

It is No Longer I Who Live: Justification by Faith and Participation in Christ in Martin Luther's Exegesis of Galatians*

STEPHEN CHESTER

North Park Theological Seminary, 3225 West Foster Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625, USA
email: schester@northpark.edu

Traditional Protestant accounts of Paul's theology are often criticized for their inability to relate justification by faith and the participatory categories of Paul's thought. The two are driven apart by sharp distinctions between declaring and making righteous, between justification as a once for all external act and regeneration as an internal lifelong process. The way is left open for justification to be treated as a legal fiction. Contrary to popular misconceptions, these difficulties do not stem from Martin Luther. In his exegesis of Paul, Luther intimately connects justification by faith and participation in Christ, integrating the two effectively. This article explores the manner in which Luther does so, evaluating his exegetical conclusions and assessing their relevance for contemporary attempts to interpret Paul's theology.

Keywords: Galatians, Luther, justification, participation, imputation, objective/subjective genitive

In recent debates in Pauline theology, one of the perceived weaknesses of the Reformation tradition of reading Paul has been its failure to express adequately the connection between justification by faith and participation in Christ.¹ As Richard Hays puts it, 'The greatest weakness of the traditional post-Reformation understanding of "faith" and "justification" is, as Gerhard Ebeling rightly observed, that it offers no coherent account of the relation between the

* An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Paul Seminar of the British New Testament Conference in 2005. I am grateful to all those who participated in the discussion on that occasion. This article is part of larger project on Reformation readings of Paul subsequently to appear as a book with Eerdmans.

¹ I use the phrase 'participation in Christ' throughout this paper since it is the one most familiar from Pauline scholarship. However, it seems more usual in Luther scholarship to refer to 'union with Christ'.

doctrine of justification and *Christology*.² Hays' complaint has some force, for, anxious to avoid any hint of righteousness by works, many Protestant accounts offered sharp distinctions between God's declaring and making the believer righteous, between justification as a once for all external act and regeneration as a life-long process. The result was that justification granted the believer right standing before God, but it was not clear how it accomplished participation in Christ. The two appeared to operate independently, courting the danger of justification functioning as a cold legal fiction divorced from any real sense of an encounter with Christ.

Hays makes his complaint in the context of his work on the disputed genitive phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, work that has been instrumental in securing acceptance by many Pauline scholars of a subjective genitive reading (the faith/fulness of Jesus Christ) rather than the previously traditional objective genitive reading (faith in Christ). In this debate, Hays understands there to be momentous issues at stake in relation to Pauline soteriology. He labels the subjective genitive reading as a christological interpretation and the objective genitive as an anthropological interpretation. 'The christological reading highlights the salvific efficacy of Jesus Christ's faith(fulness) for God's people; the anthropological reading stresses the salvific efficacy of the human act of faith directed toward Christ'.³ The christological subjective genitive reading explains the connection between justification by faith and Christology in terms of participation by Christians in the saving faithfulness of Christ, whereas the anthropological objective genitive reading suffers from the dangerous tendency 'to reduce the gospel to an account of individual religious experience, or even to turn faith into a bizarre sort of work, in which Christians jump through the entraceway of salvation by cultivating the right sort of religious disposition'.⁴ There is 'not enough grounding of our theological discourse in the story of Jesus Christ'.⁵ Such fears also figure strongly in a significant recent work by Douglas Campbell, another advocate of the subjective genitive construal of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ and of a participatory model of Paul's soteriology, who repeatedly labels understandings of Paul's soteriology that focus on justification by faith as 'contractual' and 'anthropocentric'.⁶

2 R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, rev. ed. 2002) xxix (his emphasis). Hays is referring to G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963) 203.

3 Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 277.

4 Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 293.

5 Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, lii.

6 D. A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel* (London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2005). See in particular Chapter 8, which is entitled 'The Contractual (JF) Construal of Paul's Gospel and its Problems', and Chapter 9, where two sub-headings speak of 'The Anthropocentric Construal of "Faith" in Paul'. Campbell does not engage extensively with actual interpreters of Paul for whom justification by faith is central to Paul's soteriology.

Given all of this, a consideration of the relationship between justification by faith and participation in Christ in Martin Luther's exegesis of Paul seems most unpromising.⁷ For Luther is, after all, both the progenitor of the Reformation tradition of interpreting Paul's soteriology primarily in terms of justification by faith and the most famous advocate of the objective genitive interpretation of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. One might expect his work to exemplify the difficulties to which Hays and Campbell react. Having committed himself to an anthropological understanding of faith in the disputed genitive phrase, Luther ought to have great difficulty in relating justification by faith to Christology.⁸ This paper will argue that the opposite is in fact the case. 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. I will demonstrate this claim first through a general description of the exegetical basis of Luther's understanding of justification. This will be followed by a closer look at Luther's handling of Gal 2.19b–20, a text where, in his famous Galatians commentary of 1535, the christological dimensions of his understanding of justification are especially plain. It is also a text that contains one of the disputed genitive phrases, and it is thus particularly useful in assessing the claims made about the relationship between justification and Christology by advocates of the subjective genitive interpretation. Luther simply assumes an objective genitive reading at this point, and so our discussion of his reading of the verse will say nothing directly about the exegetical basis of the debate. However, the fact that Luther can display a participatory understanding of justification when assuming an objective genitive reading is itself significant for the debate. At one point, Campbell

Instead, he constructs a model of such a construal of Paul's gospel in the abstract so that it can exemplify multiple failings in interpretation and act as a foil in relation to which Campbell's own view of Paul's soteriology can be presented positively. Campbell's recent *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) appeared too late to be taken into account in the writing of this article.

⁷ The term exegesis is here and subsequently used in a very general fashion. For, of course, Luther was not a critical exegete in our contemporary sense of the term, nor did he produce historical-critical commentaries. His procedures for, and presentation of, biblical interpretation were shaped by the expectations of his own era. For a discussion of the differences, see K. Hagen, *Luther's Approach to Scripture as seen in his 'Commentaries' on Galatians* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993) 1–18.

⁸ To be fair, Hays says very little that could be construed as blaming Luther for the frequent difficulty in Protestant accounts of relating justification and Christology. Campbell has a rather more contradictory attitude. On the one hand, he is clear that Luther cannot simply be identified with what he terms the Justification by Faith (JF) model of Paul's soteriology, which he constructs on the basis of descriptions of Federal Calvinism. See *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 24, 146, 162. On the other hand, Campbell's description of the JF model is sprinkled with apparently negative references to Luther. See 148, 152, 153, 157–8.

rhetorically asks, 'Could it really be the case that Luther's favorite letter is a sustained witness to Paul's christocentric conception of faith?'⁹ I will argue that not only is Paul's letter such a witness, but also Luther's commentary. Luther has a rather different understanding of christocentric faith from either Hays or Campbell, but it is christocentric nonetheless.

