

LUTHER AND MELANCHTHON ON JUSTIFICATION: CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY?

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Editor's Note: A modified form of this article is to appear in Justification in the Reformation, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012)

ABSTRACT

Although some scholars have argued that Philip Melanchthon departed significantly from Martin Luther's theology of justification, analysis of the two reformers within their own theological context indicates that they stand within a broad pattern of continuity in opposition to Rome. Both affirm a divine demand for perfect obedience, which in turn requires a doctrine of alien righteousness and a clear law-gospel distinction. Melanchthon forged his own path on some issues pertaining to justification—free will, the nature of faith, and the uses of the law—but within a broad pattern of continuity with Luther.

Is it possible that the instigator of the Reformation, the theologian of justification *par excellence*, Martin Luther, has been misunderstood on the very question of justification, not only by the theological tradition that bears his name, but also by Protestantism as a whole? Moreover, is it possible that such a misunderstanding has arisen largely from an imposition of Philip Melanchthon's heavily forensic doctrine of justification onto Luther himself? Scholarly discussion surrounding Luther's theology in relation to that of Melanchthon sometimes suggests that Melanchthon departed radically from the teachings of his colleague and subsequently led Lutheranism as a whole down a faulty path, one that essentially buried Luther's rich, life-giving

teaching under the dry soil of legal fiction. For example, after tying Luther's doctrine of justification to that of Osiander, Stephen Strehle writes, "No matter how one might feel about this matter or other details of Osiander's system we must at least recognize that the church has become greatly impoverished in adopting Melanchthon's one-dimensional concepts to the exclusion of other tensions in Luther's thought—tensions that Osiander had hoped to bring forth."¹ Mark Seifrid similarly argues, ". . . it is clear that Melanchthon and Luther differ dramatically from one another on the question of justification because they proceed from radically different perspectives."² This "Luther against the Lutherans" thesis has gained a bit of traction in recent years with the rise of the so-called "Finnish School" of Lutheran interpretation, representing an ecumenical agenda that ties Luther's doctrine of justification closely to Eastern Orthodox theology by proposing that Luther was concerned primarily with ontological, and not legal, categories.³ Always a controversial figure among his Roman Catholic opponents, Luther continues to play the role today among his Protestant friends.

Does Luther stand against the Lutherans? More specifically, does a comparison between Luther and Melanchthon on the doctrine of justification suggest continuity or discontinuity? The answer to this question is not a simple affirmation of one or the other, for the evidence suggests elements of both. However, I propose that the elements of discontinuity between Luther and Melanchthon on justification can be subsumed within a larger context of more significant

¹Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Gospel: Encounter Between the Middle Ages and the Reformation* (New York: Brill, 1995), 82-83.

²Mark A. Seifrid, "Luther, Melanchthon and Paul on the Question of Imputation: Recommendations on a Current Debate," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 143.

³Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Responses to the methodology of the Finnish School include Timothy J. Wengert, review of *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Theology Today* 56 (1999): 432-34; Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *WTJ* 65, no. 2 (2003): 231-44; R. Scott Clark, "*Iustitia*

continuity. Therefore, the “Luther against the Lutherans” thesis should be rejected, but the rejection of such a notion does not imply that Luther and Melanchthon stand in perfect agreement on this question. I agree with Seifrid’s claim that American evangelicals in particular do not seem to have a widespread grasp of the precise shape of Luther’s doctrine of justification.⁴ Luther has indeed been misunderstood in some important ways. But a close comparison of Luther and Melanchthon to each other in the context of late medieval Catholic theology strongly suggests that Luther and Melanchthon hold much more in common on the question of justification than they hold in tension. Specifically, this paper will argue that a divine demand for perfect obedience and its theological corollaries—a law-gospel distinction and alien righteousness—form the basis of continuity between the two Reformers. While Melanchthon did come to depart from Luther on the issue of free will, the nature of faith, and the uses of the law, none of these issues threatens the more central theological issues that separated Luther from Rome.

It is imperative at the beginning of this investigation to establish the basic contours of Luther’s doctrine of justification. I will argue that Luther’s doctrine is one of unconditional justification based on the free grace of God through the creation of faith in the sinner who hears the gospel and to whom Christ and his righteousness are made present in faith in a way that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer. This claim will be demonstrated by a chronological survey of some of Luther’s works, beginning with the period 1513-1521. In his first lecture series through the Psalms (1513-1514), it is clear that Luther, who had studied the works of Gabriel Biel, was still an adherent to the theology of the *via moderna*, a late medieval theological development in which it was believed that human works, of no intrinsic value before

Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification? CTQ 70 (2006): 307-10; Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul, Luther, and Justification in Gal 2:15-21,” WTJ 65, no.2 (2003): 215-30.

