinian distinction between works preceding

justification and those which follow therefrom. As I showed in the last chapter, a significant current in the medieval exegetical tradition deployed this distinction as a way of explaining how justification is both the *terminus a quo*, the point from which grace begins, and the *terminus ad quem*, toward which it is directed. The Christian life begins with the infusion of grace (*iustitia Christi*) in baptism, initiating a lifelong process of transformation which ultimately issues in the *viator*'s eschatological vindication before the judgment seat of God (*iustitia Dei*). In this scheme, the initial infusion of justifying grace is the critical turning point: any ostensive good works performed prior to this point contribute nothing to God's decision in granting the gift of grace. After grace has been given, however, these good works become the means by which grace transforms the sinner into a being perfectly righteous and capable of passing muster before the bar of God's justice.

Luther's problem with this scheme in 1515 is a distinctively monastic one: grace is hard to come by and easily lost. Glossing another classic Augustinian maxim, Luther notes, "we all pray: 'Give what Thou commandest,' and yet we do not receive this power. We all believe and speak, we confess and act, and yet we are not all justified."<sup>54</sup> Here, in a nutshell, is Luther's gripe against Augustine and the whole tradition that has flowed from his most basic insights concerning the inner workings of grace: "we pray . . . and yet we do not receive." However Luther may

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<sup>54</sup> *Omnes oramus: da, quod Iubes, et tamen non accipimus. Omnes credimus et loquimur, confitemur et operamur, Et tamen non omnes Iustificamur.* WA 56:257.16-18; LW 25:244. The phrase, "give what you command [and command what you will]," of course, originally comes from Augustine's *Confessions* (e.g., 10.29.2), and may have been one of the early sparks of the controversy with Pelagius. Luther is most likely quoting from *Spir. et litt.* 13.22, however.

have exaggerated in later accounts his efforts to impress God by means of his “monkery,” it is impossible to miss here the traces of a latent frustration at his inability to make progress in the spiritual life.

Moreover, even when such progress is won, it is often ephemeral or even self-defeating, due to the weakness of the flesh and the wiles of the Devil. Some inexperienced (*rudiores*) souls are simply ignorant of their own miserable state. These Satan tricks into thinking that “they are doing enough and that they must therefore be regarded as righteous before God,” when in reality they are acting merely out of servile fear. The only remedy for this tedium is “earnest prayer, earnest study, earnest work and reproof, until this old habit is eradicated and a newness of will comes into being. For grace is not given without this self-cultivation (*agricultura suiipsius*).”<sup>55</sup> Others, however, are more discerning (*subtiliores*), and these the Devil misleads through subtler means, allowing them to perform good works “with joy and happiness,” and so inflating them with pride, which then subverts the benefits they might have received from these genuinely good deeds.

These two classes of unhappy fools, the complacent and the prideful, are variations on a common theme: both think they have attained *iustitia* before God

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<sup>55</sup> WA 56:257.18-33; LW 25:244. Luther is presumably alluding to the gift of further growth in grace, not the initial gift of grace in baptism.

(*coram Deo*). But this can never be.<sup>56</sup> Why? Luther's rejection of any form of Christian perfection is a curious mix of introspection and metaphysical syllogism:

If we examine ourselves carefully . . . we shall always find in ourselves at least vestiges of the flesh by which we are afflicted with self-interest, obstinate over against the good, and prone to do evil. For if there were not this kind of remnant of sin in us and if we were seeking only God, surely this mortal man would quickly be dissolved, and our soul would fly to God (*certe mox dissolueretur homo et euolaret anima ad Deum*). But the fact that the soul does not take to flight is a sure sign that it still clings to the filth of the flesh until it may be freed by the grace of God, and this is to be awaited in death. Meanwhile, we always have to groan with the apostle: "Who will deliver me from the death of this body [sic]?"<sup>57</sup>

This is a curious bit of reasoning. Luther seems to presume that sin is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for embodied mortal existence, such that the entire purification of the soul would immediately result in the dissolution of the *homo* and the return of the *anima* to its source in God.<sup>58</sup> The fact that this has not happened is all the proof we need that sin still remains in us. As long as we are alive, we are *semper peccatores*. The practical conclusion Luther draws from this is that

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<sup>56</sup> Later in life Luther noted his earlier unwillingness, when a "monk," to allow that anyone might attain genuine holiness in the present life: "I and others, for example, were so deeply steeped in our monkery and unbelief that I was terrified by the thought that a man should consider himself holy on earth or let others call him holy. For our thoughts floated only up there among the deceased saints and blessed ones in heaven, even though in Scripture the word 'holy' is always applied to those living here on earth." In *Reihenpredigten über Johannes 14-15* (1533), WA 45:617; LW 24:170.

<sup>57</sup> WA 56:258.8-16; LW 25:245.

<sup>58</sup> It is curious that Luther feels no need to justify these premises any further, since they seem to imply the heterodox conclusion that human mortality is a result of the Fall. Also noteworthy is Luther's mis-quotation of Rom 7:24: *quis me liberabit de morte corporis huius* for the Vulgate's *quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius*. This idiosyncratic allusion was something of a habit for Luther (cf. WA 1:485.26; 2:338.42, 412.48, 645.2; 39:491a.20; 55.2:782.108, 882.63), though just as often he quoted it correctly (e.g., WA 1:114.24; 8:123.28). Interestingly, another late medieval author with whom Luther was familiar misquotes this text in similar fashion: Wyclif quotes (incorrectly) from Augustine's citation of this text (*De sermone Domini in monte* 2.11.38) in *Opus evangelicum* 2.17.

we must always pray and work so that grace and the Spirit may increase but the body of sin decrease and be destroyed and our old nature become weak. For *God has not yet justified us (Non enim Iustificavit nos)*, that is, He has not made us perfectly righteous or declared our righteousness perfect, but He has made a beginning in order that He might make us perfect.<sup>59</sup>

In one sense, this is a very Augustinian way of understanding things, with its emphasis on the gradual perfection of the sinner through grace. Yet moving justification so far into the future, Luther sets the stage for a complete inversion of Augustine's famous dictum, "Works follow from justification; they do not precede that one may be justified."<sup>60</sup> To be sure, Luther does not contradict Augustine explicitly, and at times his formulations seem to have a strong Augustinian ring.<sup>61</sup> Yet in his insistence that there is *never* a time, prior to death, when such righteousness has been accomplished, Luther both elides Augustine's language of justification as the initial *terminus a quo* and shifts all the emphasis to the arduous labor of life-long struggle with sin as a preparation for a justification which is ultimately eschatological:

For this reason the whole life of the new people, the faithful people, the spiritual people, is nothing else but prayer, seeking, and begging by the sighing of the heart, the voice of their works, and the labor of their bodies, always seeking and striving to be made righteous, even to the hour of death, never standing still, *never possessing (nunquam apprehendisse)*, never in any work putting an end to the achievement of righteousness, but *always awaiting it as something which still dwells beyond them*, and always as people who still live and exist in their sins.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ideo semper orandum et operandum, Vt crescat gratia et spiritus, decrescat autem ac destruat corpus peccati et deficiat vetustas. Non enim Iustificavit nos i. e. perfecit et absoluit Iustos ac Iustitiam, Sed incepit, vt perficiat.* WA 56:258.16-20; LW 25:245; emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup> *F. et op.* 14.21; PL 40:211.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., WA 56:255.15-19; LW 25:242.

<sup>62</sup> WA 56: 264.16-21; LW 25:251-52; emphasis mine.

So absolute is Luther's rejection of the idea that the Christian can ever possess (*apprehendere*) the *iustitia Dei* in this life that any such prayer is in essence a request for an early death!<sup>63</sup>

This "always seeking and . . . never possessing" is not exactly a recipe designed to give the conscience peace. Indeed, there is an ascetic rigorism here that Luther would dismiss as misguided "monkery" later in his career. But Luther finds echoes of this stretching out for a salvation that always eludes one's reach in a whole host of biblical texts, and by reading them allegorically and intertextually, he is able to arrive at a sort of resolution through paradox:

"I called Him, but He gave no answer" (Song of Sol. 5:6), that is, "I never thought that I had apprehended, but I am always seeking." Hence his voice is finally called the "voice of the turtledove" (Song of Sol. 2:12), because he is always groaning and crying. And "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). Ps. 34:9: "Those who fear the Lord have no want." . . .

For he who thus seeks in heart and work, by the very fact that he seeks to be justified and does not think that he is righteous, is doubtless already righteous before God (*iam Iustus est apud Deum*). . . .

Therefore the fact that we are sinners does not harm us as long as we strive with all our strength to be made righteous. . . .

For it is sufficient that our sin displeases us, even though we do not get entirely rid of it. For Christ carries all sins, if only they are displeasing to us, and thus they are no longer ours but His, and His righteousness in turn is ours.<sup>64</sup>

This last extract comes from the very last line of Luther's *scholia* on Romans 3, and it receives no further development in this context.<sup>65</sup> Even so, this is a

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<sup>63</sup> "When we pray, therefore, that our righteousness be made perfect in us and that our sin be taken away, we are praying at the same time to finish this life." WA 56:260.24-25; LW 25:247.

<sup>64</sup> WA 56:264.37-265.5, 18-20, 266.17-18, 267.5-7; LW 25:252-54.



remarkable line of argument, in which Luther points to a theme which will become a dominant feature of later confessional Protestant soteriology, the *commercium admirabile*, or “happy exchange,” in which the believer’s sin is exchanged for the righteousness of Christ. Yet Luther’s use of this language in this context bears scant resemblance to later confessional formulations. In fact, the concept itself has a long and distinguished pedigree in Christological formulations, and it is known to have been in currency even in soteriological contexts as late as the second half of the fifteenth century. For one thing, Luther’s exegesis here does not tie the exchange to the notion of *sola fide*, as later Protestant thinkers would explicitly do. More importantly, however, the exchange does not serve the same function it does in later Protestant thought, that of securing the believer’s assurance of salvation *now*. In the 1520 treatise, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, for example, Luther takes this notion of the *commercium admirabile* and locates it within the metaphor of a marriage union, the indissolubility of which serves as the basis for an unshakeable confidence in one’s *iustitia* before God.<sup>66</sup> In the lectures on Romans, however, the exchange

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<sup>65</sup> Nor is this line of reasoning present in the extant *Nachschriften*, which ignore Luther’s critique of perfectionism entirely. WA 57:157-62.

<sup>66</sup> Here the notion of exchange is present, but it is utterly transformed by Luther’s tone of confidence and his assertion that it serves as the basis for a victory of sin enjoyed in the present, not merely anticipated in the future: “Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, *of which she may boast as of her own* and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, ‘If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his,’ as the bride in the Song of Solomon [2:16] says, ‘My beloved is mine and I am his.’” *De libertate Christiana* WA 7:55.24-34; LW 31:352. It is striking to note the shift in Luther’s use of erotic language from the Song of Songs from the Romans lectures to the *De libertate Christiana*: in the former text, “I called

stands in paradoxical relationship to the believer's own efforts: "by the very fact that [one] seeks to be justified and does not think that [one] is righteous," one is "doubtless already righteous before God." But this cannot serve as the basis of confidence or assurance—quite the contrary. Luther is at pains, rather, to emphasize that such confidence is one of the traps laid for us "with marvelous cleverness" by that *mille artifex*, the Devil.<sup>67</sup>

### 4.3 Conclusion

When viewed in the light of his subsequent break with Rome over the matter of Christian repentance, Luther's early exegesis of Romans in 1515 is difficult fully to explain if one is looking for evidence of some sudden theological breakthrough or conversion experience. Luther does not discover some hidden Pauline insight for which he later finds confirmation in Augustine; rather, he begins reading Paul through the lens of Augustine, but finds the results strangely unsatisfying in some ways. Nor is there any indication that Luther regards his reading of Romans as uniquely liberating and life-giving, the "open door" to paradise. On the contrary, the unsettling knowledge that God has only begun to heal our infirmities, and that the long and arduous path to perfect righteousness is beset on all sides by the weakness of the flesh and wiles of the Devil means that the Christian life is one of perpetual groans and sighs—and above all, of unceasing labor.

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Him, but He gave no answer" encapsulates the longing of the Christian for a consummation that is entirely in the future; in the latter, that union is enjoyed now: "My beloved is mine and I am his."

<sup>67</sup> WA 56:266.19, ff.; LW 25:254.

All this is very much in keeping with the rigorous piety of the late medieval mendicant orders, but Luther is not content to stop there. There is a kind of reassurance that is offered to believing souls, but only after all the dangers of complacency and false presumption have been pointed out: in the act of stretching out for the *iustitia Dei*—a righteousness we do not now possess—somehow God treats us as though we in fact do possess it. “He who thus seeks in heart and work, by the very fact that he seeks to be justified and does not think that he is righteous, is doubtless already righteous before God.” But this is a precarious solution. Offered as a purely descriptive statement, it is in keeping with the spirit of the late medieval axiom that “to those who do what is in them, God does not deny grace” (*facientibus quod in se est, Deus non gratiam denegat*). But offered as an answer to the existential problem of assurance, it fails utterly, locking the believer in a hopeless dilemma: if one believes that one is righteous before God, one is not; conversely, if one believes that one is sinful and is dissatisfied with one’s sin, God regards one as righteous. But there is no mechanism in place by which the penitent believer may appropriate or benefit from this judgment *in foro coeli* prior to death: as soon as the penitent Christian realizes that God regards her a righteous, that righteousness is lost, and she is back to square one.

Oppressed by his own conscience and unable to find comfort from the practices of the institutional church, it is no surprise that Luther turned his attention to rethinking the basic terms of Christian salvation. In 1517, Luther came into conflict with the Roman curia over the issue of indulgences, a controversy leading

perform to a critique of the sacrament of penance. In defending his views, he was then forced the following year in his debate with John Eck to repudiate the sacerdotal jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff. This is the basic plot-line of Luther's conflict with Rome, but it is a plot-line with only loose connections to Luther's work as a biblical exegete. If what I have argued in this chapter is correct, then the roots of Luther's break with the Catholic Church cannot be sought in any supposed "Tower experience" or "rediscovery" of Pauline theology. Well before he began his lectures on Romans, Luther already regarded Christian repentance primarily as an inward phenomenon, and in his Pauline exegesis we clearly see him casting about for some reason to hope that the forgiveness sought had been granted.

Why Luther chose to reject the orthopraxy of salvation which the medieval church had constructed around this basic Augustinian framework is a question beyond the scope of this work, but it is not a question that can be answered on the basis of Luther's Pauline exegesis alone. There is simply no indication at this stage that Luther had discovered a revolutionary new perspective on Paul that would answer his implicit critique of Augustine. The new Pauline theology, on the contrary, would only be developed after the break with Rome had been made all but irreparable—and not, primarily, by Luther. But Luther's early lectures on Romans did ensure one thing: those evangelicals and Protestants who rallied to his side in rejecting the Catholic church's sacramental regulation of justification would be forced to confront a problem that ran deeper than Luther's protest against the indulgence trade: they would be forced to confront Augustine himself.

## **CHAPTER 5: After Luther: The Confessional Model Takes Form**

In Chapter 4 I argued that Luther's exegesis of Romans posed a serious challenge to the traditional Augustinian reading of Paul, a challenge it did not satisfactorily resolve: "we all pray: Give what Thou commandest, and yet we do not receive this power. We all believe and speak, we confess and act, and yet we are not all justified."<sup>1</sup> In 1515-16, Luther regarded this dilemma as placing the believer beyond any certainty of salvation, "never possessing . . . but always awaiting" a righteousness which is always in the future.<sup>2</sup> Yet as a solution to this difficulty, he recurs to the traditional monastic notion of humility as offering a point of access to the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness which, paradoxically, one can only possess by believing that one does not possess it. In the years that followed, however, Luther came to precisely the opposite conviction: namely, that faith alone could grant this right standing before God *now*: we believe and speak, *and thereby* we are justified.

There is no hint of this revolutionary development in Luther's 1515 lectures on Romans; rather, it emerged over the course of several years during Luther's

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<sup>1</sup> WA 56:257.16-18; LW 25:244.

<sup>2</sup> WA 56: 264.16-21; LW 25:251-52.

controversy with the Roman curia and its defenders, during his continued labors as professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, and in his new role as both leader and lightning rod for the emerging evangelical protest movement.<sup>3</sup> The centrality of Luther's contribution to this development is beyond question; ironically, however, Luther himself is not a major figure (at least not directly) in the development of Romans exegesis in the years following the break with Rome. In Chapter 2 I conducted a fairly exhaustive survey of early evangelical and Protestant commentary on Romans from 1515 to 1544, and it is telling that Luther never returned to the text later in life to give a systematic exposition in lecture or commentary form. This task was left to others—most notably, to his junior colleague on the faculty at the University of Wittenberg, Philipp Melancthon.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The literature on the development of Luther's *Rechtfertigungslehre* during this period is far too vast for even a cursory summary here, and in any case this is unnecessary, since my argument in this chapter concerns developments in other Protestant commentators. The following works, however, survey the scholarship which deals with Luther's own development: E. Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953).

