

The Christo-Centrism of Faith in Christ: Martin Luther's Reading of Galatians 2.16, 19–20

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It is regularly suggested that the great weakness of reformational orderings of 'faith' and 'justification' is that they fail to coordinate Christology and the doctrine of justification. Behind this assertion is a particular construal of the *pistis Christou* debate: the interpretative decision to read Christ as the object of faith contributes to an anthropocentric account of justification whereas a 'subjective' interpretative of the genitive phrase restores the (Pauline) relationship between Jesus and justification. This article will argue that this is a misreading of Protestant theology, at least as it comes to expression in Martin Luther's exegesis of Galatians 2.16, 19–20 which presents a radically Christocentric account of 'faith in Christ'. For Luther, the *sola fide*, as an interpretation of a Pauline antithesis—'not by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ'—, is an anthropological negation and a christological confession: it excludes the human as the subject of salvation and confesses Christ, who is present in faith, as the *one* by, in, and on the basis of whom God justifies the ungodly.

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'What', asked Karl Barth, 'is the *sola fide* other than a faint echo of the *solus Christus*?'¹ In implicit answer to this question, an increasing number of Pauline scholars have failed to see what, for Barth, was the obvious and inextricable connection between faith in Christ and the person and work of Christ. Referring to an essay by Gerhard Ebeling, Richard Hays has suggested that the great weakness of the reformational 'understanding of "faith" and "justification" in Paul is that it offers no coherent account of the relation between the doctrine of justification and Christology'.² Within this rhetorical context, the *pistis Christou* debate is a

1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 632.

2 Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3.1–4.11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2d ed. 2002) xxix; quoting Gerhard Ebeling, 'Jesus and Faith', *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963) 203.

line in the sand: translate the genitive phrase as ‘faith in Christ’ and your reading of Paul is anthropological, anthropocentric, contractual, and now even Arian; but interpret *pistis Christou* as ‘the faith/faithfulness of Christ’, and thus as a compressed reference to the narrative of Jesus’ life and death, and your exegesis is christological, theocentric, covenantal, and Athanasian.³

The intention of this article is not to plant my flag in an unpopular camp, taking a stand with those influenced by Heidegger and Arius in defense of a *sola fide* that supposedly drives a wedge between justification and Jesus. Rather, I will argue that this semantic debate, as it is currently construed, poses false theological alternatives. Contrary to the criticism of some opponents of the subjective genitive interpretation, I do not think, as Douglas Moo does for example, that the notion of Christ exercising faith is theologically dubious.⁴ Borrowing a formulation from Michael Allen, I regard ‘the faith of Christ’ as both christologically coherent and soteriologically necessary.⁵ That being said, I also regard ‘the faith of Christ’ to be a mistranslation of Paul’s *pistis Christou* phrases and the theological correction it claims to offer to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of reformational readings of Paul.⁶ While I cannot hope to

- 3 Hays introduced the ‘anthropological-christological’ contrast with Bultmann as the named polemical target (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, xxv–xxvi). The expansion of the contrast to include ‘anthropocentric-theocentric’ is most notable in the work of Douglas Campbell, as are the ‘contractual-covenantal’ and ‘Arian-Athanasian’ distinctions which he borrows from James Torrance’s critique of Federal Theology. For Campbell, see especially *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). For Torrance, see ‘Covenant and Contract: A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-century Scotland’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970) 51–76; Torrance, ‘The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981) 225–43. Interestingly, in the essay Hays quotes, Ebeling anticipated this rhetorical situation and warned that we must ‘not let ourselves be impressed by the labels...like “anthropological approach”’ (‘Jesus and Faith’, 202 n. 1).
- 4 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 225. Moo’s opinion reflects Aquinas’s insistence that the infused knowledge of the incarnate Son negates Jesus’ need for faith; see Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 3a. 7. 3. References to the *Summa Theologiae* are to the Blackfriars edition (60 vols.; New York: McGraw–Hill, 1963–76).
- 5 R. Michael Allen, *The Christ’s Faith: A Dogmatic Account* (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology; London: T&T Clark, 2009).
- 6 Once the theological objections are addressed, the strong semantic case for something like the objective genitive can be heard: (1) Paul’s instrumental faith clauses are derived from the ἐκ πίστεως of Hab 2.4, which does not (*pace* R. B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005] 119–42) employ ὁ δίκαιος as a christological title but as a reference to the generic, believing human, a point confirmed by the appeal to Abraham in Rom 4 and Gal 3 (Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007] 240). (2) In Paul, Jesus is never the subject of the verb πιστεῦω and Paul’s habit of interpreting an instance of the verb in a citation with reference to the noun (e.g. Rom 4.3, 5; 9.32–33; 10.5–11, 16–17) indicates that the meaning of the noun and verb have not drifted apart (R. B. Matlock, ‘Detheologizing