God, are nevertheless acceptable to God on the basis of a freely ordained covenant that God has made between himself and humanity. Thus, even though no man can ever please God by his works, God nevertheless gives grace, in accord with the terms of the covenant, to the one who does what is in him (*facienti quod in se est*). Commenting on Psalm 115:1, the early Luther makes this exact point: Speaking of the necessity of preparation to receive Christ, Luther writes,

Hence the teachers correctly say that to a man who does what is in him [*facienti quod in se est*] God gives grace without fail, and though he could not prepare himself for grace on the basis of worth [*de condigno*], because the grace is beyond compare, yet he may well prepare himself on the basis of fitness [*de congruo*] because of this promise of God and the covenant of His mercy. . . . Therefore He bestows everything gratis and only on the basis of the promise of His mercy, although He wants us to be prepared for this as much as lies in us [*quantum in nobis est*]. Hence, as the Law was the figure and preparation of the people for receiving Christ, so our doing as much as is in us [*quantum in nobis est*] disposes us toward grace.⁵

As Alister McGrath has argued, it is this theological context that best explains Luther's transforming encounter with "the righteousness of God" in Romans 1:17, an experience Luther recounts in his 1545 preface to his Latin works.⁶

Given his theological context, it is likely that the early Luther understood God's righteousness to refer to his strict, impartial equity in the administration of the terms of the covenant: God is righteous precisely because he is no respecter of persons but rewards impartially with grace those who do what is in them and condemns those who do not fulfill this covenant stipulation. Thus, "justification can only be based upon merit" as God, the impartial judge, allows human beings to distinguish themselves by their deeds.⁷ It must be kept in mind that the kind of merit in view is entirely congruous, for it is only by free grace that God has

⁴Seifrid, "Luther, Melancthon and Paul," 138.

⁵Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms II: Psalms 76-126*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (*LW* 11:396-97).

⁶Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1985).

⁷*Ibid.*, 109.

determined to accept any human work as meritorious. Nevertheless, because of the conditionality of the covenant, the decisive element in justification comes from the human side of the equation. The young Luther would have struggled to understand how this notion of righteousness could be good news for the sinner (as stated in Romans 1:17) when it was impossible to know whether one had truly done what is in him (*quod in se est*). McGrath observes,

The ‘righteousness of God’ thus remains an unknown quality, the impersonal attribute of an utterly impartial and scrupulously just judge, which stands over and against man, and ultimately justifies or condemns him on the basis of a totally unknown quality—and is thus the cause of much *Anfechtungen*! To someone such as Luther, who appears to have become increasingly uncertain about his own moral qualities as the *Dictata* progress, it must have seemed inevitable that God, in his righteousness, would condemn him.⁸

And so the theology of the *via moderna* provides a quite plausible context within which to understand Luther’s struggle over the righteousness of God.

McGrath further argues that a major breakthrough occurred in 1515 that set Luther on a trajectory toward a very different understanding of justification. Adducing evidence from Luther’s 1515-1516 lectures on Romans, he argues that by this time Luther’s theology has taken an Augustinian turn.⁹ Significantly, Luther no longer believes that God rewards with grace the one who does what is in him. In his Romans lectures he regards the idea as a Pelagian notion, even though he acknowledges that “there are now no Pelagians by profession and title.”¹⁰

In the Romans lectures Luther no longer urges his listeners to do what is in them in order to attain grace. Instead, he argues that one must receive the first grace passively,¹¹ and this is directly related to the fact that the will is enslaved to sin and cannot, apart from grace, will

⁸Ibid., 110-11.

⁹The discussion that follows draws on the insights of McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 128-36.

¹⁰Martin Luther *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Walter G. Tillmanns and Jacob A. O. Preus (LW 25: 496; WA 56:502).

anything good.¹² Luther explicitly repudiates his earlier view that the human will is decisive in salvation.¹³ He espouses instead an Augustinian doctrine of predestination.¹⁴ Necessarily, this new understanding of the particularity of grace entails that God's righteousness can no longer consist in his impartial administration of a covenant that allows human beings to distinguish themselves by their deeds. God's righteousness, he notes in his comments on Romans 1:17, does not consist in his personal rectitude; it is, rather, that by which he makes us righteous.¹⁵ Divine righteousness is opposed to human righteousness, for the latter arises from works but the former precedes them.