<sup>4</sup> Luther and Melancthon developed different emphases in their teaching and academic output corresponding to their different appointments as faculty at the university. Melancthon had been appointed as a professor of Greek in 1518, and though initially he seems to have conceived this role rather more narrowly than others, Luther lobbied hard for his junior colleague to take focus his teaching duties on the New Testament (cf. WABr 3:258.6-30). Luther, for all his professed admiration for the Pauline writings and the Gospels, spent far more time lecturing and commenting on the Old Testament (cf., Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969]). There are exceptions to this generalization, of course: Paul's letter to the Galatians held a special fascination for Luther (according to Veit Dietrich, he regarded himself as "betrothed" to this epistle; WA Tr 1:69.18-19), and after Romans and Colossians, the biblical text on which Melancthon published most was Proverbs (this according to the survey by Wengert, "Biblical Commentaries," 121). So also as a preacher, Luther's output on Romans pales by comparison to other books even within the New Testament. Surveying Luther's career as a preacher, Fred Meuser points out that Luther preached over 1,000 sermons on the synoptic gospels and several hundred on the Gospel of John, while only taking Romans as his text about thirty times. "Luther as a Preacher of the Word of God," *The Cambridge Companion to Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim, 136-48 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138.

In this chapter I survey early evangelical commentary on Romans with an eye to tracing the emergence of a key concept in the Protestant *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*: the development of a purely forensic conception of justification as an external declaration of God's acceptance distinct both from the internal renewal (*renovatio, regeneratio*) effected by grace and from the good works (*bona opera*) which flow therefrom. In the first section, I examine the work of three evangelical commentators on Romans: Melanchthon, Oecolampadius, and Bugenhagen, and I conclude that while all three agree in distinguishing justification from good works, they approach this text with different agendas and with different emphases. In the second section, I examine in detail the decisive conceptual development in Melanchthon's 1532 *Commentarii*, where justification is clearly and unambiguously distinguished not only from good works, but also from regeneration. In 1532 Melanchthon for the first time clearly acknowledges his departure from Augustine on this issue, though I point to evidence that Melanchthon had been less than forthright up to this point in claiming Augustine as a forerunner for his *Rechtfertigungslehre*. In the final sections I examine the exegesis of two writers in the emerging Reformed tradition who differ in varying degrees from Melanchthon's new understanding of forensic justification: Bucer and Calvin. Bucer, I argue, adopts much of Melanchthon's rhetoric, while remaining for the most part within a traditional Augustinian framework of justification as both forgiveness of sins and interior renewal. Calvin, however, is much more difficult to pin down. Although subscribing clearly in the first edition of his *Institutio* (1536) to a Melanchthonian-

style understanding of justification, Calvin makes no clear distinction between justification and regeneration in the 1540 edition of his commentary on Romans, nor does he betray any awareness of his divergence from Augustine. In later editions, however, Calvin would work both to ground the doctrine he had set out in systematic and confessional contexts more securely in the text and also to distance himself from earlier patristic formulations.

## **5.1 Trajectories in Early Evangelical Exegesis**

### **5.1.1 Consolation for Terrified Consciences: Melancthon's Early Romans Exegesis**

Following Luther's break with Rome, he and his followers pursued a ground-up reconstruction of Pauline theology as an answer to this basic problem, and this agenda is clearly visible in Melancthon's 1522 *Annotationes*. In Melancthon's exposition, the second half of Romans 3 stands at the heart of Paul's argument in the letter and provides the Apostle's most fundamental definition of Christian righteousness: "Righteousness before God is to believe that righteousness and forgiveness of sins are given to us on account of Christ, without any righteousness by our own merits." This righteousness God "reputes" (*reputat*) to us apart from our



own virtues or works.<sup>5</sup> It is this idea that Melanchthon regards as the major proposition and the primary thrust of the entire epistle.<sup>6</sup>

The 1522 *Annotationes* were never intended by Melanchthon for publication. They give us the bare lineaments of his exegetical approach to Romans, an approach still in the earliest stages of development. Much in this manuscript is simply asserted, rather than argued, and many of his core theological commitments lie buried beneath the surface. But in his exposition of the *status epistolae* in Romans 3, a clear polemical target comes into view, as well as a driving existential concern, in Melanchthon's reading of the phrase *sine lege revelata sit iusticia Dei*.<sup>7</sup> The polemical target is the *scholasticos*, who blur the distinction between law and Gospel, thus making Christ into another Moses. For Melanchthon, however, Paul's rhetoric is clearly intended to distinguish explicitly between law and gospel.<sup>8</sup> And

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<sup>5</sup> *Iusticia coram Deo est, credere quod propter Christum donetur nobis sine nostris meritis iusticia, et remissio peccatorum. Atque haec definitio est iustitiae Christianae. Sic enim docendi causa vocabimur, cum Paulus covet iusticiam Dei, scilicet, qua nos coram Deo iusti sumus, seu qua nos Deus reputat iustus. Annotationes* (1522); CR 15:451.

<sup>6</sup> *Nunc demum pervenit ad principalem propositionem, quae est huius totius Epistolae status. Ut autem architectus totam aedificii formam in animo inclusam habet, et videt quomodo omnes inter se partes consentient.* CR 15:450; cf., the similar statement in the *Commentarii* (1532); MSA 5:98.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis original; CR 15:451.

<sup>8</sup> *Memini scholasticos anxie quaerere, quas leges praeter decalogum antea revelatum, Christus tulerit. Atqui nulla nova lex quaerenda est. Hic manifeste Paulus separate ab Evangelio legem, ac docet Christum adferre iusticiam gratis sine nostris meritis, Christum non esse legislatorem, sed redemptorem. Lex per Moysen data est, per Christum donator remissio peccatorum et Spiritus sanctus.* CR 15:453. Luther himself had earlier given Psalm 84 (Vg.) a Christological gloss, following Nicholas of Lyra's suggestion that Christ was the *legis dator* in v. 8 (WA 3:650.14). Beginning with his commentary on Galatians in 1531, however, Luther consistently charges his scholastic opponents with making Christ into a second Moses; cf., WA 40.1:90b.23, 232b.29, 533b.21.

this distinction addresses the very heart of Luther’s critique of Augustine: “Of what value are the consolations proposed in this passage for terrified consciences, no human voice is sufficient to explain. For even if we are lacking works, nevertheless we should believe that on account of Christ we are freely received into grace by the Father.”<sup>9</sup> And it remains the case that we are righteous before God, even if sin remains in our fleshly bodies (*tametsi peccatum adhuc in carne haereat*).<sup>10</sup>

Melanchthon extols the comfort this brings to “terrified consciences” (*territis conscientiiis*), but numerous questions remain unanswered, chief among them way in which this new law-gospel distinction bears on the question of the believer’s transformation by grace. This transformation was a constitutive element of the older, Augustinian model of justification, and by defining Christian righteousness as “reception into grace” (*credamus nos propter Christum a patre in gratiam recipi gratis*), it would seem that Melanchthon leaves the door open for a sanative aspect to his notion of justification. Already in 1522, however, Melanchthon is using the language of justification as declaration (*reputare*), but the relationship between this imputation of righteousness and the actual righteousness brought about by God’s transforming grace is not addressed. Luther and Melanchthon did not wish to deny

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<sup>9</sup> *Quantae autem consolationes in hoc loco territae conscientiiis propositae sint, nulla vox humana pro dignitate explicare potest. Etiam si desint opera, tamen credamus nos propter Christum a patre in gratiam recipi gratis.* CR 15:452. Cf. Melanchthon’s summary in the *Argumentum: Cum verbo arguuntur peccata, et perterrefiunt corda nostra, si in his terroribus crediderimus nobis ignosci peccata, et in gratiam patris nos recipi propter Christum, iuxta Evangelium. Ea fides erigit et consolatur perterrefactas mentes. Ea fides est vere iusticia oram Deo.* CR 15:444.

<sup>10</sup> *At qui in Christum credit, iam est iustus coram Deo, habet ergo legis finem, tametsi peccatum adhuc in carne haereat. Et tamen idem vere iam agnoscit Deum, vere sentit Deum nobis adesse, servare ac defendere credentes.* CR 15: 452.

the reality of this transforming grace; rather, they aimed to distinguish it from God's pronouncement of righteousness and the remission of sins as a way of preventing the slow and uncertain progress of the former to undermine confidence in the reality of the latter. Like Luther, Melancthon is concerned that even though we pray, "Give what you command," we "do not receive this power"—or at least, it is apparent that "sin remains in the flesh" (*peccatum adhuc in carne haereat*). The only way that consciences terrified by this lack of power to fulfill the divine command can have peace is if God's remission of sin is granted independently of this slow process of transformation. This move, however, immediately raises the specter of antinomianism: if justification is God's free remission of sins despite the remainder of sin in the human subject, then how is this justification anything other than a licence for unbridled sin? In time, Protestant theologians would develop the distinction between *iustificatio* and *regeneratio* as a way of dealing with this issue, explaining that while God's declaration of righteousness was not logically or materially dependent on the interior renewal brought about by grace, both types of grace were granted simultaneously: justification may be by faith alone, but the grace that justifies is never alone. Until this distinction was made, however, many Protestant exegetes were hesitant to follow Melancthon's lead in defining justification in such a way that seemed to lead to such antinomian conclusions.

### **5.1.2 The "Origenist" Option: Johannes Oecolampadius (1525)**

The earliest extant commentary from the Reformed tradition on Romans, written by Johannes Oecolampadius in 1525, illustrates that while many of the early reformers

drew on a common rhetoric of dissent in their critique of Catholic theology, their exegesis of the text was often motivated by significantly different aims.<sup>11</sup>

Oecolampadius takes much of his language directly from the Wittenberg school, describing, for example, the “righteousness of God” (*iustitia Dei*) as “that by which God reputes (*reputat*) us righteousness.”<sup>12</sup> And glossing the phrase, “righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (*Iustitia vero dei, per fidem Iesu*), Oecolampadius offers the very “Protestant” sounding caveat that this *iustitia Dei* does not come “through our works, because Christ is our righteousness.”<sup>13</sup>

This impression quickly dissipates, however, when we come to Oecolampadius’ exegesis of v. 25 and the phrase, “past sins” (*praeteritorum peccatorum*). Modern translations of the Greek text render the verse’s final prepositional phrase διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων as a pluperfect, thus: “[God] did this to show his righteousness, *because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed*” (NRSV). The Latin Vulgate, however, renders the phrase *propter remissionem praecedentium delictorum*, and most medieval commentators simply took this as a reaffirmation of Augustine’s distinction between *opera praecedentes* and *opera sequentes*—in other

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<sup>11</sup> Oecolampadius is one of the most under-studied of the first-generation Swiss reformers. Although we are not yet in possession of a study focused on his *Rechtfertigungslehre*, assessments in passing have either depicted him as swallowing Luther whole or as a “moralist” in the mold of Erasmus. For the former approach, see Ernst Staehelin, *Das theologische Lebenswerk Johannes Oekolampads* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1939); for the latter, see McGrath, “Humanist Elements in the Early Reformed Doctrine of Justification,” *ARG* 73 (1982): 5-20.

<sup>12</sup> *Romans* (1525), 34<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Romans* (1525), 35<sup>v</sup>.

words, God's *iustitia* is demonstrated by his willingness to grant forgiveness to sins committed prior to the initiation of justification in baptism (or the resumption of the process through the sacrament of penance). This tradition, in other words, holds out little or no comfort to those who persist in sin after the gift of grace is given, and Oecolampadius is no exception: the text "urges us to give up our sins, and not return to our vomit," cross-referencing 1 Pet 4:3 to emphasize the point.<sup>14</sup> Even more revealing, however, is his concluding summary of the passage:

We sum up and conclude, that by faith a man is justified apart from works of the law, of whatever kind of precepts there are in the law. Origen explains this text clearly, saying, "the justification of faith alone suffices, so that the one who only believes is justified, even if he has not accomplished a single work."<sup>15</sup>

Oecolampadius goes on to cite Origen's two biblical *exempla* of persons saved *sola fide* apart from works: the thief on the cross and the woman in Lk 7:36-50. He then concludes with a nearly verbatim restatement of Origen's crucial qualification to this doctrine:

But perhaps hearing this, one might grow negligent of doing good? To this person it is said, that if anyone acts unjustly after justification, without a doubt he has spurned the grace of justification. Obviously pardon is not given so that one may continue to sin, *for the remission is not given for future, but only past crimes.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Innuat desistendum a peccatis, & non redeundum ad vomitum: sicut & 1. Petri 4. Sat enim est vobis, quod ante acto tempore, &c.. Romans (1525), 36<sup>v</sup>. 1 Pet 4:3 reads: "You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry."*

<sup>15</sup> *Colligimus & concludimus, fide iustificari hominem absque operibus legis, qualiacunque praecepta sunt in lege. Origenes hunc locum aperte declarat, dicens, sufficere solius fidei iustificationem, ita ut credens quis tantummodo, iustificetur, etiam si nihil ab eo operis fuerit expletum. Romans (1525), 36<sup>f</sup>. Cf., Origen, Romans, 3.9.2; Hammond Bammel 1.248; FotC 103:226.*

<sup>16</sup> *Sed fortasse haec audiens, bene operandi negligentiam arripit? Huic dicitur, quod si quis post iustificationem iniuste agit, sine dubio iustificationis gratiam spernit. Quippe non ideo datur venia, ut rursus liceat peccare. Indulgentia enim nobis non futurorum, sed praeteritorum criminum*

In Chapter 3, I took a dim view of attempts to press Origen into service either as a proto-Protestant or as an early exemplar of post-Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy. This judgment holds true in comparing Origen to the mature *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* later in the century, but it is worth noting that at least one early evangelical exegete found Origen a helpful guide in resolving some of the key difficulties raised by this text, a judgment which set Oecolampadius apart from many of his fellow reformers.<sup>17</sup> Melancthon, for example, would write not long afterward that “Origen does not understand fully what Paul calls faith. Therefore he errs since he attributed justification to moral works and not to faith.”<sup>18</sup>

Oecolampadius’ exegesis of this passage suggests that what is at stake is more than simply a disagreement over the value of Origen as an exegete:

Oecolampadius is operating with a different set of priorities in interpreting the text

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*promittitur. Romans* (1525), 37<sup>v</sup>; emphasis mine. Cf., Origen, *Romans*, 3.9.2; Hammond Bammel 1.249; FotC 103:228.

<sup>17</sup> Not all, however. Peter Martyr Vermigli also had a positive notion of Origen’s contribution: “in no way does [justification] depend on merits. Origen saw this when he expounded . . . the letter to the Romans. . . .” Vermigli cites extensively from Origen in support of his own exegetical conclusions in his *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos commentarii doctissimi*. . . . (1558); ET in *Predestination and Justification: Two Theological Loci*, The Peter Martyr Library 8, ed. and trans. Frank A. James III (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2003), 149. A wealth of recent scholarship has attempted to assess the reformers’ use of the church fathers, including Origen, but unfortunately most of this work overlooks these second-tier “reformers in the wings,” many of whom held Origen in higher esteem than did Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin.

<sup>18</sup> *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colossenses*. . . . (1528), 49<sup>r</sup>; cited in Timothy J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melancthon’s Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46. Luther’s negative assessment of Origen is well-known, and need not be rehearsed at length. Thomas Scheck’s study of the reception history of Origen’s *Romans* commentary provides a litany of some of Luther’s and Melancthon’s most negative assessments, but this work must be corrected by more balanced and contextual accounts; see, for example, Jon F. Dechow, “Origen’s Shadow over the Erasmus/Luther Debate,” *Origeniana sexta: Origène et la Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30 août–3 septembre, 1993*, eds. Giles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 739–757.

than his colleagues in Wittenberg. Whereas Luther and Melancthon were concerned with rereading Romans in order to correct what they perceived to be a fundamental flaw in the Augustinian reading of Paul, a flaw which left the believer without any real certainty of salvation, Oecolampadius draws on Origen—whose views on this matter are remarkably similar to those of Augustine—in order to insist that sin *must not* remain after justification: justification, after all, only wipes the slate clean for prior sins. Clearly this is not a reading of Paul which is designed to “give terrified consciences peace.”

### **5.1.3 Bugenhagen’s Assault on the Forgiveness of Future Sins (1525)**

Oecolampadius may have been in a minority among the reformers in his appreciation of Origen’s *Rechtfertigungslehre*, but he was not the only exegete to view justification primarily in terms of forgiveness for *past* sins only.<sup>19</sup> Johannes Bugenhagen’s commentary of that same year demonstrates that limiting the scope of justification to past sins could cut both ways in the polemic against Rome.