1. Justification in Luther's Exegesis: Christocentric Faith and Imputation

Luther is an elusive thinker whom scholarship finds difficult to pin down. He returns to the same themes and ideas again and again in his vast corpus of work, but rarely for the sake of producing tightly defined doctrines. He produces tracts for the times and expositions of scripture, but not systematic theology. As a result, his characteristic ideas and themes appear not for their own sake but in the service of other goals. Luther is more concerned to counter the arguments of his critics, or to communicate clearly the meaning of the biblical authors, than he is with achieving consistency in the use of his intellectual resources. This is not necessarily to allege that Luther contradicts himself, although his ideas certainly develop during the course of a turbulent career spanning several decades. Rather, it is to acknowledge that his thought is as sprawling as it is fertile. To adapt a metaphor current in NT studies,¹⁰ Luther's thought resembles the complexity and variety of a great Gothic cathedral, not the clean lines of a modernist building. There may be genuine coherence and unity, but the structure could scarcely be described as uniform or regular.

It is therefore potentially misleading to discuss Luther's 'view' or 'understanding' or 'doctrine' of justification by faith or, indeed, participation in Christ, as if they constituted single, easily definable entities. In his exegesis he provides different explanations of them as he is prompted by the demands of the text and of debate. Justification can be particularly difficult to pin down. Concern with it permeates his writings, Luther perceiving it as relevant to virtually every other theological issue. Texts where Paul is not directly discussing justification, as well as those where he is, speak powerfully for Luther about that topic. Its all-encompassing nature means that Luther can employ together explanations of justification that were in later eras to seem quite distinct. In what follows, our concern is thus with his dominant or typical patterns of explanation.

In recent decades there has been increasing recognition among Luther scholars that participation in Christ is crucial to his explanations of justification. This has been asserted by a group of Finnish Luther specialists, working in the context

⁹ Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 232.

¹⁰ G. Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (London: SCM, 1999) 17–18, 306–7 applies the metaphor of a semiotic cathedral to early Christianity.

of ecumenical exchanges between Lutheranism and Russian Orthodoxy, who regard Luther's explanations of justification as fruitful in dialogue with Orthodox notions of *theosis* or divinization.¹¹ Opponents have sometimes criticized their work as too reliant on the early writings of Luther,¹² and the 1535 commentary on Galatians is therefore a particularly significant text in the debate since it is perhaps Luther's most influential exegetical work and indisputably represents his mature thought.¹³ At times in the commentary, Luther's thoughts on justification do appear to reflect widespread preconceptions about what he must have taught as the progenitor of Protestant theology. When commenting on Gal 3.6, 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', Luther suggests that its application to the believer is that God reckons 'imperfect faith as perfect righteousness for the sake of Christ'.¹⁴ This works in the following way:

Christ protects me under the shadow of His wings and spreads over me the wide heaven of the forgiveness of sins, under which I live in safety. This prevents God from seeing the sins that still cling to my flesh. My flesh distrusts God, is angry with Him, does not rejoice in Him etc. But God overlooks these sins, and in His sight they are as though they were not sins. This is accomplished by imputation on account of the faith by which I begin to take hold of Christ; and on His account God reckons imperfect righteousness as perfect righteousness and sin as not sin, even though it really is sin.¹⁵

- 11 See C. E. Braaten and R. W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) and T. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005). I am not equipped properly to assess the claims made by the Finns about Luther and *theosis*. They seem at first blush counter-intuitive, but Luther's Christology is deeply indebted to the Alexandrian Church Fathers for whom *theosis* certainly was a central concern. Writing before the Finns, M. Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ—Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982) 54, 386–7 twice mentions the possible significance of the theme of divinization for Luther on the basis of his familiarity with patristic writings. However, even if the Finns are wrong to interpret Luther's emphasis on union with Christ in justification in terms of *theosis*, this does not in itself invalidate the claim that such an emphasis is of great significance for Luther.
- 12 See C. R. Trueman, 'Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle', *WJT* 65 (2003) 213–44 (236–7).
- 13 Luther lectured on Galatians several times and produced two major commentaries. The first of these was published in 1519 (based on lectures delivered in 1516/17), the second in 1535 (based on lectures given in 1531). It is the 1535 commentary that has claimed a hugely significant place in the history of interpretation.
- 14 *LW* 26:231 = *WA* 40:366, 29–30. References to Luther's texts are to the English translation Philadelphia Edition, *Luther's Works* (ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann; Philadelphia/St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86) and to the Latin and German Weimar Edition, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883–). References to *WA* DB are to the sub-section within the Weimar Edition dealing with the German Bible (Deutsche Bibel).
- 15 *LW* 26:231–2 = *WA* 40:367, 13–21.

Although Luther does not use explicitly forensic imagery (he rarely does so), the context is clearly God's judgment of sin, and his explanation of justification sits easily with subsequent Protestant understandings of it as a declaration of acquittal. God judges justly because, cloaked in Christ's righteousness, the believer appears in God's sight as a righteous person and not as a sinner. However, the believer continues to sin, and the strength with which this is asserted would appear to support an understanding of the famous formula *simul iustus et peccator* as 'righteous before God but a sinner in fact', a feature which could lead the unsympathetic to speak of a merely fictional righteousness.

Yet while this description of justification is genuinely Luther's own, and genuinely significant in his theology, to present it as a summary of his teaching on justification in this Galatians commentary would be highly misleading. There are other explanations of justification that form the context of the one quoted above, with which it overlaps to give a very different overall picture. It is important to note in the quotation above that Luther says that imputation takes place, 'on account of the faith by which I begin to take hold of Christ'. For Luther presents a rich understanding of faith that itself has several dimensions. Each time Paul uses this one word, it carries multiple connotations for Luther. Indeed, if one reads through the 1535 commentary alongside his earlier commentary from 1519, it is perhaps the transformation in his concept of faith that forms the most significant development in Luther's understanding of Galatians. The nature of faith receives little reflection in the earlier commentary, but by 1535 it is a major topic. Even in Luther's comments on 3.6 alone, there are several strands to his discussion of faith.

As one might expect, the statement 'Abraham believed God' leads Luther to understand faith as trust in God's promises. Abraham believed against reason that God would keep his promise that the aged Sarah would have a son. Similarly, the Christian is called upon to embrace 'the foolishness of the cross' (1 Cor 1.18–25), and so 'faith slaughters reason and kills the beast that the whole world and all the creatures cannot kill'.¹⁶ However, this is not all. In thus believing God's promises, faith acknowledges God for who He is. It regards him as 'truthful, wise, righteous, merciful, and almighty, ... as the author and donor of every good'.¹⁷ God has been given his place by his creatures, his glory affirmed, and so 'faith justifies because it renders to God what is due him; whoever does this is righteous'.¹⁸ Further, by this giving to God of his glory, faith 'consummates the deity; and, if I may put it this way, it is the creator of the deity, not in the substance of God but in us'.¹⁹ Luther goes so far as to compare faith, in its relationship with works, to the divinity of Christ in relation to his humanity:

¹⁶ LW 26:228 = WA 40:362, 15–16.