establish this double-assertion within the confines of this article, I hope to point in that direction by attending to Martin Luther's reading of Gal 2.16, 19–20. My thesis can be stated simply: For Luther, 'faith in Christ' is christocentric.⁷ More fully expressed, the *sola fide*, as an interpretation of a Pauline antithesis—'not by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ'—, is an anthropological negation and a christological confession: it excludes the human as the subject of salvation and confesses Christ, who is present in faith, as the *one* by, in, and on the basis of whom God justifies the ungodly.

1. Not by Works of the Law

As Luther reads Gal 2.16, he notes that Paul does not present faith as an abstraction; he presents it in an antithesis: 'a person is not justified by works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). This antithesis, as Barry Matlock observes, reflects a Pauline pattern—a form of πίστις is set in contrast to law and/or works with δικαιοῦ or δικαιοσύνη as the middle term.⁸ For Luther, this syntactical structure becomes theologically significant at Gal 2.16: justification is *both* 'not by works of law' *and* 'through faith in Jesus Christ', and therefore, as Luther puts it, Paul 'is contrasting the righteousness of faith with the righteousness of the law'.⁹ According to the summative *argumentum* to the 1531/5 lectures on Galatians, Luther regards this distinction between 'two kinds of righteousness' as 'the argument of the epistle'.¹⁰ The antithesis between 'works of the law' and

the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective', *NovT* 42 [2000] 1–23 [13–14]; cf. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 243). (3). The question of redundancy in Rom 3.22, Gal 2.16, 3.22 and Phil 3.9 points to 'a much wider pattern of repetition of πίστις/πιστεύω in Galatians and Romans, rooted in Genesis 15.6 and Habakkuk 2.4' that functions to disambiguate the genitive phrase (R. B. Matlock, 'Saving Faith: The Rhetoric and Semantics of πίστις in Paul', *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies* (ed. M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009) 73–89 (89).

7 Stephen Chester, 'It is No Longer I Who Live: Justification by Faith and Participation in Christ in Martin Luther's Exegesis of Galatians', *NTS* 55 (2009) 315–37, reaches a similar conclusion by considering the relationship between justification and participation in Luther's reading of Galatians.

8 Matlock, 'Saving Faith', 77 notes Gal 2.16, 19, 20, 21; 3.2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 24, 26; 5.4, 5; Rom 3.20, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31; 4.3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16; 5.1; 9.30, 32; 10.5, 6; Phil 3.9; cf. Rom 4.4–5; 9.32 (Eph 2.8–9).

9 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/5), *LW* 26:122 = *WA* 40/I:218, 15–18. References to Luther are from the 55 volume American edition of *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan et al.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1958–86).

10 *LW* 26:4 = *WA* 40/I:40, 25–6. While this article will focus on the 1531 lectures, it is worth noting that this basic contrast is present in the 1519 revision of his 1516–17 *Lectures on Galatians* as

'faith in Jesus Christ' is expressed exegetically as an essential contrast between active and passive righteousness. In explicit disagreement with Jerome and Erasmus who interpret the phrase 'works of the law' as a restricted reference to the Ceremonial Law, Luther, based on the subsequent argument of Galatians which concerns the whole law, insists that 'works of the law be taken in the broadest possible sense'.¹¹ Law names the divine demand and therefore the entire Mosaic legislation. Thus, in his reading, the excluded option in Gal 2.16—justification by works of the law—is a reference to the establishment of righteousness before God on the basis of works performed in accordance with the law: it specifies a justification that is grounded in human action rather than divine giving.