Commenting on the phrase, *praeteritorum peccatorum*, Bugenhagen points out that this text had hitherto been put to a range of illicit uses. Chief among these is the

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<sup>19</sup> Bugenhagen’s soteriology has been studied in rather more detail than that of Oecolampadius, though opinion remains divided on his adherence to Luther throughout the 1520’s. According to Hans Hermann Holfelder, Bugenhagen differed from Luther in viewing Christ’s work primarily as a moral exemplar and in defining justification solely in terms of forgiveness of sins. This view has recently been challenged by Ralf Kötter, who draws on a wider range of Bugenhagen’s writings to demonstrate a close fidelity to Luther’s teaching. Neither author engages at length with Bugenhagen’s commentary on Romans, however. Holfelder, *Tentatio et consolatio: Studien zu Bugenhagens Interpretatio in librum psalmodum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974); *Solus Christus: die Ausbildung von Bugenhagens Rechtfertigungslehre in der Paulusauslegung (1524/25) und ihre Bedeutung für die theologische Argumentation im Sendbrief “Von dem christlichen Glauben” (1526): eine Untersuchung zur Genese von Bugenhagens Theologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981); Kötter, *Johannes Bugenhagens Rechtfertigungslehre und der römische Katholizismus: Studien zum Sendbrief an die Hamburger (1525)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

claim that Christ's passion only provided expiation for sins committed prior to baptism, leaving any sins committed after baptism to be blotted out by means of good works.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand—and far more dangerous a notion, in Bugenhagen's mind—is the view that both past *and* future sins may be remitted by means of a papal indulgence. To counter this view, Bugenhagen argues forcefully that the remission of sins granted in justification only applies to sins committed in the past. To illustrate this point, Bugenhagen uses the *crassum exemplum* of money owed as a debt. If you owe me one hundred pieces of gold but are unable to pay, I may choose to forgive the debt. But clearly the cancellation of this debt applies only to the money you already owe me, not to any debts you may accumulate in the future. Bugenhagen agrees with Luther's rejection of Christian perfectionism, asserting that “we are never without sin,” and therefore we are always debtors to God. This is why Christians must always continue to pray, “Forgive us our debts.”<sup>21</sup> But it is the height of folly, in Bugenhagen's view, to use this distinction between sins forgiven outright through justification in baptism and sins continually forgiven through the prayer of faith as a basis for the trade in indulgences. Bugenhagen is never one to understate his case:

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<sup>20</sup> *Alii tantum, quae erant ante baptismum in nobis, expiavit sua passione. [unclear] uero post baptismum facta, nobis per nostra bona opera reliquit abstergenda.* Bugenhagen, *Romans* (1527), 36<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Luther explains this petition from the Lord's Prayer in terms of granting subjective assurance of God's forgiveness, not as the objective ground of forgiveness itself, in the *Larger Catechism* of 1529: “Here again there is great need to call upon God and pray: ‘Dear Father, forgive us our debts.’ Not that he does not forgive sins even apart from and before our praying; for before we prayed for it or even thought about it, he gave us the gospel, in which there is nothing but forgiveness. But the point here is for us to recognize and accept this forgiveness” (3.88). *BC*, 452.



But turn your attention to this most idiotic papistical stupidity, which first became common in our times (formerly they did not play the fool in this way): nowadays the papists promise indulgence for future sins, and they grant bulls and certificates which absolve from future sins! O most shameless men—you know not what you say! God alone forgives sins; therefore in order not to sin, do nothing to sin further! Is it really for this reason that forgiveness is given: “I desire to be free from sins, and yet remain in sin”? How stupidly one acts, who ardently desires to be freed from sin, and yet to remain in sin! Therefore one who receives this bull must indeed be charged with extreme insanity.<sup>22</sup>

Bugenhagen, like Oecolampadius, deploys the same rhetoric of dissent in attacking his Catholic opponents—terms like *sola fide*, and justification *sine operibus legis* constantly recur throughout his exegesis. Yet while he is unmatched among evangelical exegetes in his acerbic critique of Catholic sacramental practices, Bugenhagen is clearly operating from the same basic assumption as Oecolampadius and so many exegetes before them: justification provides forgiveness for *past* sins only. The implication seems to be that for Bugenhagen, justification must perpetually be renewed by fresh applications for forgiveness. Neither author pushes this assumption to its logical conclusion, but in construing justification primarily as a backward-looking remission of individual sins, rather than as God’s decisive acceptance of the person *in toto*, important questions are left unanswered. In particular, Oecolampadius’ and Bugenhagen’s treatment place the evangelical teaching in a rather ambiguous position with regard to medieval Augustinian, and

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<sup>22</sup> *Sed aduerte & hic stultiffimam stulticiam Papisticam, quae primum nostris temporibus inualuit, olim non ita ineptiebant, ut de futuris peccatis indulgentias promitterent, id quod hodie faciunt Papistae, dant Bullas & diplomata quibus a futuris absoluant peccatis. O hominess impudentiffimos, qui quid adfirmant nesciunt. Deus solus remittit peccata, ideo ut non pecces, non ut porro pecces. Quae enim haec esset remiffio? uolo liber esse a peccatis, & tamen manere in peccatis. Vt stulte feceritis, qui uehementer cupiat e carcere liberari, & tamen manere in carcere, sic is quoque extremae insaniae accusandus, qui in hoc bullas acceperit. Romans (1527), 36’.*

especially patristic, formulations. Oecolampadius, with his restatement of Origen's position, and Bugenhagen, with his virulent attack on the soteriological foundations of the indulgence trade, both give the impression that their understanding of justification is in keeping with earlier precedent, and that their main targets are contemporary Catholic aberrations. Melanchthon, as we shall see, had different ideas.

## **5.2 The Forensic Turn: Melanchthon and Augustine Part Company (1531-32)**

In the 1532 *Commentarii* on Romans, arguably the most influential of his many treatments of that letter, Melanchthon for the first time makes clear in public his dissatisfaction with Augustine's understanding of transformative justification. Prior to this point, evangelical exegetes had made no clear distinction between justification as forgiveness of sins and the transformation of the sinner brought about by grace, and it would still be possible to view Protestant engagement with Pauline theology as an attempt to recover an earlier, patristic reading of the Bible against the reigning Catholic orthodoxy of salvation. With the publication of his third commentary on Romans, however, Melanchthon gave his first public signal that what was needed was more than simply a repristinization of patristic exegesis, explicitly criticizing Augustine's theology as fundamentally inadequate for understanding Paul's meaning at its deepest level. This is a critical turn in the emergence of the confessional Protestant *Rechtfertigungslehre*, a doctrine which aims to return directly *ad fontem Pauli*.

Melanchthon's Pauline exegesis during this period is driven almost single-mindedly by his desire for *certitudo*, an immovable anchor for the troubled conscience. When and how he came to realize that his exegetical aims could not be accommodated within the traditional Augustinian framework is not entirely clear, in part because of Melanchthon's own deliberate strategy of invoking the sanction of antiquity in support of positions he knows to have only tenuous support in patristic sources. As I shall demonstrate below, Melanchthon has already come to realize the inadequacy of Augustine's position in the spring of 1531, even as he continues to refine his argumentation in the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession*, a text which represents his views as fully in keeping with those of the venerable Bishop of Hippo. This background is essential for understanding what seems to be the rather moderate language of Melanchthon's critique of Augustine in his Romans commentary of the following year. It is no accident, however, that Melanchthon's fully forensic understanding of justification emerges at precisely the same time he is finally willing to make public his dissatisfaction with Augustine.

### **5.2.1 An Apology for the *Apology* (1531): *Augustinus non satisfacti Pauli sententiae***

Prior to 1532, Melanchthon had been less than clear in distinguishing between the remission of sins in justification and the interior renewal, or regeneration, brought about by grace. In the Introduction to this work I noted the ambiguity on this question in Art. 4 of the *Confessio Augustana*, an ambiguity only heightened by Melanchthon's conflation of the terms *iustificatio* and *regeneratio* in the *Apologia*

for that text he wrote in the fall of 1530 and the spring of 1531. Consider, for example, this summary statement of his position in his lengthy defense of Art. 4:

Up to this point, in order to make the matter very clear, we have demonstrated fully enough both from the testimonies of Scripture and from arguments derived from the Scripture that by faith alone we obtain the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ and *by faith alone we are justified*, that is, out of unrighteous people *we are made righteous or are regenerated*.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, in this same context Melancthon cites approvingly from Augustine's remarks in the treatise *On the Letter and the Spirit*, from exactly the same context as gave the young Luther such unease, as I argued in the previous chapter:

“By the law we fear God; by faith we hope in God. But to those who fear punishment, grace is hidden; let the soul that labors under this fear . . . flee by faith to the mercy of God, in order that he may give what he commands” (*ut det, quod iubet*). Here [Augustine] teaches that our hearts are terrified by the law, but that they receive consolation by faith. And he teaches [us] to take hold of the mercy by faith before we attempt to keep the law.<sup>24</sup>

In the *Apologia*, Melancthon makes no clear distinction between justification and regeneration, and he claims Augustine as a supporter for the position formulated in the *Confessio Augustana* and elaborated in the *Apologia*.

Melancthon had begun work on the *Apologia* in July of 1530 based on a transcription of the *Confutatio* as it had been read aloud before the Emperor. He did not receive a copy of his opponents' text, however until October of that year, upon which he felt constrained to answer the “insidious and deceitful arguments”

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<sup>23</sup> *sola fide iustificemur, hoc est, ex iniustis iusti efficiamur, seu regeneremur. Ap. Conf. 4.117; BSLK 184.9-11; BC, 139. Nor is this an isolated ambiguity: throughout the Apologia Melancthon routinely uses terms such as iustificatio, regeneratio, and conversio interchangeably. See, for example, 4.12-13, 4.64-65, 12.58.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ap. Conf. 4.106; BSLK 182.29-38; BC, 138; cf., Spir. et litt. 29.51; CSEL 60:207.*

advanced against the article on justification in particular.<sup>25</sup> The authors of the *Confutatio*, led by Luther's old nemesis, Johannes Eck, had laid a neat trap for the evangelicals. Conceding the force of their anti-Pelagian arguments, the *Confutatio* charges the evangelicals with falling into another ancient heresy, that of Manichaeism, with their blanket rejection of any human merit, even merit acquired with the assistance of divine grace. "All Catholics," the *Confutatio* concludes, "admit that our works of themselves have no merit, but God's grace makes them worthy to earn eternal life."<sup>26</sup>

The *Confutatio* shifted the terms of the debate from a simple contrast between faith and good works to the more complex question of the relation between justification and God's transformative grace. All were now agreed that human works did not merit divine favor *simpliciter*, but the Catholic theologians commissioned by the Emperor instead drew their battle lines around the notion that good works could be accepted as meritorious by virtue of God's grace. This is an important development, as it made clear that the primary disagreement between the Catholics and the reformers was not over the necessity of grace for justification, but rather over the mode in which grace is given. By claiming that grace-empowered works were accepted by God as the basis for eternal life, the Catholic theologians signaled their adherence to Augustine's celebrated dictum, *cum Deus coronat merita*

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<sup>25</sup> BC, 108.

<sup>26</sup> *Responsio Pontifica seu Confutatio Augustanae Confessionis*, 1.4; CR 27:82-184; SCBC, 108-109.

*nostra, nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua.*<sup>27</sup> Melanchthon advanced a patristic authority of his own in Jerome's statement that "our righteousness does not consist of our own merits, but of God's mercy."<sup>28</sup> But Melanchthon is not willing to concede that Augustine is on his opponents' side, however. Rather, he attempts to reinterpret Augustine's famous dictum by redefining reward as a more attenuated form of merit:

What then about rewards? First, if we were to say that eternal life is called a reward, because it is owed to the justified on account of the promise, we would not be speaking unreasonably. For there is a correlation among the gifts with reference to one another, just as Augustine also says, "God crowns his own gifts in us." However, Scripture calls eternal life a reward, not because it is owed on account of works, but because it compensates for afflictions and works, even though it happens for completely different reason. Just as an inheritance does not come to a son of a family because he performs the duties of a son, nevertheless, it is a reward and compensation for the duties he performs. Therefore, it is enough that the word "reward" is connected to eternal life because eternal life compensates for works and affliction.<sup>29</sup>

If the logic of this argumentation seems strained, this may be some indication of the pressure Melanchthon is under to maintain continuity with Augustine's teaching. In the Preface to the *Apology*, Melanchthon explains that throughout the controversy he had "always made it a point to adhere as closely as possible to traditional doctrinal formulas in order to promote the attainment of concord."<sup>30</sup> And indeed, when one compares the concession of his opponents in the *Confutation* that "our works of themselves have no merit" with Melanchthon's concession in the *Apology* that

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<sup>27</sup> In *Ep.* 194.5; CSEL 57:190; *Gr. et lib. arb.* 6.15; PL 44:890-91.

<sup>28</sup> *Ap. Conf.* 4.316a; *BC*, 165. The quotation comes from Jerome's *Dialogus contra Pelagianos* 1.13; PL 23:527.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.362c; *BC* 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid. Praef.* 11-12; *BC*, 110.

eternal life “compensates for afflictions and works,” one may be inclined to think that the disagreement is merely verbal—an “inane *logomachia*”—or at least a matter of emphasis, rather than substance.

This rosier view of the matter appealed to a number of contemporary observers, including at least one theologian in Luther’s and Melanchthon’s inner circle. As Melanchthon was composing his *Apologia* in the fall of 1530 and the spring of 1531, he sent out drafts of his work as it progressed and solicited input from a number of his colleagues, including Johannes Brenz. Brenz wrote back sometime in the spring of 1531 advancing what appeared to Melanchthon and Luther as a rehash of Augustine’s view, namely that justification consisted not merely in the external pronouncement of God’s favor, but in the interior renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> In contrast with his argumentation in the *Apologia*, Melanchthon’s reply is striking for its candid assessment of Augustine’s position:

You still cling to the fancy of Augustine, who argued as he did in order to deny that the righteousness of reason (*rationis iusticiam*) is reckoned before God for righteousness; and he thought rightly. Henceforth it was imagined that we are reckoned righteous because of this fulfillment of the law, which the Holy Spirit effects in us. . . . This fancy locates righteousness in our fulfillment [of the law], in our cleanness or perfection, even if this renewal is supposed to follow from faith. But tear your eyes away from this renewal and from the law entirely, to the promise and to Christ, and consider that we are righteous and find peace of conscience because of Christ—this is our acceptance before God—and not because of that renewal. For this the renewal itself does not suffice. Therefore we are righteous by faith alone, not because it is the source, as you write, but because it apprehends Christ, on account of whom we are accepted. Whatever sort of renewal there may be (even though it ought necessarily to follow), it cannot give the conscience peace.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This letter, as far as I am aware, is no longer extant; cf., Wengert, “Melanchthon and Luther,” 68.

<sup>32</sup> *Tu adhuc haeres in Augustini imaginatione, qui eo pervenit, ut neget rationis iusticiam coram deo reputari pro iusticia; et recte sentit. Deinde imaginatur nos iustos reputari propter hanc impletione legis, quam efficit in nobis spiritus sanctus. Sic tu imaginaris fide iustificari homines, quia fide*

Here we see Melanchthon finally pushing his position to its logical conclusion, using the conscience of the individual Christian as the ultimate criterion in judging the adequacy of Augustine’s doctrine, which clearly falls short: “Augustine does not do justice to Paul’s meaning (*Augustinus non satisfacit Pauli sententiae*), even if he does do better than the scholastics.”<sup>33</sup> Yet perhaps because of the way in which Melanchthon had appealed to Augustine throughout the *Apologia*, he feels compelled to explain his “Augustinian rhetoric” further:

And therefore I invoke Augustine *as if he were entirely of the same mind (tanquam prorsus ὁμόμηρον)* because of the common opinion of him, even though he does not adequately explain the righteousness of faith. Believe me, my Brenz, the controversy about the righteousness of faith is great and obscure, yet you will still understand the matter rightly if you totally remove your eyes from the law and the fancy of Augustine concerning the fulfillment of the law and fix your soul entirely on the gracious promise. . . .<sup>34</sup>

This is a stunning admission. Melanchthon not only acknowledges that his position is fundamentally different from that of Augustine, but he also concedes that he has

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*accipimus spiritum sanctum, ut postea iusti esse possimus impletione legis, quam efficit spritus sanctus. Haec imagination collocata iustitiam in nostra impletione, in nostra mundicie seu perfectione, etsi fidem sequi debet haec renovatione. Sed tu reice oculos ab ista renovatione et a lege in totum ad promissionem et Christum, et sentias, quod propter Christum iusti, hoc est accepti coram deo, simus et pacem conscientiae inveniamus, et non propter illam renovationem. Nam haec ipsa novitas non sufficit. Ideo sola fide sumus iusti, non qui sit radix, ut tu scribas, sed quia apprehendit Christum, propter quem sumus accepti, qualisqualis sit illa novitas, etsi necessario sequi debet, sed non pacificat conscientiam. MBW 1151 (T5: 108.4-109.18).*

<sup>33</sup> *Augustinus non satisfacit Pauli sententiae, etsi propius accredit quam scholastici.* MBW 1151 (T5: 110.23-24).