¹⁷ LW 26:227 = WA 40:360, 22–3.

¹⁸ LW 26:227 = WA 40:361, 12–13.

¹⁹ LW 26:227 = WA 40:360, 24–5.

Let faith always be the divinity of works, diffused throughout the works in the same way that the divinity is throughout the humanity of Christ. Anyone who touches the heat in the heated iron touches the iron; and whoever has touched the skin of Christ has actually touched God. Therefore faith is the 'do-all' (*fac totum*) in works, if I may use this expression. Thus Abraham is called faithful because faith is diffused throughout all of Abraham. When I look at Abraham doing works, therefore, I see nothing of the physical Abraham or of the Abraham who does works, but only Abraham the believer.²⁰

Thus when Luther says, 'Christian righteousness consists in two things, namely, faith in the heart and the imputation of God',²¹ it is important to recognize that faith itself involves participation in Christ. In his earlier comments on 2.15–16, where Paul asserts that justification is by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, Luther emphasizes that Christ himself is present in faith. 'Faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ...the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness'.²² This is compared to the mysterious presence of God in the darkness on Mt. Sinai or in the Holy of Holies in the temple. In an important passage, Luther uses another image:

Here it is to be noted that these three things are joined together: faith, Christ, and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has him present, enclosing him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous.²³

Thus, faith takes hold of Christ and has him present, and because the righteous one is present in faith, imputation is possible. To return to Luther's comments on 3.6, 'to take hold of the Son and to believe in him with the heart as the gift of God causes God to reckon that faith, however imperfect it may be, as perfect righteousness'.²⁴ Christ himself is the gift received by the believer. It is therefore clear that imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer is not defined over and against, or even in indifference to, participation in Christ. The presence of Christ in faith secures an intimate relationship between imputation and the participation of the believer in Christ. God imputes because the Christian believes, but the faith of the Christian is itself a divine gift in which Christ is

²⁰ LW 26:266 = WA 40:417, 15–21.

²¹ LW 26:229 = WA 40:364, 11–12.

²² LW 26:130 = WA 40:229, 22–9.

²³ LW 26:132 = WA 40:233, 16–19. I. D. K. Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1970) 147 comments, 'Luther loves to illustrate the character of faith by the figure of an empty container. Faith is merely a husk, but Christ is the kernel. It is a purse or coffer for the eternal treasure, an empty vessel, a poor little monstrosity or pyx for gems of infinite worth'.

²⁴ LW 26:234 = WA 40:371, 18–21.

present.²⁵ This christocentric conception of faith means that, for Luther, imputation itself involves participation in Christ.²⁶

2. Justification in Luther's Exegesis: Joyous Exchange and the Story of Christ

The understanding that God imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer on account of his presence in faith is closely related to Luther's principal explanation of how such imputation takes place. For he frequently asserts that between Christ and the believer there is a 'joyous exchange' in which, having taken upon himself the sins of the world, Christ gives to the believer his righteousness.²⁷ What is ours becomes his, while what is his becomes ours. In the 1535 Galatians commentary, this is expressed particularly clearly in Luther's lengthy comments on Gal 3.13, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us'. Luther rages against those, especially Jerome, who are nervous at the apparent impiety of the idea that Christ was cursed by God. Instead, Luther thinks it absolutely necessary to emphasize that, although innocent in his own person, Christ became 'the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world'.²⁸ If he is not, then

25 Indeed, Luther is explicit that Christ is more than the object of faith. See *LW* 26:129 = *WA* 40:228, 31–229, 15: 'It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in faith itself'.

26 Trueman, 'The Finnish Line', 239 distinguishes between properly understanding the presence of Christ in faith in relation to its effects in imputation and declaration and mistakenly understanding it in the terms urged by the Finns. R. W. Jenson, in his 'Response to Mark Seifrid, Paul Metzger and Carl Trueman on Finnish Luther Research', *WTJ* 65 (2003) 245–50 implies that Trueman has allowed a prior understanding of imputation exclusively in terms of acquittal to determine what he finds in the commentary in the face of the evidence: 'it will make a great difference whether we interpret the passages about Christ's indwelling by what we antecedently think we know imputation is, or let what Luther says about Christ's relation to the believer in the particular passage tell us what he there means by imputation' (248).

27 The understanding that justification is effected through joyous exchange is vital to a proper appreciation of the exegetical basis of imputation. The idea that it is Christ's righteousness that is gifted to the believer in justification is sometimes disputed on the grounds that support for the notion comes only from 1 Cor 1.30, where Christ is termed 'our righteousness', and 2 Cor 5.21, where, in Christ, Christians become 'the righteousness of God'. See N. T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion, 1997) 122–3. Yet Luther reads all texts that contain the idea of exchange (e.g. Rom 8.3; Gal 3.13; Phil 2. 5–11) as supporting the view that Christ's righteousness is given to believers. Taking the idea from the Fathers, especially Athanasius and Augustine, Luther concentrates on righteousness as it provides the answer to sin and is prominent in Paul's vocabulary. However, he does also include other properties of Christ in the exchange.

28 *LW* 26:277 = *WA* 40:433, 27–8. Unsurprisingly, Luther uses Gal 3.13 and 2 Cor 5.21 to expound the idea of joyous exchange in his lectures on Deuteronomy (1523–5) when commenting on 27.26. See *LW* 9:215–16 = *WA* 14:699, 18–700, 18.

his righteousness cannot become the Christian's righteousness, and salvation is lost. As it is, having taken on himself the sins of the world, Christ is able to give to the believer his righteousness. 'By this fortunate exchange with us He took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious Person'.²⁹

Luther links this exchange with Christ's emptying of himself (Phil 2.7), a text that he also used to express the same idea years previously in an important sermon entitled *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (preached late 1518/early 1519). Because of Christ's willingness to empty himself by taking upon himself all sins, the believer 'can with confidence boast in Christ and say: "Mine are Christ's living, doing and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered and died as he did"'.³⁰ Thus, what Luther achieves by linking together texts such as Gal 3.13 and Phil 2.7 in discussion of justification, even when neither of them ostensibly concerns justification, is to root God's act of justification for the individual Christian in God's wider action in the world. It depends on incarnation,³¹ flowing from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For it is only in becoming human that the Son of God is able to take upon himself the sins of humanity, and it is only in remaining divine that he is able to overcome both sin and death. As Luther explains, again in his comments on Gal 3.13, because Christ takes upon himself the curse of the law, his person becomes the site of a titanic duel. The curse clashes with the blessing of the eternal grace and mercy of God in Christ, and

because in the same person, who is the highest, the greatest, and the only sinner, there is also eternal and invincible righteousness, therefore these two converge: the highest, greatest and the only sin; and the highest, the greatest, and the only righteousness. Here one of them must yield and be conquered, since they come together and collide with such powerful impact. Thus the sin of the entire world attacks righteousness with the greatest possible impact and fury.³²

By the very reason of Christ's divine nature, the duel inevitably has a positive outcome. All evils are conquered and put to death, including death itself, God's purpose being that through Christ 'the whole creation was to be renewed'.³³ Here, the death of Jesus is the decisive act in God's invasion of a world previously held in thrall to hostile powers. The significance for the justification of the believer

29 LW 26:284 = WA 40:443, 23–4.

30 LW 31:297 = WA 2:145, 16–18.

31 For a helpful general discussion of this relationship, see G. Yule, 'Luther's understanding of Justification by Grace Alone in Terms of Catholic Christology', *Luther: Theologian for Catholics and Protestants* (ed. G. Yule; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985) 87–112.