While this 'active righteousness' has its proper place—after justification and before the world in service to one's neighbor—, it oversteps its limits if and when the topic is the righteousness that avails before God. To paraphrase Luther, justification is outside the law's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, in what he referred to as an 'unhappy habit', 'reason cannot refrain from looking at active righteousness'.¹² Human history is haunted by the serpent's words: 'Did God really say? You will be as God'. For Luther, the unbelief evoked by the serpent's question has as its inevitable consequence the self-righteous idolatry suggested by the serpent's promise: failing to live from the word of the creator and thus outside themselves in faith toward God and love for others, human existence is characterized by the incurvation associated with attempting to play God—what Luther called the *ambitio divinitatis*.

Within this theological frame, 'justification by works of the law' specifies the fundamental human error: disbelief in the giftedness of creation and salvation and a corresponding attempt to establish and save oneself. While this may appear more like theological expansion than exegesis of Gal 2.16, Luther indicates his awareness of the particularity of Paul's polemical target and thus the distance between the first and sixteenth centuries. In his words, 'For if according to the testimony of the apostle, no one is justified by the works of the divine law, much less will anyone be justified by the rule of Benedict or Francis?'¹³ Put another way, if the Mosaic Law, which Luther can refer to as the 'best of all things in the world'¹⁴ and the 'most salutary doctrine of life', 'cannot', as he says in the Heidelberg

well: 'There are two ways in which a man is justified... In the first place, there is the external way, by works... This is the kind of righteousness the Law of Moses, even the Decalogue itself, brings about... In the second place, there is the inward way, on the basis of faith and of grace' (LW 27:219–20).

¹¹ LW 26:122 = WA 40/I:217, 27–28.

¹² LW 26:5 = WA 40/I:42, 18–19.

¹³ LW 26:140 = WA 40/I:245.

¹⁴ LW 26:5 = WA 40/I:42, 22.

Disputation, ‘advance humans on their way to righteousness’,¹⁵ then, *mutatis mutandis*, merits and masses certainly do not justify. The issue, then, is not primarily ‘what’ people do (that is, which laws) or even ‘who’ performs works (the human or the Holy Spirit); for Luther, Paul’s critique centers on ‘why’ works of the law are performed. As he puts it, ‘good works and love must also be taught; but this must be in its proper time and place... But when we are involved in a discussion of justification, there is no room for speaking about the law’.¹⁶

The reason for this totalizing claim is that, as noted above, Luther regards the righteousness of the law, and thus justification by works of the law, as fundamentally active: human beings, bound to exist as ‘unhappy and proud gods’,¹⁷ are tethered to their own righteousness, which as Luther notes, appears as a synonym to ‘the righteousness of the law’ in Romans 10 and Philippians 3. The negation of justification by works of the law in Gal 2.16 is therefore, according to Luther’s reading, the exclusion of the human as the subject of salvation. This excluded soteriological option is essential to understanding the corresponding Pauline phrase: διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The coordination of these mutually interpreting assertions suggests that the negation of justification by works of the law provides a negative definition of the phrase ‘faith in Jesus Christ’. In other words, for Luther, ‘by works of the law’ is a soteriological antonym to ‘faith in Christ’ and thus, as its excluded opposite, entails and partially defines the debated phrase: not by works of the law indicates that the human is not a salvific subject; faith in Christ identifies Jesus as the savior.

It is precisely this observation—that it is Jesus rather than the believer who justifies—that motivates the translation of the genitive phrase as the faith or faithfulness of Jesus Christ. As Richard Hays remarks, ‘the Christological [that is, subjective] reading highlights the salvific efficacy of Jesus Christ’s faithfulness... the anthropological [that is, objective] reading stresses the salvific efficacy of the human act of faith’.¹⁸ If Paul’s antithesis excludes the human as a co-operative saving agent—and this, as we have seen, is how Luther reads the negated reference to justification by works of the law –, and if the translation of διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as ‘through faith in Jesus Christ’ stresses the efficacy of a human act, turning faith, as Hays says, into a ‘bizarre sort of work’,¹⁹ then the subjective reading would appear to provide a necessary soteriological solution. Interestingly, however, the current concern to ensure the singularity of the salvific

15 Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), *LW* 31:39, 42.