<sup>34</sup> *Et ego cito Augustinum tanquam prorsus ὁμόμηρον propter publicam de eo persuasionem, cum tamen non satis explicit fidei iusticiam. Crede mihi, mi Brenti, magna et obscura controversia est de iusticia fidei, quam tamen ita recte intelliges, si in totum removeris oculos a lege et imaginatione Augustini de impletione legis et defixeris animum prorsus in gratuita promissione. . . .* MBW 1151 (T5: 110.24-29); emphasis mine. The term ὁμόμηρον is rather obscure, but it seems to have been used in Hellenistic Greek to invoke an authority supportive of one’s position; cf., e.g., Socr. Soz., *Hist. eccl.* 4.12.38. There is a variant reading of this term in one manuscript of the letter, reading ὁμόληρον instead of ὁμόμηρον (T5: 110, n. 1. 25). This latter term is even more obscure, though the prefix, ὁμό-, suggests that the meaning should not be dramatically different.



deliberately muddied the waters in debate with his Catholic opponents, invoking Augustine's authority "as if he were entirely of the same mind" when Melanchthon knows perfectly well that he is not. When exactly Melanchthon came to this opinion is not entirely clear. Given the admission in this letter of what can only be described as duplicity, however, we ought to regard with some caution his earlier appeals to Augustine's authority and focus instead on the question of when Melanchthon was prepared to make a public break with the Bishop of Hippo over the question of justification. That point, so far as I can tell, came in the course of his 1532 *Commentarii* on Romans, to which I now turn.

### **5.2.2 *Extra nos: Justification in the 1532 Commentarii***

In both the 1522 *Annotationes* and the 1532 *Commentarii*, Melanchthon is unmistakably clear that justification can never find its basis in human actions, whether ceremonial observances or moral deeds. In the latter work, however, Melanchthon goes beyond any of his earlier formulations in severing the link not only between justification and good deeds, but also between justification and the interior renewal brought about by grace. This move brought Melanchthon into direct conflict not only with his contemporary Catholic opponents, but also with Augustine himself.

In 1522, Melanchthon had explained that God's acceptance of sinners apart from works was one of the chief benefits of Paul's Gospel.<sup>35</sup> In the 1532

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<sup>35</sup> CR 15:452.

*Commentarii*, however, certainty of salvation takes center stage not simply as a valuable consolation, but as the very criterion for valid exegesis of Paul.<sup>36</sup> In his *Προλεγόμενα de iustificatione* in 1532, Melanchthon denies that he and his fellow evangelicals have been moved by any inane *logomachia* in their controversy over justification with the Catholics. On the contrary, the contested issues surrounding this matter are of the utmost significance:

Indeed, without this doctrine concerning faith, which Paul delivers and we defend, not only can nothing be held with certainty (*certi*) regarding the remission of sins and the consolation of consciences, but nothing can truly exist in the universal worship and invocation of God.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1532 *Commentarii*, much more than in his earlier exegesis, Melanchthon returns again and again to the notion of certainty (*certitudo*) in justifying his own exegesis and in attacking that of his Catholic opponents. In his comments on Romans 3:21, in particular, the term *certitudo* and its cognates (*certus*, *incertus*) recur continually throughout his elaboration of the text and his critique of rival views.<sup>38</sup> The basic point is this: our right standing before God can never be certain if it depends in any way on our action or on a quality which inheres in our person

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<sup>36</sup> Luther later commented that Paul had given four arguments for the doctrine of justification by faith in the epistle to the Romans, and that Melanchthon had given the fullest explication of one of these, the *argumentum de dubitatione*. WA Tr 1:160.9-14; cf., Wengert, “Melanchthon and Luther/Luther and Melanchthon,” in *Lutherjahrbuch* 66, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 70.

<sup>37</sup> *Non movemus inanem λογομαχίαν de iustificatione. . . . Rerum controversia est et quidem maximarum: De remissione peccatorum, de consolatione conscientiarum, de vero cultu, de vera invocatione Dei litigamus. Etenim sine hac doctrina de fide, quam tradit Paulus ac nos defendimus, non solum de remissione peccatorum et consolatione conscientiarum certi nihil teneri potest.* MSA 5:33.15-24.

<sup>38</sup> Melanchthon’s comments on this verse take up four full pages in the recent *Studienausgabe*, and in the course of those four pages the word *certitudine* and its cognates is used 26 times. MSA 5:98-102.

(*intra nos*). This is the problem with all the *scholastici*, who gloss this text as “faith formed by love,” or who argue that “we are justified by faith because of love.” Only a form of righteousness which is entirely outside of us (*extra nos*) can provide the immovable fulcrum on which a certain faith can depend.

It is in the *Prolegomenon* to the 1532 commentary that Melancthon lays down his clearest, and perhaps most famous, definition of justification as a declaration, analogous to a courtroom proceeding (thus, “forensic”), by which God declares the sinner to be righteous:

“To be justified” properly signifies to be reputed righteous (*iustum reputari*), that is, to be reputed accepted (*acceptum reputari*). Thus it should be understood relatively (*relative*), just as in a law court, according to Hebrew custom, “to be justified” is used for “to be pronounced righteous” (*iustum pronuntiarum*), as when someone says, “The Roman people have justified (that is, pronounced righteous, absolved, approved) Scipio, who was accused by the people’s tribunes.” Although it is necessary that new motions exist in those who have been reconciled, nevertheless “to be justified” does not in a strict sense signify to have new virtues. But it should be understood relatively concerning the will of God: to be approved or accepted by God (*approbari seu acceptari a Deo*).<sup>39</sup>

And again, in his comments beginning at 3:21, which he regards as the *Propositio principalis* of the entire letter:

“Righteous” is understood relatively for that which is accepted by God.  
“Righteousness” is understood by Paul in this argument not as our quality (although it is true that new qualities must be effected in us), but rather because of something else, outside of us (*extra nos*)—that is, on account of his mercy, we are righteous because of Christ (i.e., we are accepted).  
The “Righteousness” of God signifies the acceptance by which God accepts us.

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<sup>39</sup> *Iustificari proprie significat iustum reputari, h. e. acceptum reputari. Sic intelligatur relative, sicut in foro usurpatur Hebraica consuetudine iustificari pro eo, quod est iustum pronuntiarum, ut si quis dicat: Populus Romanus iustificavit Scipionem accusatum a tribune plebis, h. e. iustum pronuntiauit, absolvit, approbavit. Quamquam autem novos motus existere in his, qui reconciliantur, necesse est, tamen iustificari non significant proprie habere novas virtutes. Sed relative intelligatur de voluntate Dei pro eo, quod est approbari seu acceptari a Deo. MSA 5:39.7-16. The reference to Scipio comes from Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 4.18. Cf. Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 179-85.*

“To be justified” simply and properly means that one is accepted—that is, reckoned or pronounced righteous.<sup>40</sup>

These passages make up the clearest articulation of Melanchthon’s new grammar of justification, construed in purely forensic terms: *reputari*, *acceptari*, *pronuntiari*, and *extra nos*. While many of these terms had surfaced in Melanchthon’s earlier writing, they were often accompanied by other, more traditional terms, which indicated an interior, or transformative, aspect: *regeneratio*, *renovatio*, *conversio*. Here, in the 1532 *Commentarii*, however, Melanchthon decisively severs the connection, restricting the semantic range of the term *iustificatio* to a purely relational term modeled on a courtroom proceeding. This does not mean, of course, that Melanchthon denies the interior renewal brought about by grace, but rather he distinguishes it logically and verbally from the imputation of righteousness granted unconditionally in justification.

This increased definitional precision has important implications for the way in which Melanchthon reads other key terms in the text. This is especially clear in the comments on 3:25, a passage which he had passed over without remark in the 1522 *Annotationes*. I noted in the previous section that the two major evangelical commentaries of the 1520’s, by Oecolampadius and Bugenhagen, both read this text in keeping with the traditional Latin rendering of *remissionem praecedentium*

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<sup>40</sup> “*Iustus*” intelligatur relative pro eo, quod est acceptus Deo. “*Iustitia*” in hac disputatione Pauli non intelligatur de nostra qualitate (etsi verum est, quod novas quasdam qualitates in nobis effici oportet), sed tamen propter aliud extra nos, sc. per misericordiam propter Christum sumus iusti, h. e. accepti. “*Iustitia*” Dei significat acceptionem, qua Deus nos acceptat. “*Iustificari*” simpliciter et proprie significat iustum, i.e. acceptum, reputare seu pronuntiari. MSA 5:99.11-19.

*delictorum*. The implication of this reading is succinctly stated in Erasmus' paraphrase of the passage: "In this way [God] reveals his righteousness to all men, while through the Son he pardons the errors of their former life with the intent that they afterwards do not fall back again into sin."<sup>41</sup> This interpretation began to come under fire in the late 1520's, however. Zwingli was unconvinced in his lectures on Romans that this text could be read so as to limit the effects of justification only to prior sins, and Bullinger's notes on the first five chapters of Romans suggest that he, too, was coming to a different conclusion.<sup>42</sup>

Melanchthon begins his explanation of the text by reminding his readers of the definition of *iustificatio* he had just given, suggesting that the phrase *per remissionem peccatorum* might just as well read *ut declaret, quod iustificet*. This paraphrase, according to Melanchthon, highlights the relative character of the term, with the result that the only consideration in view is God's gracious acceptance of the sinner, rather than any internal quality or external action. The result of this reading is that "forgiveness of sins is to be understood not only with regard to external misdeeds, but also with regard to the natural impurity [of the soul] itself."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *In epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos paraphrasis* (1517); CWE 42:25. Cf. Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Romans* (1512), 75<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> *Non solum autem ad remissionem praeteritorum peccatorum, quae diu toleravit, sed etiam ad ostendendam iustitiam suam in praesenti tempore, quod ipse sit iustus qui iustificet omne eum qui fidit Iesu Christo filio suo. Non ergo misit filium suum, ut duntaxat deleat et expiaret praeterita peccata, sed et praesentia et futura.* Zwingli, *Romans* (1527); ZO 6.2:88. Cf. Bullinger, *Vorlesung* (1525); HBW 3.1:96-97.

<sup>43</sup> *Definitio est praecedentis particulae; interpretatur enim, quid dixerit "iustitiam." Quod si transferas in verba, erit planius hoc modo: "Ut declaret, quod iustificet," sc. "per remissionem peccatorum." Ponit enim ipsam definitionem et formale (ut ita dicam) iustificationis. Proprie enim*

What this means for Melanchthon's argument is that actual sins, cut off from their root in original sin, are incapable of undermining the sinner's acceptance before God (*coram Deo*):

This is a great consolation for pious minds to understand, that justification is specifically the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, even if we perceive that we are morally impure (*immundos*), yet we know that we are pronounced righteous—not because of our own righteousness, but on account of Christ—and we know that justification is truly the *perpetual* forgiveness of sins.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas Bugenhagen had grounded Christian assurance in the perpetual renewal of forgiveness for past sins in the Christian's recurrence to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Melanchthon goes a step further, describing justification itself as "truly the perpetual forgiveness of sins." Melanchthon then goes on to attack the position that Bugenhagen had criticized, that sins committed after baptism lie outside the scope of Christ's propitiation.<sup>45</sup> This view he attributes to the third-century schismatic Novatian, though it is difficult to see it as anything other than a thinly-veiled attack on Roman Catholic practice, which Melanchthon and his colleagues consistently represent as requiring in the sacrament of penance a satisfaction for sins other than that secured by the work of Christ. This would

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*iustificatio est remissio peccatorum propter Christum. Ita relative intelligatur iustificatio de reconciliatio et acceptatione. Et remissio peccatorum intelligatur non tantum de externis delictis, sed de ipsa naturali immunditie. MSA 5:111.13-112.5. Cf., Ac loquitur Paulus non solum de actualibus delictis, sed de naturali immunditie, de radice et de fructibus. MSA 5:112.26-28.*

<sup>44</sup> *Haec est magna consolatio piis mentibus intelligere, quod iustificatio proprie sit remissio peccatorum. Igitur, etsi sentimus nos immundos esse, tamen sciamus nos iustus pronuntiari non propter nostram iustitiam, sed propter Christum, ac sciamus iustificationem vere esse perpetuam remissionem peccatorum. MSA 5:112.14-19; emphasis mine.*

<sup>45</sup> MSA 5:112.33-113.13.

clearly never do, however, because any basis for the forgiveness of sins which rested in whole or in part on the state or deeds of the subject would result one once again in that intolerable state of doubt and fear. Only the propitiatory work of Christ, conceived and executed entirely *extra nos* and perpetually imputed through God's pronouncement of justification could give the conscience peace.

### **5.2.3 *Contra Augustinum: The Public Break***

By 1532 Melanchthon has bigger fish to fry than Novatian, however. At the end of his comments on Rom 3 Melanchthon takes up Paul's rhetorical question, "Do we therefore abolish the law by this faith?" Paul's answer to this question, Melanchthon observes, is "rather obscure" (*subobscura*) on account of its brevity, but he explains that two things must be kept in mind: 1) it is impossible to fulfill the law without faith, and 2) faith accomplishes the law.<sup>46</sup> The former point was not particularly controversial, even in the sixteenth century. The second also has a long-standing tradition behind it, but Melanchthon gives it a new twist, in keeping with his purely forensic understanding of justification: faith does not fulfill the law by providing access to God's transformative grace; rather, faith fulfills the law in a more immediate sense by apprehending Christ. And here, at last, Melanchthon is forced to acknowledge that this way of viewing the matter ultimately puts him at odds with Augustine:

That the law actually comes about by faith must in the first place be understood in terms of imputation. . . . Next comes the effective [transformation]: for when hearts

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<sup>46</sup> *Haec responsio subobscura est propter brevitatem. Sed cum Paulus clare dicat confirmari legem fide, apparet eum de impletione legis loqui. Nam confirmari legem est conservari eam et fieri. Quare haec duo tenenda sunt, legem sine fide non posse fieri, et fide legem fieri.* MSA 5:120.24-29.

take hold of faith in [God's] mercy and conquer death, then certainly they recognize the goodness of God, then certainly they establish and obey [the law], and they truly call upon God and truly love him. Augustine handled this matter inadequately (*tenuiter*). He only said that we receive the Holy Spirit by faith, and that praying in faith we obtain the help of God to fulfill the law. But it is much more advantageous to remind the reader concerning the proper role of faith, the destruction of doubt, and that for the doubting conscience, it is not possible to fulfill the law. . . . And this is the proper evangelical doctrine: to render the conscience certain, that God is certainly favorable through his mercy, because the law only offers doubt and desperation, for we cannot satisfy the law.<sup>47</sup>

This passage, concluding Melanchthon's explication of the *Propositio principalis* of the epistle to the Romans, sums up what is both the fundamental insight of his model and its basic point of conflict with the Augustinian tradition: God's declaration of acceptance is the starting point of the Christian life, the basis on which the Holy Spirit builds confidence in God's grace and the source of all good works which follow. The young Luther had started from the position of Augustine that "justification does not demand the works of the Law but a living faith which produces its own works."<sup>48</sup> Like Augustine, he had only been half right: justification does not demand anything.

Melanchthon's disagreement with Augustine in the 1532 *Commentarii* is stated much more mildly than in his correspondence with Brenz. Given what we know of Melanchthon's habit of pulling his punches when writing for a public

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<sup>47</sup> *Secundo, quod lex etiam fide fiat, intelligendum est primum imputative; sed de ea re hic non dicemus. Deinde effective: Cum enim corda fiduciam misericordiae concipiunt et vincunt mortem, iam certo agnoscunt bonitatem Dei, certo statuunt se exaudiri, vere invocant, vere diligunt Deum etc. Augustinus tenuiter tractat hanc particulam; tantum dicit, quod fide accipiamus spiritum sancum, et quod fide orantes impetremus auxilium Deo ad legem faciendam. Sed multo magis prodest admonere lectorem de proprio fidei officio, de tollenda dubitatione, et quod dubitante conscientia lex non posit fieri. . . . Et haec est propria evangelii doctrina: conscientias redder certas, quod Deus certo sit propitius per misericordiam, quia lex simpliciter affert dubitationem et desperationem; non enim satisfacimus legi. MSA 5:121.24-122.12.*

<sup>48</sup> WA 56:249.10-11; cf. Chapter 4.



audience, this should come as no surprise. On the other hand, we cannot so lightly dismiss Melanchthon's (or Luther's) continual protestations of admiration for Augustine. Nearly fifty years have now passed since the publication of Pierre Fraenkel's study of Melanchthon's use of patristic authorities in his controversies as a reformer, and the basic conclusion of this work has stood the test of time: Melanchthon held the fathers of the early church in high esteem. But he regarded their writings as *argumenta*, not *auctoritates*, and when the arguments they advanced were not judged to cohere with the meaning of scripture, they could safely be set aside or passed over in silence.<sup>49</sup> Melanchthon held Augustine in particularly high regard as a champion of early Christian orthodoxy against the likes of Origen and Pelagius, who, he felt, had undermined core teachings of the Christian gospel. Timothy Wengert has recently highlighted the complexity of Melanchthon's relationship to Augustine, and his conclusions both reinforce my findings in this section and extend the trajectory of Melanchthon's departure from Augustine on the issue of justification across a longer timeframe.<sup>50</sup> Wengert points to a 1539 commencement speech given by Melanchthon in honor of Augustine, as well as a preface he later authored to an edition of *On the Letter and the Spirit* by the Wittenberg printer, Joseph Klug.<sup>51</sup> Both texts lay claim to Augustine as a source and inspiration for evangelical theology, but both qualify this claim by pointing out the

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<sup>49</sup> Pierre Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (Genève, Droz, 1961).