32 LW 26:281 = WA 40:439, 13–18.

33 LW 26:282 = WA 40:440, 29–30.

is that it is this same Christ, the incarnate son of God, human and divine, who fought and conquered sin and death in his person, who exchanges his righteousness with the believer's sinfulness and who is present in the believer's faith. On this basis, Luther is able intimately to connect the justification of the individual with the apocalyptic dimensions of Paul's theology in general and with the story of Jesus Christ in particular.³⁴ Following the lead of Karin Bornkamm, Marc Lienhard suggests that, in the Galatians commentary of 1535, Luther's personification of powers such as sin, the law and death in their enslaving of humanity and their assault on Christ leads him to 'insert the believer directly into the history of Christ'.³⁵ Outside of participation in that history lies only defeat.

3. Christocentric Faith in Luther's Exegesis of Gal 2.19b–20: What it is not

We have now seen that, far from having difficulty in relating justification to Christology, Luther makes Christology vital to his understanding of what Paul says about justification in at least two ways. First, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer by God occurs on account of the presence of Christ in faith. Participation in Christ is involved in imputation itself. Secondly, the principal means by which such imputation takes place is 'joyous exchange' in which what is ours becomes Christ's in order that what is his might become ours. It is only by receiving what is his, and thus by participating in Christ through faith, that the believer is justified. However, simply establishing that Luther offers a strongly christological account of justification and of the part played in it by human faith still leaves a vital question unanswered. What does Luther mean by participation in Christ in its relationship with justification by faith?³⁶

Here the work of the Finns has not been as helpful from the perspective of NT scholarship as it might have been, since they have discussed the matter primarily in relation to Luther's ontology.³⁷ Their affirmation that the union is an

34 A renewed emphasis on the apocalyptic dimension of Luther's own theology has been a strong feature of recent Luther scholarship. See especially H. A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1989).

35 Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 273 referring to K. Bornkamm, *Luthers Auslegungen des Galaterbriefs von 1519 bis 1531—Ein Vergleich* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963) 166–7.

36 Trueman, 'The Finnish Line', 235: 'the meaning of "union with Christ" is not a universal given. Marriage union, legal union, ontological union – these all offer models of understanding the idea that may well differ in significant ways'.

37 See T. Mannermaa, 'Why is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research' (1–20), R. W. Jenson, 'Response to T. Mannermaa' (21–4), S. Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics: What is the Structure of Being according to Luther?' (129–60) and D. Bielfeldt, 'Response to S. Juntunen' (161–6), all in *Union with Christ* (ed. Braaten and Jenson). The Finns are here reacting against a strong Kantian tradition in German Luther scholarship that reduces

ontological one does not take us very far forward in exegetical terms, especially as Luther 'wrote little about such questions as "What is the ontological structure of the world?"'³⁸ It is here that his exegesis of Gal 2.19b–20 is so revealing, offering the chance to explore what Luther meant exegetically by participation in Christ in relation to justification by faith. However, it is vital to place Luther's comments in historical context, first noting the long-established tradition of interpreting participation in Christ that Luther rejected. As H. A. Oberman puts it, Luther

attacked the whole medieval tradition as it was later confirmed at the Council of Trent. According to this tradition the 'iustitia Christi' is granted in justification to the sinner as gratia or caritas. But the 'iustitia Dei' is not granted together with or attached to the 'iustitia Christi'. ... The 'iustitia Dei' is the standard according to which the degree of appropriation and the effects of the 'iustitia Christi' are measured and will be measured in the Last Judgment.³⁹

The key point here is that grace is connected to love and is understood as something that God does within a person. It is infused, and God accepts the sinner because the righteousness of Christ has wrought a renewal within the person. Christ in his righteousness enters into a person and, with their co-operation, produces a righteousness that is inherent to them. There is an objective judgment based on what the human has become. As Daphne Hampson puts it, 'life is to be conceived of as a *via* for our transformation. ... "In the end" the human should be able to stand before God on account of his merits. That merit is gained through working with God's grace, in which the human remains rooted'.⁴⁰ The principal exegetical basis for this view of grace as infused is Gal 5.6, where Paul asserts that, with regard to the hope of righteousness, what counts is not circumcision or un-circumcision but 'faith working through love'.

union with Christ to a non-ontological existential union of the will of God with the human will. Jenson, 'Response to T. Mannermaa', 23 comments that 'according to the Kantians, we cannot deal with being but only with relations. According to Luther according to Mannermaa, a certain mode of relation *is* being'.

38 Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics', 129.

39 H. A. Oberman, 'Iustitia Christi and Iustitia Dei: Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification', *HTR* 59.1 (1966) 1–26 (19). Trueman, 'The Finnish Line', 234 criticizes the Finns for failing to take sufficient account of careful work by Oberman and others on the theological context in which Luther worked. This criticism is correct, but Trueman's assumption that careful attention to historical context will weaken, rather than simply clarify, the Finns' overall case does not follow.

40 See D. Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001) 56–96 (83–4). It should be noted that, contrary to popular Protestant prejudices, this theological framework is not Pelagian. Although the human will co-operates with divine grace, the process always and necessarily begins with the latter.

This is interpreted to mean that only a faith formed by love (*fides caritate formata*) can justify. In a tradition which understood faith primarily as intellectual belief (*fides*), that faith should be formed by love appeared necessary if it were to be truly alive.

Luther has an entirely different view of both faith and grace. Defining faith much more in terms of trust (*fiducia*), Luther is able to regard faith as itself inherently active. 'Paul does not make faith unformed here, as though it were a shapeless chaos without the power to be or do anything; but he attributes the working itself to faith rather than to love. ... He makes love the tool through which faith works'.⁴¹ In Gal 5.6, Paul is not discussing justification, and 'the hope of righteousness' is an eschatological reference. It is the hope of future freedom from the sin that during their earthly lives clings to the flesh of those who have already been justified. That it should be active through love is indeed the hallmark of true faith, but such activity is not the cause of justification. Luther imagines Paul explaining that 'I am speaking about genuine faith, which, after it has justified, will not go to sleep'.⁴² True faith inevitably expresses itself in love of neighbor, but such works of love do not justify a person.