16 *LW* 26:137 = *WA* 40/I:240, 17–19.

17 Martin Luther, *Work on the Psalms*, *WA* 5:128, 36.

18 Richard B. Hays, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology: What Is at Stake?’, *Pauline Theology*. Vol. 4, *Looking Back, Pressing On* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997) 35–60.

19 Hays, ‘ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology’, 293.

subject (*solus Christus*) is exactly what Luther and his Protestant heirs thought they were purifying and proclaiming with their insistence that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. In other words, for the reformers the *sola fide* was consistent with, and as we will see necessary to, the *solus Christus*. This requires a fresh consideration of Luther's Christocentric understanding of faith in Christ.

2. Through Faith in Jesus Christ

Whatever Luther thought faith in Jesus Christ was, he certainly did not regard it as the human contribution to salvation—as 'a bizarre sort of work in which Christians jump through the entranceway of salvation', to quote Hays again.²⁰ In a series of Disputations on Rom 3.28, a parallel to Gal 2.16, Luther repeatedly critiques the thesis that faith is a work and therefore works justify. First, just as law and promise are distinct, so works and faith are distinct. Works relate to law; faith relates to promise, and it is therefore a category mistake to label faith a work. Second, faith is more properly called a divine work than a human work because it is given by the Holy Spirit in the speaking of the promise. As the 1519 *Lectures on Galatians* puts it, 'Faith comes through the Word of Christ'.²¹ In other words, for Luther, faith is not a work because it is oriented to God's promise and because God creates faith by his promise.²² As Oswald Bayer summarizes, 'turning toward salvation, which is what faith is, is in no way the work of the human being; it is the work of God—just as the divine promise that creates faith is solely the work of God'.²³ Thus, in distinction to the active righteousness of the law, Luther calls the righteousness of faith passive or receptive and insists that 'here we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us'.²⁴ This language is reminiscent of Luther's earlier definition of faith in his 1522 preface to his published lectures on Romans: 'Faith is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old Adam and makes altogether different people.'²⁵ For Luther, then, the first thing to say about the righteousness of faith is that 'we do not perform but receive'²⁶ and thus he can answer his own question 'do we do nothing and work nothing in order to obtain this righteousness?' with an emphatic 'I reply: nothing at all'.²⁷

20 Hays, 'ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology', 293.

21 *LW* 27:220.

22 *The Disputation Concerning Justification* (1536), *LW* 34:189 = *WA* 39/I:120.

23 Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 188.

24 *LW* 26:5 = *WA* 40/I:41, 1–2.

25 Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (1522), *LW* 35:370 = *WA*, *DB* 7:11.

26 *LW* 26:6 = *WA* 40/I:43, 15–16.

27 *LW* 26:8 = *WA* 40/I:47, 15–16.