<sup>50</sup> Wengert, "Philipp Melanchthon and Augustine of Hippo," *LQ* 22, no. 3 (2008): 249-267.

<sup>51</sup> *Oratio de vita divi Augustini* (1539), in CR 11:446-56; *Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi liber de spiritu et littera* (Wittenberg: Klug, 1545); the preface (MBW 3973) is reproduced in CR 5:803-10.

inadequacy of Augustine's understanding of justification as a transformative process, rather than as God's unilateral declaration. It was, after all, "not easy for him to overcome completely the darkness of his time."<sup>52</sup> Throughout the 1530's, however, Protestant appreciation of Augustine remained in flux.

### **5.3 Testing the Limits of the Forensic Model: Martin Bucer's Augustinian Hybrid**

The significance of Melancthon's forensic model for subsequent Protestant exegesis of Romans is difficult to overstate. Of the major commentaries published in the decade following, virtually all explicitly acknowledge a debt to Melancthon on the matter of justification, and virtually all adopt his basic terminology, deploying the language of *reputare*, *imputare*, and *pronuntiari* with increasing frequency.<sup>53</sup> This does not mean that all Protestant commentators approached Paul with same set of motivations or expectations, however. The older Augustinian model of transformative justification was deeply embedded in the psyche of the Western theological tradition, and several evangelical theologians continued to operate within this framework, even as they attempted to integrate it with the new forensic grammar of justification supplied by Melancthon.

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<sup>52</sup> CR 5:805, cited in Wengert, "Melancthon and Augustine," 259.

<sup>53</sup> Bucer's endorsement of Melancthon's basic definition is typical: *Philippus Melancthon iustitiam Dei hic pro acceptatione accipit, qua nos deus acceptat: id vero cum eo convenit, quod nos per eam intelligimus incomparabilem illam Dei bonitatem in Christo exhibitam, qua & peccata condonat, & iustitiam imputat, & vitam aeternam largitur, eamque hic adspirando mentem novam, ac pietatis studium, auspicatur. Romans* (1536), 180. Cf., Bullinger, *Romans* (1533), 72; Brenz, *Romans* (1538), JBW 2.2: 99-101.

Martin Bucer's 1536 *Metaphrases et enarrationes* on Romans is a particularly striking example of precisely this tension. Whereas Melanchthon had sought to exclude any interior renewal or moral virtue from consideration as the basis for God's justifying declaration, arguing that only a righteousness that is wholly *extra nos* can provide certainty of God's grace for the tormented conscience, Bucer takes a different tack. In many ways a more subtle thinker than Melanchthon, Bucer's treatment of Romans is not driven by the single, overriding concern to find a secure foundation for *conscientiis territis*. This difference is as much methodological as theological. Melanchthon, as we have seen, regards the rhetorical structure of the letter as the key to its deepest meaning, and he seeks to explain the text in terms of a single argument, the *status*, or *propositio*, of the letter. Bucer, on the other hand, operates according to a very different methodology, in which linguistic, rhetorical, dogmatic, and even reception-historical concerns are continually in play.

Bucer's goal is to extract a systematic reading of the text in which the concerns of the evangelical movement are harmonized with the best of patristic theology and Renaissance humanist learning.<sup>54</sup> What this means in practice is that

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<sup>54</sup> Edwin Tait explains how "the structure of the commentary reflects Bucer's systematizing and harmonizing agenda": "Bucer treats the text on several levels. Each section receives an *expositio*—a summary of what Bucer thinks Paul is trying to say in this particular passage—and a more detailed *interpretatio*, which follows Paul's argument verse by verse. The *interpretatio* is usually followed by a discussion of patristic interpretations of the passage, though this may occur elsewhere. Next, if Bucer thinks that this passage provides the best opportunity to discuss some major doctrinal issue, he will insert a detailed discussion that issue here. . . . These more detailed discussions are called *quaestiones* or, if they deal with an apparent conflict between the passage under discussion and some other part of Scripture, *concilationes*. Finally, Bucer goes back over the text and offers further observations" aimed primarily at edification. Edwin W. Tait, "The Law and Its Works in Martin

where Melanchthon was primarily focused on rhetorical analysis in an effort to recover Paul's primary meaning, Bucer is more interested in deploying philological analysis to open up Paul's language as a resource for refining traditional theological categories. In the preface to his commentary on Romans, Bucer gives a lengthy excursus on what Paul means by the term "to be justified" and "justification." Melanchthon had made only a passing nod a Hebrew and classical useage of the term in his commentary.<sup>55</sup> Bucer, by contrast, goes into great detail tracing out the semantic range of the word in order to set his exegesis on firm linguistic footing, examining the ways in which concepts in Hebrew are translated into the Greek via the Septuagint, and thus forming the backdrop for Paul's deployment of the terms. His conclusion is that while the primary meaning of δικαιοῦν is declarative, nevertheless Bucer is compelled to admit a transformative aspect by virtue of two considerations: 1) the consensus of patristic and medieval exegetes, and 2) the thrust of Paul's argument in Rom 3.

### **5.3.1 Bucer's Linguistic Analysis**

Bucer's understanding of the Greek term δικαιοῦν involves both forensic and transformative aspects, leading some interpreters to describe his notion as a *duplex iustitia*, or "twofold righteousness."<sup>56</sup> This description is not without its warrants in

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Bucer's 1536 Romans Commentary," in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and W. Ward Holder, 57-69 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2008), 58.

<sup>55</sup> MSA 5:39.7-16.

<sup>56</sup> Lane, "Twofold Righteousness," 216; Robert Stupperich, "Der Ursprung des 'Regensburger Buches' von 1541 und seine Rechtfertigungslehre," *ARG* 36 (1939): 88-116.

his *oeuvre*, but when Bucer distinguishes between different kinds of *iustitia*, he generally does so in connection with specific biblical contexts, not in an effort to develop a consistent, systematic term of art.<sup>57</sup> In the *praefata* to his commentary on Romans, however, Bucer does develop at some length a twofold notion of justification, but it is important to notice that what is in view here is a description of *iustificatio*, not of *iustitia*, a point often overlooked in the scholarly literature.<sup>58</sup> Before we proceed, therefore, we must take careful measure of Bucer's discussion, *Quod Paulus significatu usurpet uerbum iustificari, & iustificatio*.<sup>59</sup>

For Bucer, the decisive consideration in his delimitation of the Pauline concept of justification is based not on an extrapolation from classical notions of *iustitia*, but rather from the Hebraic understanding of righteousness in the Old Testament.<sup>60</sup> "It must be obvious to all," Bucer begins, "[that] St. Paul's Greek style

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<sup>57</sup> As, for example, in his Gospel harmony, where Bucer uses the term *duplex iustitia* to distinguish between "true righteousness" and "pharisaical righteousness" (102) and between "internal righteousness" and "external righteousness" (116); *In sacra quatuor Evangelia, enarrationes perpetuae*. . . . (Basil: Ioannes Hervagium, 1536 [DLCPT]).

<sup>58</sup> Robert Stupperich, for example, argues for an adaptation of Thomas' distinction between justification taken *in habitu* and *in actu* (cf., *ST IaIIae*, q. 100, a. 12) by an "Erasmian school," which translates these distinct understandings into infused and imputed righteousness; in *Der Humanismus and die Wiedervereinigung der Konfessionen* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1936), 10. Friedhelm Krüger provides a more nuanced account of Bucer's use of the formula *duplex iustificatio* in his Gospels commentary of 1530, concluding that Bucer's and Erasmus's use of the concept arises from certain shared theological commitments: "Wenn es zutrifft, daß die Anschauung von einem mehr rational gefärbten Glauben, der sich in guten Werken realisiert und in ihnen erst zum Ziel kommt, die Quelle für die Ausbildung einer doppelten Rechtfertigung bei Erasmus ist, dann müßte Bucer zu demselben Ergebnis kommen, da er von gleichen Voraussetzungen ausgeht." Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus*, 174.

<sup>59</sup> *Romans* (1536), 11.

<sup>60</sup> This judgment has been borne out by modern philological scholarship: "The usage of the Greek OT fundamentally determines the meaning of δικαιοῦν in Paul in other NT writings." Karl Kertlege, "δικαιοῦν," in *EDNT* 1:331.

reflects Hebrew idioms at every turn, and this is particularly so with the word δικαιοὐσθαι, to be justified. The Hebrew word is הצדיק, which means ‘to have judgment given in one’s favour, to be declared to be in the right.’<sup>61</sup> He then proceeds to cite two OT passages where the Hebrew term clearly indicates a forensic meaning, Deut. 25:1 and Prov. 17:15. In the first passage,<sup>62</sup> the Hebrew וְהַצְדִּיקוּ is rendered δικαιώσωσιν in the LXX.<sup>63</sup> In the second,<sup>64</sup> the language is somewhat different, as the construction מְצַדֵּיק רָשָׁע (“the one justifying the wicked”) becomes ὁς δίκαιον κρίνει τὸν ἄδικον (“the one who judges the wicked righteous”). The first instance supports Bucer’s contention that הצדיק carries a forensic meaning, “to be declared to be in the right.” The second, however, suggests that when the Greek translator wished to emphasize the purely denominative nature of the action—especially considering the disconnect between the pronouncement and the actual state of affairs, the judging of the unrighteous as righteous—a different construction was called for. This latter instance, therefore, does little to support Bucer’s construal

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<sup>61</sup> *Hoc nemini obscurum est, D. Paulum ita Graece scripsisse, ut interim Hebraeos idiotismos ubique referat. Id facit & in hoc verb δικαιοὐσθαι, id est, iustificari. Hebraice est הצדיק & significat iudicari secundum aliquem, pronunciari habere iustam causam. Romans (1536), 11; CPMB 160.*

<sup>62</sup> “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall *justify* the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut. 25:1, AV).

<sup>63</sup> The LXX routinely translates the Hiphil form of צדיק with δικαιοὐν; see Ex. 23:7, 2 Sam. 15:4. Normally, the meaning is purely forensic, “to declare righteous,” but some cases are ambiguous (e.g., Is. 53:11), and some heighten the declaratory aspect by using the adjective, δίκαιος with another verb (e.g., with ἀποφαίνω in Job 27:5).

<sup>64</sup> “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15, AV).

of the Greek term vis-à-vis the Hebrew. What is even more curious is that Bucer limits himself to a consideration of the Hebrew verb in its Hiphil form only; the צָדַק word group, however, encompasses a wider range of meanings than simply the forensic, including both stative (Qal) and active (Niphal) meanings; these, however, are usually rendered either by an adjectival construction or by another Greek word altogether.<sup>65</sup> What Bucer seems to have noticed is the tight correlation between the Hiphil form of the Hebrew verb, almost always denominative in meaning, and the Greek verb with which it is almost always translated, δικαιῶν.<sup>66</sup>

It is thus against this Hebraic background that Bucer presents what he considers to be the primary Pauline sense of the term: “Now St. Paul, in inquiring into the means of our salvation, takes this word in its primary connotation as above, so that it has the same force as God’s acquitting us and deciding our case in our favour when our own thoughts and Satan accuse us.”<sup>67</sup> In construing justification thus, Bucer is largely following the definition given by Melanchthon; indeed, no influence looms larger over Bucer’s initial discussion of the term *iustificari* in the *praefata* than Melanchthon’s “most learned and devout” 1532 commentary on

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<sup>65</sup> Ordinarily, but not always; thus, for example, Judah “justifies” Tamar: “She is more righteous than I [צָדִיקָה מִמֶּנִּי]” (Gen. 38:26; LXX, δεδικαίωται Θαμαρ ἢ ἐγώ), but Daniel prophesies that the temple “will be restored to its rightful state [וְנִצְדַק קְדֹשׁ]” (Dan. 8:14; LXX, καθαρῶσθῆσεται τὸ ἅγιον). Neither of these verbal forms (a Qal and a Niphal, respectively) could possibly be taken in a forensic sense.

<sup>66</sup> ‘צָדַק’, in *NIDOTT* xx:xx.

<sup>67</sup> Porro D. *Paulus dum quaerit, quo iustificemur, verbum hoc primo illo significato intelligit, ut idem valeat atque Deum nos absolvere, & causam nostram, accusantibus nos propriis cogitationibus, & Satana, secundum nos iudicare. Romans* (1536), 11; *CPMB*, 161.

Romans.<sup>68</sup> Bucer gives evidence of his singular regard for Melanchthon in concluding his discussion of justification relative to the church fathers at the end of the section and reiterates his definition:

Our purpose in adding this last section was to demonstrate that the early Fathers are at one with us, and do not conflict either with Phillip Melanchthon or with all the others, who duly proclaim that the heart of our salvation, that is, our justification, is our free acceptance before God, whereby he pardons our sins, imputes righteousness to us, and bestows on us eternal life; this life is begun here and now and daily increased in us by the Spirit, who is the implanter and cultivator of righteousness and good works.<sup>69</sup>

Clearly, Bucer had not read Melanchthon's letter to Brenz from May of 1531. Moreover, the fact that four years after the publication of the *Commentarii*, Bucer still regards Melanchthon as being in essential agreement with Augustine on this matter suggests that Melanchthon's critique of Augustine in that work had not been widely recognized as a major departure from patristic interpretation, at least among Protestants outside of Wittenberg. Bucer seems genuinely to think that he is building on Melanchthon's key insight into the term, and furthermore, that this insight is perfectly in keeping with the teachings of the early fathers. This was perhaps an easy enough mistake to make throughout the 1530's—especially for someone as irenic a soul as Bucer.

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<sup>68</sup> *Romans* (1536), 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Haec eo adscriptimus, ut ostenderemus convenire nobis, nec veteres dissentire & cum Philip. Melanchthone, & cum omnibus aliis, qui summam istam salutis nostrae rite praedicant, nempe nostri iustificationem, esse nostri apud Deum gratuitam acceptationem, qua ille nobis remittit peccata, imputat iustitiam, donat vitam aeternam, quam spiritu, iustitiae & bonorum operum plantatore & educatore hic in nobis inchoat, & in dies provehit. Romans* (1536), 14; *CPMB*, 167.



### 5.3.2 *Duplex iustificatio*

It ought to be clear from the passages cited above that justification is, for Bucer, at its most basic level a relational action. It is an act of acceptance on God's part, whereby he receives sinful creatures into his favour. This relational understanding of justification lies at the heart of Luther's theology and reflects his appropriation of the Scotist-Occamist notion of *acceptatio divina*.<sup>70</sup> Whatever Bucer's relationship to the Thomistic theology of his former Dominican order may have been,<sup>71</sup> there can be little doubt that for Bucer, "the heart of our salvation, that is, our justification," derives from an act of will on the part of God.<sup>72</sup> As Bucer explains in his

*Enarrationes* on the four Gospels:

God's spontaneous goodwill is the prime cause of his giving judgment in our favour and awarding us eternal life. Indeed his will is the prime cause of everything. Next is Christ's merit, for he died for the salvation of the world—but this itself is a free gift of the divine goodwill. The third is faith, by which we embrace and lay hold of this goodwill of God and of Christ's merit. For he who believes has eternal life. But this faith itself is also the work and gift of God in us, who is gracious now on account of Christ's merit. The last cause is good works, for everyone is recompensed in accordance with his works. But these themselves are also the gifts of God's goodwill, the effect of Christ's merit, and the fruit of faith. . . . Thus everything pertaining to our salvation is a gift, even the work of God's free and spontaneous goodwill.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf., Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 194. Bucer had first encountered Luther at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, and the impression made was a lasting one; cf. Thomas Kaufmann, "Bucers Bericht von der Heidelberger Disputation," *ARG* 82 (1992): 147-70.

<sup>71</sup> According to Leijssen, "Bucer is ein selbstständiger Theologe, der Luthers Grundintuitionen in einer humanistischen Denkart ausarbeitet, die nicht von seiner thomistischen Ausbildung losgelöst ist." Lambert Leijssen, "Martin Bucer und Thomas von Aquin," *ETL* 55, no. 4 (1979): 273.