As regards grace, the distinctive nature of Luther's position can be seen clearly in his preface to the commentary. Here Luther distinguishes between active and passive righteousness. Under the former heading come all the different kinds of righteousness, 'including the righteousness of the Law or Decalog, which Moses teaches',⁴³ that properly govern human life on earth. However, disaster follows from confusing these diverse forms of active righteousness, expressed in human works, with the righteousness that justifies before God. That justifying righteousness is 'heavenly and passive. We do not have it of ourselves; we receive it from heaven. We do not perform it; we accept it by faith'.⁴⁴ To be under grace is to have passive, justifying righteousness. Grace is not the infused enabler of active righteousness but the attitude of God towards the believer with which righteousness by faith is granted. This understanding of grace had been part of Luther's theology since 1521, when he wrote his treatise *Against Latomus*. Commenting

41 *LW* 27:29 = *WA* 40.2:36, 8–14.

42 *LW* 27:30 = *WA* 40.2:37, 24–5.

43 *LW* 26:4 = *WA* 40:40, 25–6.

44 *LW* 26:8 = *WA* 40:46, 28–30. This distinction between active and passive righteousness that provides a framework for the commentary as a whole is used by Trueman, 'The Finnish Line', 238–9 to question the validity of the Finns' views. However, the active nature of the concept of faith that appears throughout the commentary, and especially in the discussion of Gal 5.6, shows that in using the term 'passive righteousness' Luther is pointing to the nature of grace as *favor* and to the nature of true righteousness as sheer gift, not to the gift of faith as itself essentially passive. Luther's opposition to righteousness by works does not lead him to assign participation in Christ exclusively to sanctification. He is apparently not concerned, as later Protestantism was to become, that a participatory concept of justifying faith might leave the door open to righteousness by works.

on Rom 5.15, Luther asserts that grace is 'an outward good, God's favor, the opposite of wrath'.⁴⁵ In what may be an overly subtle piece of exegesis, Luther distinguishes between this as the meaning of Paul's reference to 'the grace of God' and faith as 'the inward good which purges the sin to which it is opposed'.⁴⁶ Such faith is what is intended by Paul's reference to 'the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ'. Christ alone among all men and women merits God's favor, hence it is only in the grace that he has that sinners may receive the free gift that is faith in Christ.⁴⁷

Thus, Luther maintains that 'the grace of God is always something external to man, and an absolute, rather than a partial, quality. Man is either totally under grace or totally under wrath. In contrast to this, faith (and its antithesis, sin) are seen as internal and partial'.⁴⁸ Luther certainly provides explanations of justification that are both christological and participatory, but in these explanations grace and faith are defined in a manner incompatible with the view that grace is an infused habit and that justifying faith is formed by love. Luther does not perceive the Christian life as a journey towards righteousness in co-operation with divine grace such that the Christian eventually merits heaven (usually via purgatory) on the basis of what he or she has become. This is not the framework within which he understands participation in Christ, and he is explicit about it in his comments on Gal 2.19b–20. When Paul says that 'it is no longer I who live', this means 'not in my own person or substance'.⁴⁹ Anyone who could live in his or her own person or substance in such a way as truly to exhibit a faith formed by love, something

45 LW 32:227 = WA 8:106, 22. This rejection of the Augustinian view of grace seems to have been the result of Melancthon's influence upon Luther. For prior to *Against Latomus*, including in the Galatians commentary of 1519, Luther still gives to grace the function of purifying from sin. It is Melancthon, drawing on the philological work of Erasmus, who defines grace as *favor*. See R. Schäfer, 'Melancthon's Interpretation of Romans 5.15: His Departure from the Augustinian Concept of Grace Compared to Luther's', *Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) and the Commentary* (ed. T. J. Wengert and M. P. Graham; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 79–105.

46 LW 32:227 = WA 8:106, 20–1.

47 For a cogent analysis of the passage in *Against Latomus*, see S. Peura, 'Christ as *Favor* and Gift (*donum*): The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification', *Union with Christ* (ed. Braaten and Jenson) 42–69.

48 A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986) 201. This is a helpful summary that becomes less so when McGrath goes on to suggest that these definitions of grace and faith permit Luther 'to maintain what is otherwise clearly a contradiction within his theology of justification – his simultaneous insistence on the external nature of the righteousness of Christ, and the real presence of Christ in the believer'. Analyzing Luther's exegesis of Paul from within our own historical context, where justification by faith and participation in Christ have often been considered separate categories in Paul's thought, there is a danger that we think of Luther as overcoming a problem by bonding together two opposites. In fact they are not to him opposite categories.

49 LW 26:166 = WA 40:282, 16.

which in Luther's view is impossible, would in any case not be saved. For they 'would have only a historical faith about Christ, something that even the devil and all the wicked have (James 2.19)'.⁵⁰

4. Christocentric Faith in Luther's Exegesis of Galatians 2.19b–20:

What it is

Having established an understanding of the concept of participation in Christ that Luther rejected, we may now turn to his comments on Gal 2.19b–20 in order to explore the concept of participation that he affirmed. As soon as one examines in detail Luther's comments on Paul's assertion that having been crucified with Christ he no longer lives but Christ in him, it becomes apparent that Luther takes the death of the self suggested here very seriously. Far from being gradually changed into the likeness of Christ through co-operation with infused grace, the Christian must leave behind his or her own life for that of Christ:

Christian righteousness is, namely, that righteousness by which Christ lives in us, not the righteousness that is in our own person. Therefore when it is necessary to discuss Christian righteousness, the person must be completely rejected. For if I pay attention to the person or speak of the person, then, whether intentionally or unintentionally on my part, the person becomes a doer of works who is subject to the Law. But here Christ and my conscience must become one body, so that nothing remains in my sight but Christ, crucified and risen... By paying attention to myself... I lose sight of Christ, who alone is my righteousness and life.⁵¹

Luther rams the point home again, cautioning that 'when it comes to justification, therefore, if you divide Christ's person from your own, you are in the Law; you remain in it and live in yourself, which means that you are dead in the sight of God and damned by the law'.⁵² But as he is not paying attention to his own person, and not dividing himself from Christ, the apostle can say that

'I am not living as Paul now, for Paul is dead.' Who then is living? 'The Christian'. Paul, living in himself, is utterly dead through the Law but living in Christ, or rather with Christ living in him, he lives an alien life. Christ is speaking, acting, and performing all actions in him; these belong not to the Paul-life, but to the Christ-life. ... 'By my own life I am not living, for if I were, the Law would have dominion over me and hold me captive. To keep

⁵⁰ *LW* 26:168 = *WA* 40:285, 22–3.

⁵¹ *LW* 26:166 = *WA* 40:282, 17–28.