This interpretation of ‘through faith’ in Gal 2.16 is informed by a reading of Romans 4. As Paul’s citation of Gen 15.6 in Rom 4.3 indicates, Abraham is the unambiguous subject of the verb πιστεύω, and yet the antithesis of Rom 4.4–5 makes it impossible to interpret this human act as a ‘work’. Precisely as the subject of πιστεύω, Abraham is ‘the one who does not work’ (ὁ μὴ ἐργαζόμενος)—he is, as v. 4 says, ‘without works’ (χωρὶς ἔργων)—and his justification is therefore the act of the one who justifies the ungodly. Here, as in Luther’s reading of Gal 2.16, πίστις, as an anthropological action, is an anthropological negation—it is the act of the ungodly in the absence of works and what is present as possible when works of the law are excluded.²⁸ According to this interpretation, faith is not a human contribution or a new point of correspondence between divine saving action and the believing human subject; it is an affirmation of the contradiction between the form and object of God’s activity: God justifies the ungodly, gives life to the dead and calls non-being into being (Rom 4.5, 17). Thus, in Barth’s words, the ‘*sola fide* is the great negation’²⁹—it is the site of ungodliness, deadness, and nothingness at which the creative and gracious God operates out of the opposite. In this sense, as Bayer puts it, ‘the human being who believes thus speaks in *via negationis*—not about God but about himself’.³⁰ For Luther, the exclusion of justification by works of the law and the announcement of justification by faith in Jesus Christ means that ‘faith’ is an anthropological ‘no’—it takes God’s side in his judgment against the sinner; but, to anticipate our argument, it is also a theological ‘yes’ because it is directed to the God who speaks and, as Luther would quickly add, who thereby effects (*Verbum efficax*), the unbelievable ‘yes’ of justification.³¹

Luther, as was his rhetorical habit, speaks positively about faith with great diversity. Faith is the fulfillment of the first commandment; faith is the receptive posture of the creature in distinction from and dependent on the creator; faith clings to and is created by the promise; faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace; and on the list could go. However, despite this variety, when answering the specific question why the righteousness of faith avails before God, Luther’s answer is consistently christological. Commenting on Gal 2.16 Luther says, ‘faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ’; and therefore ‘the true Christian righteousness’ is not the human act of believing;

28 This theme is already present in the 1519 lectures, where Luther insists that righteousness ‘on the basis of faith and of grace’ occurs ‘when a man utterly despairs of his former righteousness’ (LW 27:220).

29 Barth, CD IV/1, 621.

30 Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 172; cf. 191: ‘faith, for Luther, is in forgetting the self completely’.

31 Cf. Hans J. Iwand, *The Righteousness of Faith according to Luther* (trans. Randi H. Lundell; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008): ‘in faith a person takes a decisively judging position for God and *against* himself’ (italics original).

it is 'the Christ who is grasped by faith...and on account of whom God counts us righteous'.³² This recalls the marriage imagery from *The Freedom of the Christian*, where Luther relates faith to a wedding ring and grounds justification in the marriage union between Christ and the sinner such that the Christian can say with the Song of Solomon, 'My beloved is mine and I am his'.³³ The intimacy of this account is anchored in the 'joyous exchange', in which Christ takes the believer's sin and gives his righteousness such that justification is participation in the present Christ. In Luther's words, 'faith takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in faith itself'.³⁴ It is therefore Christ, who is present in faith, that is 'our righteousness', a point Luther repeats throughout the Galatians lectures. This means that justification is, as the reformers consistently affirmed, *propter Christum*; it is by, in, and on the basis of Christ alone, and thus, as Luther remarks, the expression 'faith alone' is a shorthand for a three-part affirmation: 'These three things are joined together: faith, Christ, and imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and God accounts you righteous on account of Christ'.³⁵

This christological focus continues in Luther's comments on Gal 2.19-21. As Luther notes, the terms 'law', 'faith', and 'righteousness' in these verses indicate that the subject matter has not shifted, but the imagery, as Gerhard Forde remarks, has moved from the courtroom to the cemetery.³⁶ Justification, as Luther reads Gal 2.19-20, is a matter of life and death; or perhaps more accurately, of death and life. Through the law one dies to the law so that one might live to God. Luther reads these references to death and life realistically, and the result is what we might call a relational re-creation of the self. The demand of the law condemns and kills the sinner, first in the event of the cross in which Christ is crucified under the curse (cf. Gal 3.13) and also in the hearing of 'the word of the cross' which makes present the crucified Christ to faith. In other words, it is the event and proclamation of Christ crucified, a moment and message that is both judgment and justification, that kills the sinner in their soteriological relationship to the law and resurrects the Christian in righteous (that is, Christ-defined) relationship to God. In this sense, the life of the Christian, as Luther expresses Paul's confession 'not me but Christ', is an 'alien life' and Christian righteousness is therefore an alien righteousness (*iustitia aliena*).³⁷ Because the believer is crucified with Christ and alive only as and through faith in Christ, the Christian

32 *LW* 26:130 = *WA* 40/I:229, 22-30.