<sup>72</sup> Cf., Gabriel Biel: *sola voluntas divina est regula omnis iustitiae*. *I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, art. 4; cited in Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei,'" 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Caeterum ut iudicet pro nobis Deus, & vitam aeternam adiudicet, prima causa est eius ultronea benevolentia. Sua enim voluntas prima causa est omnium: proxima meritum Christi: nam mortuus est pro salute mundi, sed hoc ipsum benevolentiae divinae gratuitum donum est. Tertia, fides, qua hanc*

Justification is thus primarily God’s act of acceptance, but in what does this acceptance consist? Above, we saw Bucer describe justification as an act “whereby [God] pardons our sins, imputes righteousness to us, and bestows on us eternal life”<sup>74</sup>—three distinct aspects, it would appear. We must be careful here, however, not to read these statements in light of later Protestant orthodoxy. Although Bucer here speaks of God “imputing righteousness (*imputat iustitiam*),” this does *not*, at this point in his career, refer to the imputed *iustitia Christi*. So far as I can tell, Bucer does not develop a notion of Christ’s imputed righteousness for several more years, at which point it becomes a dominant term in his description of justification.<sup>75</sup> In the early 1530’s, however, when Bucer is writing his commentary on Romans, the

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*Dei benevolentiam & Christi meritum amplectimur & percipimus. Nam qui credit, habet vitam aeternam. Sed haec ipsa quoque fides opus & donum est in nobis propitii iam Dei propter meritum Christi. Postrema causa [sic], bona opera sunt: nam iuxta opera cuique reperatur, sed haec ipsa quoque sunt dona benevolentiae Dei, effectus meriti Christi, & fructus fidei. . . . Omnia igitur salutis nostrae donum sunt, & opus ultroneae & gratuita benevolentiae Dei. In sacra quatuor Evangelia, enarrationes perpetuae. . . .* (Basil: Ioannes Hervagium, 1536 [DLCPT]), 364.

<sup>74</sup> *qua ille nobis remittit peccata, imputat iustitiam, donat vitam aeternam . . . . Romans* (1536), 14; CPMB, 167.

<sup>75</sup> Article 5 of the Regensburg Agreement (1541) describes imputed righteousness as the “righteousness of Christ given to us as a gift,” as does Bucer’s treatise of the following year, *De vera Ecclesiarum reconciliatione & compositione. . . .* (Strassburg: Wendelin Rihel, 1542 [DLCPT]), in which he provides a further defense of the evangelical notion of justification against *Pighius aliique Sophistae* in a locus entitled, *Explicatio et Conciliatio Controversiae de Iustificatione*. Here the notion of Christ’s righteousness imputed to the believer takes its place in parallel with the non-imputation of sin: *Hic apparet Paulum per ablutionem, sanctificationem, & iustificationem, non solum remissionem prioris contaminationis, impuritatis & iniustitiae: & imputationem mundicie, sanctitatis & iustitiae Christi: sed etiam inchoatam in ipsis sanctis puritatem, sanctimoniam & iustitiam, quam Christus spiritu suo in credentibus efficit, quaque illos induit, intellexisse; and iustificatio, quae remissio est peccatorum per Christum, & iustitiae Christi imputatio* (122). This is also the first place in Bucer’s corpus where I have been able to find the characteristic Lutheran term *iustitia aliena* (203). This language of the *iustitia Christi donata* dominates the treatise and is a regular feature of Bucer’s understanding of justification thereafter.

language of imputation is used only rarely—never in connection with the merits or righteousness of Christ, but always in conjunction with the non-imputation of sins—and it appears to be interchangeable with terms such as *absolvere* or *pro nobis iudicare*:

Therefore, when Paul asserts that we are justified by faith, the faith whereby we assuredly believe that Christ is our Saviour and our sole peacemaker with the Father, he means that by this faith we are first of all delivered from all doubt that God, on account of the death of Christ undergone on our behalf, forgives us all our sins, absolves us from all guilt, and passes judgment in our favour against Satan and all the ill we may have deserved.<sup>76</sup>

Here the merits of Christ accomplished in the flesh—that is, “the death of Christ undergone on our behalf”—function only as the meritorious cause of our righteousness, not its substance—a point appreciated well enough by the Council of Trent.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it would appear, *iustitia* consists in forgiveness: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Ps. 31:2; ET, 32:2). Commenting on Paul’s deployment of this text in Romans 4:8, Bucer affirms that “if sin is not reckoned to [a man], he is blessed; indeed, he is justified—that is, he is numbered by God among those for whom he determines good and whom he intends to make blessed.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Proinde cum D. Paulus iustificari nos fide, qua Christum nostrum servatorem, & unum ad patrem placatorem, certo credimus, contendit, primum omnium illud intelligit hac fide fieri, ut non dubitemus Deum propter Christi mortem pro nobis obitam, peccata nobis omnia condonare, absolvere omni reatu, & pro nobis iudicare contra Satanam, & quaecunque mala meriti sumus. Romans (1536), 12; CPMB, 162.*

<sup>77</sup> *Meritoria autem: dilectissimus unigenitus suus, Dominus noster Iesus Christus, qui cum essemus inimici, propter nimiam caritatem, qua dilexit nos, sua sanctissima passione in ligno crucis nobis justificationem meruit, et pro nobis Deo Patri satisfecit. Sessio Sexta . . . decretum de iustificatione 7; in Schaff, 2:95.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ad probandum id, iustitiam imputari sine operibus, hoc est, absque merito operum hominem iustificari, adducit Apost. praeterea testimonium Psal. 31. in quo David felicem canit eum, cui remissa est iniquitas, tectum peccatum, & non imputatum. Nam si cui non imputatur peccatum, felix*

Bucer is thus quite clear in his 1536 Romans commentary that the core aspect of his notion of justification is the forgiveness, or non-imputation, of sin, describing it as “the fount and head of our entire salvation.”<sup>79</sup> His description does not stop there, however. For Bucer justification is forensic in the sense that it arises from an act of will on the part of God to forgive sins and bestow his blessings, but it is not *merely* forensic:<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, God breathes the power of his Spirit into those acquitted and declared righteous before him, to make immediate assault upon their corrupt ambitions and to urge on their suppression and extinction, and on the other hand, to fashion upright attitudes to every aspect of life, to arouse and foster holy desires, conforming us speedily to the likeness of Christ. So in treating of our restoration, Paul intimates in close connection *issuing from our very justification before God*—provided conviction of it is ours—the immediate presence in believers of the Spirit, the fashioner of all the righteousness we are to display in our lives. *Hence he never uses the word “justify” in this way without appearing to speak no less of this imparting of true righteousness than of the fount and head of our entire salvation, the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>81</sup>

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*est, is utique iustificatus, hoc est, a Deo inter eos quibus bene vult, quosque felices reddere decrevit, numeratus est. Romans (1536), 225.*

<sup>79</sup> *Inde nunquam ita iustificandi verbo utitur, quin eo non minus hanc verae iustitiae communicationem, quam principium illud, & caput totius salutis, peccatorum condonationem dicere videatur. Romans (1536), 12; CPMB, 162.* So also Bucer quotes approvingly Melancthon’s suggestion that the phrase “We are justified by faith” should be transposed into this sentence: “We are reckoned righteous by mercy.” *Romans (1536), 13; CPMB, 164. cf., MSA 5:40-41.*

<sup>80</sup> McGrath argues that the Lutheran emphasis on forensic justification can be traced to Erasmus’ *Novum instrumentum omne* (1516), where the Greek verb λογίζομαι (Latin, *imputare*) is illustrated by a Roman legal term, *acceptilatio*, referring to “the purely verbal remission of a debt, as if the debt had been paid—whereas, in fact, it has not” (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 239-40). Bucer, who would certainly have been aware of Erasmus’ comments on the text, never uses this term in his Romans commentary.

<sup>81</sup> *Porro cum Deus absolutis ac iustis apud se iudicatis, eam vim spiritus sui adflet, quae pravas in eis cupiditates ilico aggrediatur, reprimereque illas atque extinguere insistat: Sollicitudo conscientiae sola fiducia Christi eximitur contra, rectas in omnem vitam opiniones formet, sanctas voluntates excitet & perducatur, continuo nos ad imaginem Christi conformans. D. Paulus dum de nostri restitutione agit, iuxta significat, ex illa ipsa nostri apud Deum iustificatione, dum ea nobis persuasa est, credentibus statim adesse spiritum illum omnium iustitiae, quam re ipsa exhibeamus, formatorem. Inde nunquam ita iustificandi verbo utitur, quin eo non minus hanc verae iustitiae communicationem, quam principium illud, & caput totius salutis, peccatorum condonationem dicere videatur. Romans (1536), 12; CPMB, 162; emphasis mine.*

What Heiko A. Oberman writes concerning Gabriel Biel applies just as fully to Martin Bucer: “The acceptation by God . . . is not the exterior declaration or *favour Dei* of later Protestant orthodoxy; it is the coming of the Holy Spirit himself.”<sup>82</sup> Almost. Unlike later Protestant theologians, Bucer does not wish to distinguish between God’s pronouncement of absolution and the gift of the Holy Spirit—yet at the same time we may notice that even in affirming the inseparability of these concepts in Pauline usage, as Bucer understands it, he is forced to ground the presence of the Spirit in a more proper sense of the term justification as divine decree: the “immediate presence in believers of the Spirit” proceeds *ex illa ipsa nostri apud Deum iustificatione*. But still, Bucer wants to affirm that there is an organic relationship between the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit, between imputation and impartation,<sup>83</sup> such that both must be understood as elements of the Pauline notion of *iustificatio*, and this for two reasons.

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<sup>82</sup> Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 354.

<sup>83</sup> Calvin makes precisely this point against Osiander some years later, but, unlike Bucer, distinguishes terminologically between justification and sanctification: “To prove the first point—that God justifies not only by pardoning but by regenerating—[Osiander] asks whether God leaves as they were by nature those whom he justifies, changing none of their vices. This is exceedingly easy to answer: as Christ cannot be torn into parts, so these two which we perceive in him together and conjointly are inseparable—namely, righteousness and sanctification. Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption, by whose power he remakes them to his own image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, shall we therefore say that the earth is warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat? Is there anything more applicable to the present matter than this comparison? The sun, by its heat, quickens and fructifies the earth, by its beams brightens and illumines it. Here is a mutual and indivisible connection.” *Institutio* (1559) 3.11.6; LCC, 731-33.

First, maintaining this imparted righteousness, or “participation in righteousness” (*communio iustitiae*),<sup>84</sup> as an aspect of justification allows Bucer to maintain a greater degree of continuity with Patristic formulations. Bucer is well aware that many of the more important Fathers—especially Augustine—construe justification in transformative terms, and linking imparted with imputed righteousness allows him to explain and correct their formulations without overthrowing them completely:

Consequently, since Paul is accustomed to speaking in this way, denoting by the word “justification” first of course the remission of sins, yet at the same time always indicating in addition that imparting of righteousness (*illa iustitiae communionem*) which God proceeds to work in us by the Spirit . . . the majority of the holy Fathers, bearing mind no doubt the more visible aspect of justification, have taken *δικαιοῦσθαι*, to be justified, in the sense of “to be made righteous.”<sup>85</sup>

Bucer is happy to let this view stand, provided this “visible” righteousness is regarded as the effect, and not the cause, of God’s prior acceptance.<sup>86</sup>

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Bucer finds exegetical warrant for this interpretation in Paul’s argument in Rom. 3:25-26:

. . . whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was as a demonstration of his righteousness (*εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ*), because in the forbearance of God he had passed over the sins previously

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<sup>84</sup> *Romans* (1536), 12.

<sup>85</sup> *Sic ergo cum Paulus loqui soleat, & iustificationis voce, remissionem peccatorum primùm quidem exprimere, simul tamen semper significare, etiam illam iustitiae communionem, quam Deus eodem in nobis spiritu. . . plerique sanctorum patrum spectantes nimirum, quod in iustificatione sese magis profert, δικαιοῦσθαι, id est, iustificari, iustos fieri intellexerunt. Romans* (1536), 12; *CPMB*, 163.

<sup>86</sup> *Augustinus verum agnoscere merito contendit, tum huius quoque rationem non ab re habuit, quod Iacobus scripsit, Abraham ex operibus, non fide tantum iustificatum. Sed sicut haec ipsa opera, quibus a Deo honor & gloria rependitur, eoque suos iustos sibi haberi declarat, gratuita Dei dona fecit, ita nusquam eo valere adserit, ut propter illa Deo accepti simus, quae, nisi antea ex sola misericordia acceptos nos illi credimus, nulla bona opera operari possumus. Romans* (1536), 13.

committed; for the demonstration of his righteousness (πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Bucer argues that the thrust of this passage indicates that “Christ came to introduce to the world an ἔνδειξιν, a demonstration of divine righteousness unmistakable to all,”<sup>87</sup> and he links this mission to Christ’s role as justifier: how, in other words, could Christ’s work in justification stand for a demonstration of his righteousness if it were not visible and tangible—if, in other words, it were *merely* a declaration *in foro coeli*? For Bucer, it is simply not enough for justification to be conceived simply as a change of attitude on God’s part; because it performs this endeictic function outside the mind of the believer, it must *demonstrate* God’s righteousness for all the world to see.

Throughout his exposition of the text, Bucer follows the lead of Melanchthon in affirming the basic evangelical insight that “the heart of our salvation, that is, our justification, is our free acceptance before God.” Nevertheless, the tight connection Bucer sees between this acceptance and the renewal it brings clearly sets him apart from his colleagues in Wittenberg. When Bucer argues that Paul “never uses the word ‘justify’ . . . without appearing to speak no less of this imparting of true righteousness,” and when he describes our acceptance before God as “the fount and head of our entire salvation,” rather than simply as “our entire salvation,” significant

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<sup>87</sup> *Christum venisse, ut orbi ἔνδειξιν, id est, certam omnibus divinae iustitiae ostensionem inferret. Romans* (1536), 12.

ground opens up between his view and that of Melanchthon.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, while for Melanchthon the driving aim of his exegesis is a concern to secure assurance of salvation, for Bucer the concern is rather to maintain continuity with the patristic tradition while also doing justice the fact that for Paul, justification involves a demonstration of God's righteousness. This demonstration, for Bucer, ultimately involves the instantiation of a love for God above all other things, and for this reason justification cannot be something that exists purely *extra nos*.<sup>89</sup>

#### **5.4 Justification and Regeneration in Calvin's Exegesis (1540-1556)**

My aim in the final section of this chapter is to shed a little light on the development of Calvin's understanding of justification by examining the successive revisions he made to his commentary on Romans in 1540, 1553, and 1556. Calvin's elaboration of this doctrine has been a matter of perennial interest to scholars working in this field for many years now, though most studies have approached the question from a systematic, rather than from a historical, perspective.<sup>90</sup> There have been some

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<sup>88</sup> Melanchthon, it will be remembered, explicitly rejects the language of "fount and head" as insufficiently comprehensive: *Ideo sola fide sumus iusti, non qui sit radix, ut tu scribas, sed quia apprehendit Christum, propter quem sumus accepti, qualisqualis sit illa novitas, etsi necessario sequi debet, sed non pacificat conscientiam.* MBW 1151 (T5: 109.15.18).

<sup>89</sup> *Deum necesse quidem est diligere super omnia, nihil non eius solius gratia instituere & facere: verum non extra nos, non nobis exclusis, aut iis bonis, in quibus ille se deum nobis declarare statuit.* Romans (1536), 102.

<sup>90</sup> The most recent full-scale account of Calvin's *Rechtfertigungslehre* can be found in Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). Major studies also include Mark A. Garcia, "Life in Christ: The Function of Union with Christ in the *Unio-Duplex Gratia* Structure of Calvin's Soteriology" (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2004); Tjarko Stadland, *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung bei Calvin* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972); Willy Lüttge, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre Calvins und ihre Bedeutung für seine Frömmigkeit* (Berlin: Reuther



attempts, in recent years, to set Calvin's *Rechtfertigungslehre* more fully in its historical context, reading it against the backdrop of the theologians and exegetes with whom he was in continual conversation,<sup>91</sup> but as far as I am aware, no one has yet performed an archaeology of his mature doctrine, peeling back the layers of his thought as they emerged in successive publications and in the revisions of his major works—especially of the *Institutes* and his commentary on Romans.<sup>92</sup>

In this section I bring to a conclusion my survey of early Protestant exegesis of Romans by demonstrating a convergence, once again, between Melancthon and Calvin. In his early dogmatic writings, Calvin seems to be charting a course largely set by Melancthon in his earlier explication of justification in the 1532

*Commentarii*. In his first commentary on Romans, however, Calvin seems much

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& Reichard, 1909). Shorter accounts which place Calvin's soteriology within the broader scope of his thought include Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 222-33; François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1987); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956).

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Peter Alan Lillback, "Calvin's Development of the Doctrine of Forensic Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 51-80; Karla Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification: Variations on a Lutheran Theme," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 99-118. See also the essay, "Calvin and Abraham," in Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 64-78.