⁵² *LW* 26:168 = *WA* 40:285, 15–17.

it from holding me, I am dead to it by another Law. And this death acquires an alien life for me, namely, the life of Christ, which is not inborn in me but is granted to me in faith through Christ'.⁵³

For Paul to continue to live as Paul would be death for him, but to die and for Christ to live in him is life. Salvation depends not on perfecting the life that he already had, but on living an alien life. Thus, the Christian has Christ's righteousness through participation in him, but that participation does not work on the basis of a transformation of the self of the Christian. It works rather on the basis of the leaving behind and abandonment of that self. As one contemporary Lutheran theologian expresses it, 'faith as self-forgetfulness is the most intensive form of certainty of God'.⁵⁴

To speak of participation in Christ understood in this way as involving a changed or renewed life is therefore potentially misleading. It is simply not radical enough to capture Luther's sense that union with Christ involves the re-creation of the person. If we are to speak of a restoration or healing of the self in this regard, then it can only be on the basis that the Christian has to come out of him- or herself in order to come to him- or herself. In this sense that faith 'places us outside ourselves',⁵⁵ Luther is repeating an idea that had long been central to his theology, for in 1520, in his famous tract *The Freedom of the Christian*, Luther had written that, 'a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian'.⁵⁶ This soteriological necessity to live an alien life means that

There is no linear progress from being a sinner to being justified. It is not that that which is given in creation is transformed through grace. It is only through a discontinuity, through repentance and failure, that in response to the good news of the gospel the human being can come to gain a sense of himself through trusting not in himself but in God.⁵⁷

53 *LW* 26:170 = *WA* 40:287, 30–288, 2.

54 E. Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001) 243.

55 See *LW* 26:387 = *WA* 40:589, 25–8: 'This is the reason why our theology is so certain: it 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, which cannot deceive'. Luther is here commenting on the cry 'Abba, Father' in Gal 4.6.

56 *LW* 31:371 = *WA* 7:69, 12–13.

57 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 101. Hampson thus emphasizes that justification does not exist in any kind of continuity with the believer's previous life. It does not grow out of life as a creature as we know it. However, salvation reinstates what creation was intended to be so that we relate to God in the manner first intended (hence my use of the term re-creation above). The discontinuity stems from the fact that through sin what was intended for creation was so grievously and entirely lost (35).

Luther knows well that this radical discontinuity between a person's own life and his or her life in Christ is open to an obvious objection. To the charge that Paul still appears as Paul with no apparent change, Luther affirms that to the casual, surface-level observer Paul still indeed appears as Paul. He uses physical things such as food and clothing just like any other human being. However, this is only 'a mask of life',⁵⁸ for although Paul lives in the flesh, it is not on the basis of his own self. Before his conversion, Paul spoke blasphemy, but after it words of faith. Before, Paul spoke, but after, Christ speaks. The voice and tongue were the same in each case, but the words came from an entirely different source. Luther himself cannot teach, preach, write, pray or give thanks except by using the physical instruments of the flesh, but 'these activities do not come from the flesh and do not originate there; they are given and revealed divinely from heaven'.⁵⁹ This alien and spiritual life cannot be perceived by the unspiritual person, who does not recognize its true source. The unspiritual person remains ignorant of the fact that 'This life is not the life of the flesh, although it is a life in the flesh; but it is the life of Christ, the Son of God, whom the Christian possesses by faith'.⁶⁰

Living a life in the flesh that is nevertheless not a life of the flesh but is rather the alien life of Christ, the Christian is inevitably the locus of a struggle. He or she faces constant strife between two modes of existence occupying the same body. When the life lived by the believer is that of Christ grasped by faith (the Christ-life not the Paul-life), the Christian is truly and wholly righteous because Christ is truly and wholly righteous. Nevertheless, it is only outside of him- or herself in Christ that the Christian is righteous. 'I am a sinner in and by myself apart from Christ. Apart from myself and in Christ I am not a sinner'.⁶¹ The righteousness possessed by the believer remains alien, for when faith falters and the Christian lives from the self (the Paul-life not the Christ-life), then the Christian is truly and wholly a sinner. Here we have the true sense of the much misunderstood phrase *simul iustus et peccator*. Luther does not mean by it that the Christian is partially transformed and still partially sinful, forever suspended mid-way through a stalled process of becoming righteous as a result of internal renewal. The righteousness of Christ granted to the believer in justification is real, not fictional. However, its realization in practice

58 LW 26:170 = WA 40:288, 25.

59 LW 26:171 = WA 40:289, 25-7.

60 LW 26:172 = WA 40:290, 30-1. Oberman, 'Iustitia Christi and Iustitia Dei', 21-2, 25-6 finds significant the vocabulary used here by Luther. Justifying righteousness is differently understood as *possessio* than as *proprietas*. The former term denotes legal occupancy and enjoyment of something, the latter ownership proper. As it is *possessio*, 'the righteousness granted is not one's property but one's possession'. Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 24 draws an analogy with a library book. Once it is borrowed from the library I have it legitimately in my possession, but I am not its owner.

61 LW 38:158 = WA 38:205, 28-9.

depends upon whether or not Christ is grasped in faith day by day, and this thus becomes the crucial question of Christian existence. Will the Christian live by faith and hence in Christ and hence as righteous, or not? There is a sense in which the Christian can grow in faith and make progress in it, and Luther makes reference to this.⁶² It is possible to learn to trust more fully. However, precisely because, as with justification itself, the nature of this progress depends on the appropriation of Christ in faith, such progress in faith is also a return to the beginning.⁶³ It can never cohere into a stable internal quality of the Christian's own, since faith concerns the relationship of the believer with Christ. To have trusted God today and to have lived the life of Christ still leaves open the question of what will be the case tomorrow. The human propensity to sin by turning from Christ to self remains, for 'to the extent that I look back to myself and my sin I am miserable and the greatest of sinners',⁶⁴ hence the need for the Christian ever to take hold of Christ in faith anew.

The practical implications of this can best be illustrated by means of Luther's exegesis of Gal 5.17, where Paul describes the contest in the life of the Christian between the flesh and the Spirit. Sin clings to the flesh, and therefore the Christian will sin. There will be occasions when the flesh wins out over the Spirit. Nevertheless, the Christian life does not on this account seem to Luther a joyless struggle with sin. It cannot be since Christians enjoy the grace of God. 'This is the wisdom and the comfort of those who are truly godly, that even if they have sins and commit sins, they know that because of their faith in Christ they are not imputed to them'.⁶⁵ This security concerning salvation liberates the Christian from despair, while the very fact that there is a struggle between flesh and the Spirit is a sign of spiritual vitality. 'It is all right for anger or sexual desire to be aroused in them, provided that they do not capitulate to it; it is all right for sin to stir them up, provided that they do not gratify it. In fact, the godlier one is, the more he is aware of this conflict'.⁶⁶ The Christian can therefore join battle against the flesh with gusto, ultimate victory secure in Christ.⁶⁷ This means that although the Christian is indeed both justified and a sinner, the relationship between the

62 See, for example, *LW* 35:370 = *WA* DB 7:11, 6–15; *LW* 31:299 = *WA* 2:146, 29–35; *LW* 31:358 = *WA* 7:59, 24–60, 9.

63 J. D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 171 comments that 'the image that most fully represents Luther's understanding of the Christian life is that of a spiral, ... A continual return to the start is not the opposite of progress for Luther; it is the very essence of it'.

64 *WA* 39.1:508, 5–7. This translation, from *The Third Disputation against the Antinomians* (1538), is given in Jüngel, *Justification*, 216.