Even at this early stage Luther begins to move beyond Augustine by teaching a doctrine of alien righteousness. To take just one example, in his comments on Romans 4:7, Luther writes,

Therefore, I was correct when I said that all our good is outside of us [*Extrinsecum nobis*], and this good is Christ, as the apostle says (1 Cor. 1:30): "God made Him our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." And none of these things are in us except through faith and hope in Him. Hence all the praise of the church in the Song of Solomon belongs to Christ, who dwells in His church through faith, just as all the light of the earth does not belong to the earth but to the sun which sheds its light upon it. Thus in the Song of Solomon the church confesses that she is often naked and described as having no other desire than for her Bridegroom, saying (Song of Sol. 1:4): "Draw me after Thee, we will run to the odor of Thine ointments." Always she seeks, always she desires, always she praises her Bridegroom. And thereby she shows that she herself is empty and poor in herself, and that only outside of herself [*extra se*] is her fullness and righteousness.¹⁶

¹¹"Ad primam gratiam sicut et ad gloriam semper nos habemus passive sicut mulier ad conceptum." Martin Luther *Divi Pauli apostoli ad Romanos Epistola* (WA 56:378).

¹²"Liberum arbitrium extra gratiam constitutum nullam habet prorsus facultatem ad iustitiam, sed necessario est in peccatis. Ideo recte b. Augustinus ipsum appellat li. contra Iulianum 'Servum potius quam liberum arbitrium'. Habita autem gratia proprie factus est liberum, saltem respectu salutis. Liberum quidem semper est naturaliter, sed respectu eorum, que in potestate sua sunt et se inferiora, sed non supra se, cum sit captivum in peccatis et tunc non possit bonum eligere secundum Deum." Ibid., 385.

¹³"... quod nostro arbitrio fiat vel non fiat salus. Sic enim ego aliquando intellexi." Ibid., 382.

¹⁴Ibid., 383-88.

¹⁵"Et hic iterum 'Iustitia Dei' non ea debet accipi, qua ipse iustus est in seipso, sed qua nos ex ipso iustificamur, quod fit per fidem evangelii. Unde b. Augustinus c. XI. De spi. et lit.: 'Ideo Iustitia Dei dicitur, quod impertiendo eam iustos facit.'" Ibid., 172.

¹⁶Luther, *Lectures on Romans* (LW 25:267; WA 56:279). Here Luther adopts the allegorical interpretation of Song of Solomon, which was widespread until more recent times.

Alien righteousness appears in other writings from this period. In his sermon “Two Kinds of Righteousness” (1519), Luther articulates a distinction between the righteousness that comes from outside of us and that which is properly our own. Alien righteousness is “instilled [*infusa*] from without.”¹⁷ While the use of the word *infusa* indicates that Luther is not speaking the exact language of later Protestant orthodoxy, he is nevertheless beginning to articulate concepts that would later develop into the Protestant doctrine. That some notion of imputation is present here is evident from the context, for Luther goes on to argue that the person who has received this alien righteousness can justly claim, “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.”¹⁸ It is impossible to account for this kind of transfer of Christ’s obedient life to the believer without at least a nascent doctrine of imputation. Luther employs the metaphor of marriage to make sense of the transfer. Just as a husband and wife possess all things in common because they are united together as one flesh, so does the church possess all that belongs to Christ because they are one spirit.¹⁹

Luther does not, however, speak of alien righteousness as received all at once. He says that the righteousness of Christ is given in baptism as well as anytime a person is truly repentant. Furthermore, he speaks of a progression in this righteousness: “Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is

¹⁷Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” trans. Lowell J. Satre (*LW* 31:297); idem *Sermo de duplici iustitia* (*WA* 2:145).

¹⁸“Haec ergo iusticia datur hominibus in baptismo et omni tempore verae poenitentiae, ita ut homo cum fiducia possit gloriari in Christo et dicere ‘meum est quod Christus vixit, egit, dixit, passus est, mortuus est, non secus quam si ego illa vixissem, egissem, dixissem passus essem et mortuus essem.’” Luther *duplici iustitia* (*WA* 2:145). The significance of the phrase *et omni tempore verae poenitentiae* will be noted below.

¹⁹“Sicut sponsus habet omnia quae sunt sponsae, et sponsa habet omnia quae sunt sponsi (omnia enim sunt communia utriusque, sunt enim una caro), ita Christus et Ecclesia sunt unus spiritus.” Ibid.

finally perfected at the end through death.”²⁰ Luther is not referring here to the believer’s growth in personal righteousness, that is, the righteousness of good works. That is the second kind of righteousness, a subject that he has not yet addressed at this point in the sermon. What Luther is apparently referring to here as a growth in alien righteousness is progress in faith. In fact, only a few lines earlier Luther had virtually identified faith with Christ’s righteousness.²¹ As faith, which is God’s work within the believer, continues to grow and progress, so does the believer’s possession of alien righteousness. It is then from the root of alien righteousness that our own proper righteousness, that of good works, grows.²² Alien righteousness must always precede our own proper righteousness.