<sup>92</sup> H. Paul Santmire has provided a helpful synopsis of Calvin's teaching on justification in the 1540 commentary on Romans, but without comparison to the later writings. Santmire's analysis will serve as a point of departure for my argument in this essay. H. Paul Santmire, "Justification in Calvin's 1540 Romans Commentary," *CH* 33, no. 3 (1964): 294-313. Wübbenhorst makes an attempt at a diachronic reading of Calvin's doctrine, however, she mistakes the text in vol. 49 of the *Calvini opera* for the "1539 edition" of Calvin's commentary on Romans, when in fact it is the 1556 edition. The initial edition of this work was published in 1540 by Wendelin Rihel of Strasbourg (though the dedicatory epistle is dated 15 Nov 1539), and it was revised extensively in editions published in 1551 and 1556 by Jean Gérard and Robert Stephanus, respectively. My analysis here depends on the recent critical edition of the Romans commentary edited by T. H. L. Parker in COE 13, the apparatus of which (unlike the earlier edition in the CO) allows for a reconstruction of the commentary's successive layers of revision.

more restrained than this colleague in Wittenberg in assigning an exclusively forensic meaning to Paul's language of justification, nor does he venture any criticism of Augustine. This may be owing to the influence of Bucer, who played host to Calvin as he was writing this commentary during his sojourn in Strasbourg. A more likely explanation, however, own allegiance to the exegetical principles of *brevitas et luciditas* he first sets out in the praeface to this work. Calvin, in contrast with both Melancthon and Bucer, conceives the task of the exegete as cleaving simply to the argument of the text and elucidating its meaning in grammatical and historical terms. Calvin does not share in Melancthon's drive to reduce the entire meaning of the text to a single *scopus*, and he explicitly departs from Bucer's practice of using the text as a launching pad into extended polemical and theological digressions. Later in his career, as we shall see, Calvin bends somewhat on this latter ideal, as the demands of intra- and inter-confessional strife force him to develop and extend Reformed teaching even more explicitly from the text of scripture.

Calvin's later editions of the Romans commentary thus represent a more conscious appropriation of one of Melancthon's key theological insights: the strictly forensic construal of justification. It would be misleading, however, to conclude my discussion of Calvin's exegesis here. There is probably no greater formative influence on Calvin's early theology and exegesis than Philipp Melancthon, but this does not mean that Calvin simply swallowed his *Rechtfertigungslehre* whole or reproduced his views without variation. If one can

detect a certain reticence in Calvin's early Romans exegesis to ground his theology as explicitly in the text as had Melancthon, Calvin also develops his views beyond those of Melancthon with regard to the other main plank of the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* as I outlined it in the Introduction: the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. Restrictions of time and space have forced me to focus my analysis in this dissertation almost exclusively on the emergence of the first plank, the sharp distinction between justification and regeneration brought about by the forensic model. A thorough examination of the emergence of the second plank, the *iustitia Christi imputata*, is thus beyond the scope of this work, however in the concluding section of this chapter I will preview its development by tracing the emergence of its profile in the later editions of Calvin's commentary on Romans. This final section is not intended as illustrative of theme, but is also intended to highlight Calvin's originality in pushing his exposition of Paul's letter beyond the initial terms set by Melancthon.

#### **5.4.1 Between Melancthon and Augustine: Justification and Regeneration in Calvin's Romans Exegesis**

Perhaps the most striking change in Calvin's treatment of justification in Romans between the early and the later editions is the care he takes to distinguish justification from regeneration. Indeed, in the 1540 edition of the commentary, Calvin has very little to say concerning the inward renewal caused by grace. To be sure, the concepts of renewal and *vita nova* are everywhere assumed in the background of his exposition, yet Calvin seems initially to shy away from the term

*regeneratio* in his exegesis of the text.<sup>93</sup> When he does use the term, it is usually in passing and with no clear sense of its scope. Consider, for example, the following, drawn from Calvin's exegesis of Rom 2:11:

there is a twofold acceptance of men before God; the first, when he chooses and calls us from nothing through gratuitous goodness, as there is nothing in our nature which can be approved by him; the second, when after having regenerated us (*ubi nos regeneravit*), he confers on us his gifts, and shows favor to the image of his Son which he recognizes in us.<sup>94</sup>

This remark (which, incidentally, survives in both later editions of the commentary) comes by way of an explanation for how it is that God's gratuitous election is compatible with the fact that God is said to show regard for "purity of heart or inward integrity (*cordis puritatem, ac interiorem innocentiam*)," rather than outward appearance. But note that Calvin's use of the term *regeneravit* is ambiguous: speaking of the "two-fold acceptance of men before God," Calvin contrasts the first acceptance, which is purely by grace, with a second, in which God "renders to each according to his deeds." The second acceptance, however, is described as temporally consequent to regeneration. It is not altogether clear whether Calvin here regards regeneration as itself a part of the first *acceptatio*, or merely as an intermediate term between the two, but what is clear is that he is not especially worried about the distinction. Throughout the 1540 edition of the commentary, Calvin describes regeneration as an ongoing process which is never complete in this

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<sup>93</sup> This may simply be a result of Calvin's preference for formulating his doctrines in explicitly biblical language.

<sup>94</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1540), 2:11; COE 13:45.

lifetime,<sup>95</sup> but not once does he draw a clear distinction between this inward renewal and the righteousness which passes muster at the bar of God's judgment.

In the later editions of his commentary, however, Calvin adds a good deal of material which helps to clarify this distinction. In his comments on Rom 1:17, for example, Calvin expands in 1551 on his earlier definition of the *iustitia Dei* as "that which is approved before God's tribunal (*quae apud Dei tribunal approbetur*)," by contrasting it with "what some think, that this righteousness does not only consist in the free remission of sins, but also, in part, includes the grace of regeneration."<sup>96</sup> So also in his explanation of Rom 4:16, Calvin draws out the logic of this distinction in fine Melanchthonian form, explaining that "grace is not to be taken, as some imagine, for the gift of regeneration, but for a gratuitous favor (*gratuito favore*): for as regeneration is never perfect, it can never suffice to pacify souls, nor of itself can it make the promise certain."<sup>97</sup>

Calvin clarifies the relationship between justification and regeneration at a number of points throughout the later editions of his commentary, asserting both

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, the comments on Rom 7:15 (COE 13:144-45) and 10:6 (COE 13:218).

<sup>96</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1551), 1:17; COE 13:28-29. It is likely that Calvin has in mind here not only his more polemical Roman Catholic opponents, but also the more irenic attempts at rapprochement on this question we see in figures such as Jacopo Sadoleto and Martin Bucer. Sadoleto's expansive understanding of the term *iustitia Dei* in his 1536 commentary on Romans contrasts nicely with Calvin's more restrictive sense: *Iustitiam vero proprio vocabulo nequaquam. Sed animadvertendum est iustitiam hoc loco pro toto genere virtutis poni. In Pauli Epistolam ad Romanos commentariorum libri tres* (Lyon, 1536), 21. Cf. also Bucer: *Iustitiam vero dei videtur more scripturae, intelligere divinam, & praepollentem eiusmodi iustitiam, ut appareat eam non nisi dei opus & donum esse. Romans* (1536), 50.

<sup>97</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1556), Rom 4:16; COE 13:91.

their conceptual distinction and also their inseparable coincidence.<sup>98</sup> At no point is the significance of this point made more forcefully, however, than in the lengthy critique of Augustine that Calvin adds to his comments on Rom 3:21 in 1551. That Calvin regards this passage as critical for his understanding of justification is attested by the length of his comments and by the care with which he reworked his exegesis in each subsequent edition of his commentary. In glossing the phrase, “the righteousness of God apart from the law has been revealed,” Calvin initially draws a contrast between righteousness and works in 1540.<sup>99</sup> These works are not “blended” (*admiscere*) with the mercy of God; God’s mercy alone is the sole basis for the believer’s confidence.

This contrast between God’s mercy and external works fits well with the early Reformed confessional statements critiquing the Catholic sacramental regulation of justification, but it leaves unaddressed the deeper theological issue: the relationship of justification to the interior renewal brought about by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. After all, even the most trenchant of the reformers’ Catholic critics would concede that it is not the works themselves which merit God’s favor, but rather the state of interior renewal brought about by grace.<sup>100</sup> In 1551, however,

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<sup>98</sup> For passages reinforcing the distinction, see the comments on Rom 6:10 (1551), COE 13:123; Rom 8:2-3 (1556), COE 13:152-56; Rom 9:30 (1556), COE 13:212. For the inseparable conjunction between regeneration and justification, see Rom 8:9 (1556), COE 13:160; Rom 10:6 (1551), COE 13:218.

<sup>99</sup> “This righteousness then, which God communicates to man, and accepts alone, and owns as righteousness, has been revealed, [Paul] says, without the law, that is, without the aid of the law; and the law is to be understood as meaning works.” *Comm. Rom.* (1540), Rom 3:21; COE 13:68.

<sup>100</sup> The Council of Trent had declared in 1546 that “Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into the justified, as the head into the members, and the vine into the branches, and this virtue always

Calvin decisively rejects this possibility, highlighting his divergence not only from contemporary Catholic teaching, but also from its fount and wellspring in

Augustine.<sup>101</sup> “It is not unknown to me,” writes Calvin,

that Augustine gives a different explanation; for he thinks that the righteousness of God is the grace of regeneration (*Iustitiam enim Dei esse putat regenerationis gratiam*); and this grace he allows to be free, because God renews us, when unworthy, by his Spirit; and from this he excludes the works of the law, that is, those works, by which men of themselves endeavor, without renovation, to render God indebted to them. I also well know, that some new speculators proudly adduce this sentiment, as though it were at this day revealed to them. But that the Apostle includes all works without exception, even those which the Lord produces in his own people, is evident from the context.<sup>102</sup>

Calvin goes on to provide a lengthy explanation for why this is “evident from the context,” and he makes clear that it is not simply the merit of external works which he rejects, but also the inward transformation which makes these works possible. “It is but a frivolous sophistry,” he writes, “to say that we are justified in Christ, because we are renewed by the Spirit.” On the contrary, “we are in Christ because we are out of ourselves” (*Nam ideo in Christo, quia extra nos*).<sup>103</sup>

In all of these additions, Calvin seems to move in a markedly Lutheran—even Melancthonian—direction, stressing the distinction between the sinner’s gratuitous acceptance before God from the inward renewal wrought by the Holy Spirit. Like Melancthon, Calvin seems to regard this distinction as an essential

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precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any way be pleasing and meritorious before God” (Canon 6).

<sup>101</sup> Wübbenhorst incorrectly identifies this passage as originating in the first edition of Calvin’s commentary, and this leads her to characterize Calvin’s early exegesis of Romans as standing in much closer continuity with that of Melancthon on this matter than I think is warranted. Karla Wübbenhorst, “Variations on a Lutheran Theme,” 108.

<sup>102</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1540), Rom 3:21; COE 13:68.

<sup>103</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1540), Rom 3:21; COE 13:69.

safeguard for securing assurance of salvation: because the inward work of grace is always inchoate and imperfect, the believer must look to an alien righteousness outside him or herself.

#### **5.4.2 Beyond Melanchthon: The *iustitia Christi imputata***

Corollary with Calvin's increasing stress in the later editions of his commentary on the Lutheran theme of justification *extra nos* comes a fuller development of what might be regarded as Calvin's own distinctive contribution to the confessional formulation: an understanding of justification as a twofold transaction involving both the non-imputation of sin and the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness as two necessary but distinct components of the sinner's acceptance *coram Deo*.

Calvin had taken from Melanchthon a strong insistence on the forensic character of justification—that is, for both exegetes the Greek term δικαίω refers primarily to a pronouncement made by God *in foro coeli* rather than to any internal transformation or infusion of grace. The biblical word to which both of these exegetes recur most frequently in explaining this divine pronouncement is “imputation” (in Latin, *imputare* and, less frequently, *reputare*, for the Greek λογίζομαι). Thus, in the words of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), human beings

are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. God reckons this faith as righteousness (*Hanc fidem imputat Deo pro iustitia coram ipso*).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> BC 38-41; BSLK, 56.



Many scholars have noted Calvin's adoption of Melanchthon's terminology on this point, but what is often overlooked is that Calvin consistently speaks of the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness, whereas Melanchthon almost always uses the language of imputation as a synonym for the forgiveness of sins. Typical, for example, is this pair of statements, given back-to-back in Melanchthon's 1556

*Enarratio* on Romans:

Justification is the imputation of righteousness, by which God in his mercy accepts us and gives us life. Consequently, we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.

Justification is the remission of sins, by which God accepts us and we are given life on account of the Mediator, and through him. Consequently we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.<sup>105</sup>

Compare this, for example, with the explanation given by Calvin in the first edition of his *Institutes* in 1536: "By Christ's righteousness then we are made righteous and become fulfillers of the law. This righteousness we put on as our own, and truly God accepts it as ours, reckoning us holy, pure, and innocent."<sup>106</sup> So also in the first edition of his Romans commentary, Calvin argues that "where there is a coming to Christ, there is first found in him the perfect righteousness of the law, which becomes ours by imputation."<sup>107</sup> Both of these remarks come in the context of discussions of the law, a point of particular concern for Calvin, and it may be significant that Calvin does initially employ the language of positive imputation in

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<sup>105</sup> *Iustificatio est imputatio iusticia, qua Deus per misericordiam nos recipit et vivificat, Non igitur sumus iusti nostris operibus aut meritis. Iustificatio est remissio peccatorum, qua Deus nos recipit et vivificate propter mediatorem, et per eum, Igitur non sumus iusti nostris operibus aut meritis. Enarratio Epistolae Pauli scriptae ad Romanos* (1556); CR 15:888.

<sup>106</sup> *Institutio* (1536) 1.32; COS 1:60.

<sup>107</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1540), Rom 3:31; COE 13:78.

his comments on the law in Rom 3, not in the first half of Romans chapter 4, where one would expect it in connection with Paul's use of the term λογίζομαι. Like Melancthon, Calvin in 1540 construes Paul's language of imputation here in purely negative terms as forgiveness of sins: "righteousness, according to Paul, is nothing else than the remission of sins; and further, this remission is gratuitous, because it is imputed without works, which the very name of remission indicates."<sup>108</sup>

The year following the publication of his first commentary on Romans, however, Calvin composed a confession for the church of Geneva which combined Melancthon's imputative construal of justification with Calvin's own insistence that it is Christ who fulfills the positive demands of the law on our behalf: "merely through his goodness, without any regard to our works, he is pleased to accept us freely in Jesus Christ, imputing his righteousness to us, and does not impute our sin."<sup>109</sup> This compact, precise formulation would prove to be the model for virtually every major subsequent confessional symbol in both the Reformed and Lutheran churches, and it also seems to have guided Calvin's own exegesis of Romans when he revisited the text in later years.

When Calvin returned to his exposition of Romans in 1556, he inserted material at a number of points which balanced the negative emphasis on the non-imputation of sin with the notion of the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness in a manner consonant with his earlier confessional formulation. So, for example, in

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<sup>108</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1540), Rom 4:6; COE 13:83.

<sup>109</sup> *Geneva Catechism* (1541); CCFCT 2:333.

his comments on Rom 4:3, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness,” Calvin adds that “by faith [men] derive from another what is wanting in themselves; and hence the righteousness of faith is rightly called imputative.”<sup>110</sup>

And anon: “when the reason is asked, why God loves us and owns us as just, it is necessary that Christ should come forth as one who clothes us with his own righteousness.”<sup>111</sup>

The fullest explanation Calvin gives for this twofold model, however, comes in the form of a lengthy excursus added in 1556 on Rom 4:24-25: “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered up for our offences and was raised again for our justification.” Calvin sees in this passage an explicit connection between Christ’s death as the payment for sin and his resurrection as securing the believer’s eternal reward:

And though Scripture, when it treats of our salvation, dwells especially on the death of Christ, yet the Apostle now proceeds farther: for as his purpose was more explicitly to set forth the cause of our salvation, he mentions its *two parts*; and says, *first*, that our sins were expiated by the death of Christ, and *secondly*, that by his resurrection was obtained our righteousness. But the meaning is, that when we possess the benefit of Christ’s death and resurrection, there is nothing wanting to the completion of perfect righteousness (*nihil ad implendos omnes iustitiae numeros deesse*). By separating his death from his resurrection, he no doubt accommodates what he says to our ignorance; for it is also true that righteousness has been obtained for us by that obedience of Christ, which he exhibited in his death, as the Apostle himself teaches us in the following chapter. But as Christ, by rising from the dead, made known how much he had effected by his death, this distinction is calculated to teach us that our salvation was begun (*inchoatam*) by the sacrifice, by which our sins were expiated, and was at length completed (*perfectam*) by his resurrection: for

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<sup>110</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1556), Rom 4:3; COE 13:80.

<sup>111</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1556), Rom 4:3; COE 13:81.

the beginning of righteousness (*iustitiae principium*) is to be reconciled to God, and its completion (*complementum*) is to attain life by having death abolished.<sup>112</sup>

Calvin here emphasizes that Christ's atoning work was not completed by his death on the cross, but by his resurrection, and that this completion of perfect righteousness is granted to the believer in full at the moment of justification. It is not enough simply to have one's sins forgiven. Medieval theologians had, for centuries, spoken of justification as the forgiveness of sins, a point of entry back into grace which allowed one then to merit eternal life by cooperating with the work of grace. Calvin agrees with the medieval tradition in viewing forgiveness of sins as the *principium iustitiae*. The difference centers on when and how the *complementum* takes place. For most early and medieval interpreters—especially those influenced by Origen and Augustine—the *complementum* corresponded to a life-long process of renewal by grace. Calvin retains this notion of regeneration, now known as “sanctification,” rather than as justification, but he argues instead that both the *principium* and the *complementum* were accomplished wholly in the past, at the death and resurrection of Christ.