65 *LW* 27:76 = *WA* 40.2:96, 14–16.

66 *LW* 27:74 = *WA* 40.2:94, 13–15.

67 There is thus a temporal aspect to *simul iustus et peccator*. On the one hand sin will cling to the flesh of the Christian throughout earthly life, the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit ceasing only with death. On the other, God's act of justification determines the whole of

two is asymmetrical, for 'righteousness is supreme and sin is a servant'.⁶⁸ The reason for this is that even the triumphs enjoyed by the flesh ultimately serve the ends of righteousness, driving the Christian back to reliance on Christ:

For when his flesh impels him to sin, he is aroused and incited to seek forgiveness of sins through Christ and to embrace the righteousness of faith, which he would otherwise not have regarded as so important or yearned for with such intensity. ... Through such an opportunity a Christian becomes a skillful artisan and a wonderful creator, who can make joy out of sadness, comfort out of terror, righteousness out of sin, and life out of death, when he restrains his flesh for this purpose, brings it into submission, and subjects it to the Spirit.⁶⁹

The Christian lives in the shadow of sin and death but is able to snatch victory from their clutches by transforming them into their own opposites through righteousness by faith. Confronted by a struggle between two modes of existence, it is the daily appropriation of the presence of Christ in justifying faith that enables the believer to create joy, comfort, righteousness and life rather than sadness, terror, sin and death. For Luther, justification by faith and participation in Christ are fully integrated aspects of Paul's thought.

5. Conclusions and Implications

We have now seen both the central importance of participation in Christ to Luther's interpretation of justification by faith and the significance of this for the way in which he understands the Christian life. Thus far our exploration has been concerned with clarifying our knowledge of Luther's interpretation, but we must now consider the significance of his exegesis for our own attempts to understand Paul's theology. It should be acknowledged that there is much in Luther's exegesis that could be questioned. In particular, Luther reads Gal 2.19b–20 in a way that emphasizes the discontinuity between pre-Christian life and life in Christ. Salvation lies not in transforming the self but in its dying and being left behind. This fits well with the current emphasis on the apocalyptic nature of Paul's theology,⁷⁰ but could be regarded as one-sided in ignoring the hints of continuity

existence such that the Christian lives now from the future on the basis of promise and hope. See Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 27 and Jüngel, *Justification*, 218–19.

68 *LW* 27:74 = *WA* 40.2:93, 21.

69 *LW* 27:74 = *WA* 40.2:93, 24–94, 11.

70 Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, xxxviii–xl moves in the second edition to align himself with J. L. Martyn's insistence on the apocalyptic nature of Galatians. Campbell too is convinced of the apocalyptic nature of Paul's thought.

provided by Paul's continuing to speak in the first person.⁷¹ However, Luther's significance for us consists not so much in whether his exegesis should be regarded as correct in every respect as in the resources that he provides for our own thinking. Luther makes justification by faith central to his reading of Paul in a way unknown within 'New Perspective' readings, but neither can his view of Paul's theology easily be identified with that of Bultmann or other existentialist readers of the apostle. In relation to the recent history of Pauline theology, Luther brings something of a fresh perspective. While there will be many aspects of his Pauline interpretation with which we must disagree, there are also important points at which we may benefit and learn from him. There are four features of the exegesis that we have examined that I believe to be worthy of particular note:

1. Luther offers an account of Paul's soteriology in which making justification by faith central does not imply any neglect of Christology.⁷² That this is possible does not prove that justification is for Paul the touchstone of all true theology as it was for Luther, but it does nullify some of the arguments often alleged to show that to take justification as important to Paul's soteriology must be an error. The charge that by imputed righteousness Luther means fictional righteousness is simply erroneous, for while righteousness remains alien to the believer it is essential from Luther's perspective that the believer live an alien life.⁷³ The suggestion that making justification by faith central to Paul's thought leads to a contractual view of his soteriology is also challenged.⁷⁴ For Luther does not only insist that human faith is a gift from God, but also that Christ is present in that faith. Such faith does not justify

71 For an interpretation that emphasizes continuity, see M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 69–70. Discontinuity is essential for Luther at least in part because of his struggles with spiritual despair (*Anfechtungen*), which lead him to regard the self as the last place in which to find assurance or security.

72 F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. ed. 2007) 36 criticizes Bultmann's interpretation of Paul, suggesting that 'if "works" is abstracted from its concrete relation to Judaism, then "faith" will be abstracted from its concrete reference to the Christ'. The abstraction of faith from concrete reference to Christ is a failing of Bultmann's existential approach, but Watson's diagnosis of the cause is not wholly convincing since Luther abstracts works from concrete relation to Judaism without abstracting faith from concrete reference to Christ.

73 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 122: 'It is of course a complete farce to say that according to Luther God leaves man corrupt'

74 This allegation is particularly ironic given that Luther is reacting against a rather contractual understanding of justification. Following William of Ockham, the theological movement known as the *via moderna* linked promise and covenant. God has entered into a covenant (*pactum*), whereby if a person does *quod in se est* (what lies within one), which is to humble oneself before God and to repent of one's sins, God has pledged to give the gift of grace and to justify. It is the bilateral nature of this covenant that Luther rejects in favor of

because it is the appropriate response to God's grace and is the right kind of religious disposition to fulfill the human side of a contract between God and humanity, but rather because it grasps hold of Christ.

2. By assuming an objective genitive reading of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ while at the same time offering a thoroughly christocentric account of the human faith to which it refers, Luther's exegesis calls into question some of the claims made concerning what is at stake theologically in the contemporary debate. To suggest, as advocates of a subjective reading often do, that the objective genitive reading necessarily represents an anthropological view *as opposed* to a christological one is false. Luther does famously reject anything that might be considered speculative theology, insisting that we know God as he reveals himself to faith.⁷⁵ We know God as he is God for us. To this extent, all Luther's theological statements are indeed anthropological. However, as we have seen, the human faith to which God reveals himself has present in it the Christ who lived as a human being and who overcame sin and death. There is no divorce between such faith and the story of Jesus Christ. Further, his righteousness never becomes the property of the believer but always remains alien. 'Christ is, of course, a reality *pro nobis* and *in nobis*, but he is also and remains *extra nos*'.⁷⁶ Christology is not absorbed into anthropology. Indeed, Luther might be regarded as bringing an appropriate balance to the relationship between the two. Human faith has a vital soteriological role, but it does not compromise divine initiative and is not itself to be identified with individual religious experience. For what matters is not the cultivation of faith as an experience but the presence of Christ within it. Faith relies on the objective word that is Christ, believing 'against reason, feeling and experience'.⁷⁷ The story of Jesus Christ as contained in Paul's gospel is not one that can be presented as reasonable in terms of human experience. If the faith of the individual is based on no more than his or her own religious experience, then it will wither in the face of struggles with doubt like Luther's own. Luther gives us a perspective that may lead us to see as false the choice apparently confronting contemporary

divine unilateralism in justification. See A. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) Chapter 4.