33 Martin Luther, 'Freedom of a Christian', *Three Treatises* (trans. W. A. Lambert; rev. Harold Grimm; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 286-7.

34 *LW* 26:129 = *WA* 40/I:228, 31-229, 15. For the 'joyous exchange' in the Galatians lectures, see *LW* 26:284 = *WA* 40:443, 23-4.

35 *LW* 26:132 = *WA* 40/I:233, 16-19.

36 Gerhard Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

37 *LW* 26:170 = *WA* 40/I:287, 30-288, 2.

possesses (though does not own)³⁸ the righteousness that remains *extra nos*, that remains properly christological. Righteousness before God is thus ever extrinsic; imputation just is the presence of Christ in faith.³⁹

This interpretation of justification in terms of death and life reinforces the anthropological negation and christological confession indicated by Luther's reading of the antithesis between works of the law and faith in Christ. As in Romans 4, where the justification of the ungodly is related to God's acts of raising the dead and creating out of nothing (see Rom 4.5, 17), Luther reads the recurrence of righteousness language in Gal 2.21 as indicating that the references to death and life denote and describe God's act of judging and justifying the sinner. The self that remains alive to the law, the Old Adam, is, as Luther put it in his 1526 interpretation of Jonah 1.5, able to know that there is a God, but to know who God is and that God is 'for me' belongs only to faith.⁴⁰ Thus, for Luther, the 'for me' of Gal 2.20 cannot be confessed by the Old Adam; it is a confession of the one who has been crucified with Christ and who lives as and in Christ. Faith as an affirmation that Christ gave himself for me is an impossible possibility; it is a reality only on the other side of resurrection.⁴¹

For Luther, the divine act of self-giving that is the death of Jesus is the gift that grounds justification. In other words, it is the story of Jesus, of the one who loved me and gave himself for me, that is the gift of righteousness. As Luther put it, 'It was "the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"'. It was not I who loved the Son of God and gave myself for Him.⁴² In this sense, the *solus Christus* is the content of the *sola gratia*: grace is the self-giving of Christ for me (Gal 2.20; or 'for our sins', 1.4).⁴³ The faith that, in one of Luther's favorite pastoral phrases, properly applies the pronoun—the faith that believes that God in Christ is *for me*⁴⁴—in no way qualifies the singularity or unconditionality of this christological gift; rather, the *sola fide* points to the presence of the self-giving Christ

38 Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 120–5 indicates Luther's awareness of the distinction in Roman law between the right to use (*possessio*) and ownership (*proprietas*).

39 Cf. Chester, 'It Is No Longer I Who Live', 317: 'In his exegesis of Paul, Luther displays a profoundly participatory understanding of justification in which human faith is of salvific significance solely because it is itself christocentric'.

40 *Lectures on Jonah* (1525/6), *LW* 19:11 = *WA* 13:246. For a penetrating reading of this text, see Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 133.

41 For Luther on the *pro me*, see *LW* 26:176–79 = *WA* 40/I:295–300.

42 *LW* 26:172 = *WA* 40/I:291, 3–4.

43 Cf. Chester, 'It Is No Longer I Who Live', 321: 'Christ himself is the gift received by the believer'.

44 On this theme, see Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (T&T Clark 'Doing Theology'; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 136–7.

in the promise that creates and is clung to by faith.⁴⁵ According to ‘Luther’s Paul’, justification through faith in Jesus Christ is therefore not, as Richard Hays and others fear, a stressing of the salvific efficacy of the human act of faith; justification through faith in Christ is a confession of the soteriological singularity of Jesus: the *sola fide* is the confession of the *solus Christus*. And this, for Luther, is why what he calls ‘our theology’ is good news: rather than focusing on faith, justification through faith in Jesus Christ ‘snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God’.⁴⁶

45 Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 101: ‘Precision is given to *sola gratia* by *sola fide*’.

46 *LW* 26:387 = *WA* 7:69, 12–13.