The first-generation reformers opposed the idea that human cooperation with grace could fill up, or complete, the atoning work of Christ, but they were slow in devising models which went beyond mere forgiveness of sins to account for the gift of eternal life. Some, such as Bucer, rejected the Catholic sacramental system while remaining within a more or less traditional Augustinian framework of justification as

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<sup>112</sup> *Comm. Rom.* (1556), Rom 4:25; COE 13:99.

a transformative process resulting in the *complementum iustitiae*. Others, such as Melancthon, seem unaware of the problem, simply assuming that forgiveness of sins was all that was necessary to inherit eternal life. The distance between Calvin and Melancthon on this question is apparent when we compare Calvin's exegesis of this passage with that of Melancthon in his *commentary* published in 1540:

Paul distinguishes death and resurrection, and when mention is made of resurrection, the reign of Christ and his priesthood should be understood. We belong to Christ because Christ, our high priest, makes intercession for us with the Father and accounts us righteous. Likewise, because Christ lives and reigns, he gives the Holy Spirit and makes alive, frees from wrath and eternal death, and raises the dead. And faith apprehends both and applies them to us, namely the death of Christ and the resurrected mediator, high priest, and giver of life. It apprehends the death of Christ in order that it may hold fast to the sacrificial victim it declares to be the sure ransom of our sins. . . . Not only the death of Christ must be apprehended, but also that our high priest with the Father has been raised again, that he truly hears us, is truly efficacious, truly gives life, gives the Holy Spirit, helps us, frees us from eternal death, will raise the dead, and will give new and everlasting life, wisdom, and righteousness. Paul has included all these things when he says, 'He rose again for our justification.'<sup>113</sup>

For Calvin, the parallel between negative imputation (i.e., forgiveness of sins) and positive imputation (i.e., the *iustitia Christi*) clearly corresponds to the two components of Christ's passion as a completed whole: "*first*, that our sins were expiated by the death of Christ, and *secondly*, that by his resurrection was obtained our righteousness." Melancthon, on the other hand, places Christ himself, in his mediatorial role, parallel with the expiation of sins accomplished by his death: "faith apprehends both and applies them to us, namely the death of Christ and the resurrected mediator, high priest, and giver of life." This last point may seem like a subtle distinction, but it ultimately amounts to an important difference in the way

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<sup>113</sup> *Romans* (1544); Kramer, 120-21.

justification is construed in relational terms. Melancthon's model preserves a unitive aspect, insofar as faith apprehends Christ, the risen mediator, who in turn "makes intercession for us with the Father and accounts us righteous." Calvin's soteriology, of course, has an important place for union with Christ, but he is perhaps more consistent than Melancthon in rigorously maintaining the conceptual distinction between this union and the benefits which it confers.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Evangelical exegetes approached the text of Paul's letter to the Romans with a wide variety of concerns throughout the 1520's and 1530's. The break with the Roman curia initiated by Luther and quickly followed by dozens of cities in upper Germany and Switzerland prompted a reevaluation of central Christian teaching on the matter of salvation. The first-generation reformers returned to scripture with a fresh set of eyes, searching both for ammunition against their enemies, as well as for a renewed sense of Christian identity, grounded in the text. For some, such as the German humanist and reformer Johannes Oecolampadius, the Reformation offered an opportunity to recover earlier patristic insights which had become obscured by the ravages of time and the accumulation of corrosive traditions. For others, like Philipp Melancthon, Paul's letter to the Romans offered nothing less than a brief for Christian freedom—freedom not only from the oppressive machinery of a corrupt ecclesiastical hierarchy, but at an even deeper level from the torments of a sin-sick conscience. For still others, like the former Dominican-cum-humanist scholar Martin Bucer, Luther's and Melancthon's recovery of a central biblical insight

could be integrated and harmonized with the best of patristic theology in a manner that did full justice to both.

All throughout this twenty year period, it remained unclear whether the emerging Protestant soteriology would conceive itself as simply a recovery or repristinization of older traditional themes, or as a genuinely new development in the history of Christian thought. Even Melanchthon, who of the authors surveyed here was clearly the most radical in his divergence from patristic exegesis, seems clearly to have grasped what was at stake in this position. Unwilling to explicitly surrender the sanction of antiquity for his doctrine, Melanchthon deliberately concealed his divergence from Augustine on this issue until it became clear in 1532 that this his hopes of gaining imperial recognition for the *Confessio Augustana* had failed. Even after Melanchthon's public critique of Augustine in his *Commentarii* of that year, however, the question was far from decided. Bucer's massive *Metaphrases* on Romans four years later took up many of the same lines of interpretation Melanchthon had privately urged his colleagues to abandon, and he must have groaned inwardly as Bucer attempted blithely to harmonize his positions with those of Augustine and other patristic authorities. Even Calvin, who grasped the logic of Melanchthon's forensic grammar of justification much more clearly than did Bucer, avoided direct engagement with Augustine in his treatment of Romans in 1540, and though shying away from Bucer's notion of *duplex iustitia*, Calvin fails to make any clear distinction in this commentary between justification and the inward renewal brought about by grace.

Given the fluidity of this situation, it would seem that early evangelical exegesis readings of Paul's gospel hold little coherence during this period. My analysis, after all, has focused on the ways in which these writers read the text with varying agendas and reached often starkly contradictory conclusions. And yet, it is during the decade between the Augsburg Confession and the Regensburg Colloquy that the first—and perhaps, the most important—plank in the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* not only emerges, but gains wide currency among the reformers as the fundamental grammar of justification. By construing justification primarily as God's *pronouncement*, Protestant writers appealed to a set of images and analogies which set their soteriology fundamentally in tension with traditional Catholic categories of interpretation. Some, such as Bucer and even Calvin, were not as quick to grasp the implications of this move. Both, however, came to see in time that the language of justification they had inherited from Luther and Melancthon was more than a rhetoric of dissent—it constituted the point of departure for a fundamentally new way of conceiving Christian salvation.



## Conclusion

In the spring of 1541, a group of Catholic and Protestant theologians met together at the imperial city of Regensburg to discuss the possibility of a theological rapprochement between the warring factions. The Protestant groups were represented by Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's Wittenberg colleague, Martin Bucer, the former Dominican friar, and Johannes Pistorius, adviser to Landgrave Philip of Hesse. After a week of intense debate, a tentative agreement was reached on May 2 regarding the doctrine of justification, an agreement allowing for a recognition of both imputed and inherent righteousness:

So living faith is that which both appropriates mercy in Christ, believing that the righteousness which is in Christ is freely imputed to it, and at the same time receives the promise of the Holy Spirit and love. Therefore the faith that truly justifies is that faith which is effectual through love. Nevertheless it remains true, that it is by this faith that we are justified (i.e., accepted and reconciled to God) inasmuch as it appropriates the mercy and righteousness which is imputed to us on account of Christ and his merit, not on account of the worthiness or perfection of the righteousness imparted to us in Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, it would appear that this formula is almost a complete capitulation to the Protestant position, in that the formal cause of righteousness is specifically limited to *iustitia imputata*, rather than *iustitia inhaerens*. Yet when the draft was shown to Luther, he was less than enthusiastic. In a letter of 10/11 May to the Elector of Saxony, Johann Friedrich, Luther derides the formulation as a “patched

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<sup>1</sup> ARC 6:53.27-34; ET, Lane, *Justification*, 234.

and all-embracing” affair, arguing that the two ideas of justification by faith alone without works (Rom 3) and faith working through love (Gal 5) had been “slapped together and glued” (*zu samen gereymet und geleymet*): the one refers to becoming righteous, and the other to the life of the righteous following therefrom.<sup>2</sup>

Luther’s rejection of Article 5 at Regensburg is an important index of just how far the situation had developed in the decade since Augsburg. In 1531, Luther had not only approved of Melanchthon’s defense of the Protestant understanding of justification in the *Apology*, but he had even added a postscript in Melanchthon’s letter to Brenz that spring, concurring in Melanchthon’s rejection of Augustine’s transformative construal of justification. Whether or not he approved at the time of Melanchthon citing Augustine “as if he were wholly of the same mind” is not entirely clear. But in 1541, Melanchthon was up to his old tricks again, and this time, Luther was having none of it. The Regensburg formula limited the basis for justification to faith alone, it is true, but the definition of faith stipulated in the text had an oddly familiar ring:

So it is a reliable and sound doctrine that the sinner is justified by a living and efficacious faith, for through it we are pleasing and acceptable to God on account of Christ. And living faith is what we call the movement of the Holy Spirit, by which those who truly repent of their old life are lifted up to God and truly appropriate the mercy promised in Christ, so that they now truly recognize that they have received the remission of sins and reconciliation on account of the merits of Christ. . . . But this happens to no one unless also at the same time (*simul*) love is infused which heals the will so that the healed will may begin to fulfill the law, just as Saint Augustine said.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> WABr 9:406-09, #3616.

<sup>3</sup> ARC 6:53.19-27; ET, Lane, *Justification*, 234.

Defining faith itself as a *motus spiritus sancti* seemed to Luther as compromising the clear line that had been drawn during the last decade between justification and regeneration, between the inward work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the penitent sinner and God's declaration of justice pronounced *extra nos*. And the confusion would only be heightened by invoking Augustine. Melanchthon might still have been willing to appeal to the latter's authority *propter publicam*, but Luther was not: talk about the healed will fulfilling the law could only confuse the issue and allow their opponents a foothold in reasserting the Augustinian model.

The negotiations at Regensburg ultimately foundered not because Luther and the papal curia both opposed the formula on justification (which they did), but because of intractable differences on matters of ecclesiology and the sacraments, which suggests that two decades after Luther's initial break with Rome over the matter of indulgences, the finer points of soteriology were no longer the driving issue in the controversy.<sup>4</sup> Melanchthon was still willing to play fast-and-loose with his formulations, grafting Augustinian language into the article on justification in what amounted to a virtual surrender to Bucer's position. And Calvin, still a relatively junior player at the conference in 1541, had not yet learned from experience, as had Melanchthon and Luther, difficulty of reconciling Augustine's teaching on justification with the evangelical cause. Despite the impressive array of evangelical luminaries who did sign on to the compromise, it amounted to less impressive an achievement than is often supposed. The Regensburg formula thus

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<sup>4</sup> Lexutt, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch*, 265, ff.

marks an important transition in the emergence of the Protestant *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*: not only did it prove once and for all the futility of slapdash conciliar patchwork, but it demonstrated that by this point the issue of justification itself had been overshadowed by more fundamental disagreements, disagreements revolving more closely around issues of authority. After Regensburg, theological discourse began to take on a rather different character, as both sides turned from conciliation to consolidation, circling the wagons to reinforce confessional identity with ever increasingly clarity and precision.

Viewed as a point of transition, at least from the Protestant side, from reform to confession formation, the Colloquy of Regensburg makes for a convenient vantage point from which to survey the argument I have developed in this work thus far. I took as my point of departure Philip Benedict's dictum of post-confessional scholarship that the essential features of the rival confessional identities "were not fixed from the start, but instead both their core beliefs and their boundaries came to be defined over time in dialogue and dispute with rival confessions."<sup>5</sup> Much of the legwork in chapters 2, 4, and 5 was devoted to demonstrating the wide variety of exegetical options on offer in early evangelical interpretation of Romans, as well as the varied motivations and agendas which drove the exegetes themselves. The main contours of this varied landscape, however, were only fully visible against the backdrop of patristic and medieval interpretation, interpretations which the reformers themselves struggled to come to terms with. All throughout the first

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict, "What is Post-Confessional Reformation History?" *ARG* 97 (2006): 277.

generation of the Reformation era, it remained an open question whether the Protestant “rediscovery” of Paul’s gospel would ultimately resolve into a repristinization of an earlier patristic consensus, or whether it would emerge as a genuinely new departure in the history of Christian thought and practice. That it took the latter course was anyone’s guess until Regensburg at the earliest.

More than the sheer diversity of early Protestant treatments of Paul, however, I have attempted to demonstrate certain patterns of convergence in the way these writers went about the interpretive task. Initially motivated by a common rhetoric of dissent, these first-generation reformers increasingly drew on a common stock of distinctive theological vocabulary and adopted similar exegetical strategies in navigating the biblical text. Throughout this period, no figure looms larger than Philipp Melanchthon in setting the tone for Protestant interpretation of Romans. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how Melanchthon’s new rhetorical-critical approach to the text enabled later interpreters, such as John Calvin, to defuse a dangerous potential objection to the emerging doctrine of justification by faith alone, redirecting the force of Paul’s stern warnings of future judgment in Rom 2 away from the *status epistolae* which differentiated justification from law in Rom 3. Although the early Reformed exegetes read these passages very differently from Melanchthon, Calvin’s adoption of this interpretive strategy initiated a convergence between the two traditions, eventually securing a more or less “standard” Protestant reading of the text. The long run-up to this development charted in Chapter 1 highlights not only the radically new direction charted by Protestant exegesis of this passage, but also

the ways in which the tradition struggled to find a place—admittedly, a vastly attenuated place—for some notion of eschatological reward for good works.

In Chapter 4 I essayed to place on firmer ground my earlier assertion in the Introduction that Protestant engagement with Paul was not simply the story of Luther's later followers swallowing his early *Turmerlebnis* whole. On the contrary, I argued, the very notion of a "Reformation breakthrough" in Pauline exegesis stands on rather shaky ground—at least when that breakthrough is narrated in the dramatic hindsight of Luther's later reminiscences. Rather than viewing Luther's early Pauline exegesis as driven by the sudden recovery of a single revolutionary insight, the *iustitia Dei passiva*, simultaneously a recovery both of the authentic Paul and the authentic Augustine, I argued that Luther's early lectures on Romans are unimpeachably Catholic and unmistakably Augustinian. Augustine's reading of Paul, in other words, is the starting point for Luther's journey, not its endpoint. But in his wrestling with Paul and Augustine through the course of these lectures, I pointed to evidence of a nagging dissatisfaction with the solution at which Augustine had arrived: command what you will, and give what you command. This dissatisfaction was rooted in Luther's own experience of seeking the grace to fulfill the law—seeking, and not finding. "We ask," Luther poignantly observes, "and yet we do not receive."

These same qualms of conscience are clearly on display in Melancthon's earliest treatment of Romans, published in 1522, and the quest to secure an unshakeable peace for the terrified conscience grows to become the driving concern

of his exegesis by 1532. Melanchthon's almost single-minded agenda in rereading Romans in search of this assurance is not the only approach on offer, however, it quickly set the terms of the conversation among Protestant exegetes. Melanchthon remained cagey regarding his growing distance from Augustine on the matter of justification, and this may account in some degree for the ready acceptance his forensic imagery found even with so strongly Augustinian a figure as Bucer. But in the end, the decision of major Reformed writers such as Bucer and Calvin to construe justification in parallel with Old Testament usage introduced fundamental difficulties in integrating Melanchthon's aims into the Augustinian framework. Bucer maintained this two-fold notion of justification as both declaration and transformation at least through the Regensburg Colloquy of 1541; Calvin also maintained a notion of *duplex iustificatio*, but only by severing the link between the reward due to works (which were accepted only by virtue of the prior acceptance of the person) and eternal life. In the end, however, the hard distinction first introduced by Melanchthon in his 1532 *Commentarii* between justification and regeneration became a fundamental boundary marker for Protestant theological identity in the confessional age.

Thus far have I traced the emergence of the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* in the present work. By 1540 the language of forensic justification had been adopted by major commentators in both the Reformed and the Lutheran camps, and a distinction between justification and regeneration was implicit, if not yet always explicit, in the very grammar of Protestant theology. But

there is, as yet, almost no trace of the other major development in the emergence of the confessional doctrine: the two-fold formula balancing the non-imputation sins with the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. In the concluding section of Chapter 5, I pointed in the direction of future research by highlighting the materialization of this theme in the later editions of Calvin's commentary on Romans. Much work remains to be done in setting this development in its proper contexts—both in relation to patristic and medieval interpretation of Rom 4 and in relation to intra-Protestant debates in the 1540's and 1550's. For the present, however, I must rest content with having laid the groundwork for a post-confessional analysis of the ways in which early Protestants theorized salvation from the Pauline corpus and with having added some texture and nuance to our understanding of the ways in which early modern Christians engaged with scripture in light of tradition.



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## Biography

David Cunningham Fink was born on September 12, 1975, in Oklahoma City, OK. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN) in 2001 and a Master of Divinity from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL) in 2004. He is author of the following articles: “‘The Doers of the Law Will Be Justified’: The Exegetical Origins of Martin Bucer’s *Triplex Iustificatio*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 58, No. 2 (Oct 2007): 485-524; “The Reformation Revis(it)ed: A Review Essay of Recent Survey Texts,” *Fides et Historia* 40, No. 2 (2008): 49-66. From 2002 to 2004 he was a recipient of the Dean’s Scholarship at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. At Duke University, he was awarded a Lilly Fellowship (2004-2009), the Allen and Joyce Temple Graduate Research Fellowship (Summer 2008), and two Conference Travel Fellowships (Fall 2007, Spring 2009).