75 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 22 quotes W. von Loewenich, *Wahrheit und Bekenntnis im Glauben Luthers: Dargestellt im Anschluss an Luthers grossen Katechismus* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1974) 16: 'Luther's theology does not begin with a general doctrine of God, with God's aseity, or the immanent trinity, only then afterwards to turn to what God in his abstract nature means for me. To Luther that would represent the speculation of the theology of glory, ... When Luther speaks of God, he speaks of that God who has turned towards humankind'.

76 Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 392.

77 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 48.

- interpreters between reducing Paul's soteriology largely to a matter of human decision or marginalizing the faith of the Christian and saying little about it.
3. Luther's christocentric conception of the faith of the Christian effectively integrates in Paul's soteriology justification by faith and participation in Christ. Modern Pauline scholarship has often debated the relative importance of the two, wishing to relegate one or other type of language to a subsidiary status. By defining justification by faith in thoroughly participatory terms, Luther can give full theological weight to both sets of vocabulary.⁷⁸ Whether Luther's way is the only way to integrate and to give full theological weight to both sets of vocabulary is debatable, but that he does do so ought to be regarded as an exegetical advantage. For Paul's texts lack the clear indicators of relative importance that modern scholarship seeks. Giving full weight to all the data respects the historical limits of our knowledge of Paul's intentions as an author. It may also help to direct our attention to the potentially more answerable question of how Paul puts together the different elements of his theology *in his texts*.⁷⁹
 4. In his emphatic insistence on the presence of Christ in faith, and in his sense that Christians must live by such faith day by day, ever returning to Christ anew, Luther offers resources not only for contemporary descriptions of justification in Paul but also of participation in Christ. Having argued for the importance of participation in Paul's theology, E. P. Sanders comments that 'We seem to lack a category of "reality"—real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit—which lies between naïve cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand and a revised self-understanding on the other'.⁸⁰ As we have seen in his treatment of Gal 2.19b–20, the presence of Christ in faith marks an insistence by Luther on more than a revised self-understanding, but that presence is manifested in

78 Having decided (502) that the heart of Paul's theology lies in participatory rather than juristic categories, E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977) 508 expresses puzzlement at Käsemann's insistence on the apparently confusing procedure of defining righteousness by faith in participatory categories. What Käsemann is actually seeking is a dialectic between the different elements in Paul's theology in which they interpret each other. See D. Way, *The Lordship of Christ: Ernst Käsemann's Interpretation of Paul's Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 210. The extent of Käsemann's debt to Luther is both unsurprising and clear.

79 Much as we may legitimately be interested in the theology of Paul the person as an important figure in the history of human thought, from the perspective of Christian theology it is Paul's texts that are canonical and must be interpreted. Answering some questions about Paul's communicative intentions on the basis of the evidence provided by the texts themselves is a precondition of their interpretation, but that does not mean that we have sufficient evidence to answer in anything other than provisional manner many of our questions about the theology of Paul the person. To make such provisional answers normative in our theological interpretation of Paul's texts is to hide theological preferences behind historical argument.

80 Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 522.

the believer in terms that can make sense in relation to contemporary categories of reality. The struggle to live by trust in God's promises in the midst of a world marred by sin and death is not entirely beyond our understanding. We know what it is to trust or to fail to trust another. To trust in God's promises is to look to a future reality beyond the present and to live on its basis. Nevertheless, it is the locating of the presence of Christ and of that future hope precisely in the present reality of the struggle, and not in the transcendence of it, that makes Luther's understanding of participation in Christ accessible to us as a theological and exegetical resource.⁸¹

The invitation extended by these four points to think with Luther about Paul is not one that has been much accepted in recent scholarship, where the prevailing tenor has been the need to think against Luther about Paul. However, much of that mood is based on misunderstandings of Luther's interpretation of Paul among NT scholars.⁸² E. P. Sanders speaks bluntly of Luther's erroneous emphasis on 'fictional, imputed righteousness'.⁸³ Even when the tone is less prejudicial, Luther is often one-sidedly identified with exclusively forensic views of justification. Morna Hooker says that Luther argued that justification imagery 'was that of the law court, and that the word meant "to declare righteous"'.⁸⁴ Philip Esler concludes that 'there is no sign of Luther's imputed righteousness in Galatians (the "declaratory" or "forensic" meaning)'.⁸⁵ Such misunderstandings matter because of Luther's central place in the history of Pauline interpretation. If we fail to understand what he says about Paul then we fail properly to understand our own place in that history as we respond positively or negatively to positions

81 Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 54 makes it plain that in stressing the participation of the Christian in the faithfulness of Christ he is not calling for mere imitation of Christ. Paul 'is finding in his own life the experience and life of Christ figuring forth. He is *participating* in Christ...in particular, he is participating in Christ's weakness' (his emphasis). This is helpful, as is Campbell's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in participation in Christ. However, there is lacking an explanation of how this participation takes place in a way that it is not primarily imitative. In his emphasis on the presence of Christ in faith, Luther potentially allows us to say more about this missing step of analysis.

82 It is true, of course, that Luther takes a very different view of what Paul means by 'the works of the Law' from that dominant within contemporary scholarship. However, the charge that he projected back onto Paul his own struggles with a guilty conscience, or that he took such struggles to be typical of Jewish experience with the Law, is simply false. See S. J. Chester, 'Paul and the Introspective Conscience of Martin Luther', *Biblical Interpretation* 14.5 (2006) 508–36.

83 E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991) 49.

84 M. Hooker, *Paul: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003) 79. Despite this, there are some striking similarities between Luther's emphasis on 'joyous exchange' and Hooker's own important suggestion that 'interchange' is central to Paul's explanations of the salvific significance of Christ's death.

85 P. Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998) 175.

for which Luther is perceived to be responsible. Turning the usual story of Pauline interpretation on its head, Daphne Hampson comments that Albert Schweitzer's explanation of justification in Paul as 'righteousness, in consequence of faith, through the being-in-Christ' coheres exactly with that of Luther.⁸⁶ It is true of course that Schweitzer does not follow Luther in making justification so defined central to Paul's theology, but the similarity between them is genuine. To adopt the usual approach and to tell the story of the discipline as if Schweitzer's work marks a straightforward rejection of Luther, preparing the ground for the even greater rejection that was to come with Sanders, is simply a distortion. Our problem is not so much that we read Paul through the eyes of Luther, but more that we read Luther through the eyes of Bultmann and reject the two together. Only when we abandon that procedure and tell the story of Pauline interpretation in a different way will we be able to read Luther's Pauline exegesis in a discriminating manner, reaching different conclusions from Luther where necessary but taking advantage of the considerable resources that he has to offer for our own efforts to interpret Paul.

86 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 18–19 and A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London: A. & C. Black, 1931) 125, 206–7. As Hampson notes, Schweitzer himself failed to see this sense in Luther. However, Schweitzer was not helped by the Luther scholarship of his day, an excuse no longer available to contemporary Pauline scholarship.