Several quotations above indicate that Luther still conceives of righteousness as in some sense infused into the believer. How does this differ from the standard Roman Catholic teaching? In what sense can Luther uphold an alien righteousness together with the concept of infusion? Luther differs from Rome on this point by linking infused righteousness to Christ’s obedience in such a way that what Christ has done is counted to the believer. The believer’s righteousness is nothing other than Christ himself, who has been united to the believer like a husband is united to his wife. This righteousness is alien in that it belongs properly to Christ, and the believer has done nothing to warrant acceptance in God’s sight. The believer’s only hope is in the righteousness of another. Yet this righteousness is also infused through the divine work of faith, by which Christ himself is present within. This doctrine stands in stark contrast to

²⁰Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” (*LW* 31: 299); “Et ita Christus expellit Adam de die in diem magis et magis, secundum quod crescit illa fides et cognition Christi. Non enim tota simul infunditur, sed incipit, proficit et perficitur tandem in fine per mortem.” *WA* 2: 146.

²¹“ . . . et haec vocatur in psalterio per multa loca opus domini, confessio, virtus dei, mericordia, veritas, iusticia. Omnia haec sunt nomina fidei in Christum, immo iusticiae quae est in Christo. Unde Apostolus ad Gala: ij. Audit dicere: Vivo iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus, et ad Eph: iij. Ut det vobis Christum habere per fidem in cordibus vestris.” Luther *duplici iustitia* (*WA* 2: 146).

²²“Haec [secunda] iusticia est opus prioris iusticia et fructus atque sequela eiusdem.” *Ibid.*, 147.

the grace-empowered cultivation of a righteousness of works proclaimed by Rome. As Paul Althaus explains,

It is not enough, however, to say either that faith receives justification or that man receives justification *in* faith. Luther's thought must be expressed more definitely. Justification is received *with* faith, that is, in the form of faith. Faith is the work and gift of God. God justifies a man by giving him faith. Christ is the righteousness of men and to this extent this righteousness is outside of us. But Christ is my righteousness only if I appropriate him and make him my own. Faith is the only way in which Christ can give himself to me. Only the Christ who is appropriated in faith, that is, the Christ who lives in my heart through faith, is my righteousness. Christ is not only the 'object' of faith but is himself present in faith. Through faith Christ is present with and in a man. The believing heart holds fast to Christ just as the setting of a ring grasps the jewel: we have Christ in faith. Only in faith are Christ and man so joined together, so made one, that man in God's judgment participates in Christ's righteousness.²³

And so, for Luther, justification by faith does not refer to faith as the instrument that receives righteousness, but rather as the righteousness itself that God gives to the believer through the gospel.

In the 1519 lectures on Galatians, Luther speaks of two ways of being justified, and these two ways correspond to the law-gospel distinction that would become a hallmark of Lutheran theology. The first is the way of works, which leads to justification before men but is damnable in the sight of God. The second way is the way of faith, wherein a person views his or her own former righteousness as nothing and trusts only in the mercy of God in Christ.²⁴ Luther speaks of alien righteousness again in this context, arguing that Christ's righteousness and that of the Christian are one and the same. Just as all have become sinners by the sin of another, so do all become righteous because of the righteousness of another.²⁵

²³Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 231. See also Seifrid, 137-52

²⁴Martin Luther *In Epistolam Pauli ad Galatas commentarius 1519* (WA 2:489-90).

²⁵"Immo cum [haec iusticia] sit in Christum et nomen eius, quod est iusticia, fit, ut Christi et Christiani iusticia sit una eademque ineffabiliter sibi coniuncta . . . Ita fit, ut, sicut alieno peccato omnes facti sunt peccatores, ita aliena iusticia omnes fiant iusti." Ibid., 491.

Commenting on Galatians 3:10, Luther implicitly affirms the criterion of perfect obedience as necessary for divine approval. He acknowledges the tension between Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 27:26, which pronounces a curse on all who *do not* do the works of the law, and Paul's explicit argument that those who *are* of the works of the law are, therefore, cursed.²⁶ At first the opposite conclusion might seem to follow: because the law curses those who do not fulfill its demands, therefore, we ought to perform the works of the law in order to avoid the curse. Yet Luther argues that Paul's logic moves in a different direction because of his presupposition that no one can fulfill the law. Perfect obedience is an impossible standard for sinful human beings to attain. For this reason, all who place themselves under the law are, *de facto*, cursed: "The result is that with this word Moses has forced all men under the curse; and when he says: 'Cursed be everyone, etc.,' he means exactly what he would mean if he were to say: 'No man will do these things that are written; therefore all will be cursed and in need of Christ as Redeemer.'"²⁷ Thus, Luther draws a line in the sand to separate the law from the gospel. The former can only condemn sinful humanity, and thus sinners must seek righteousness in Christ alone.

The same themes emerge in the 1520 treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, published at a time when a break with Rome was imminent, though Luther still retained the hope that separation would not be necessary.²⁸ Here Luther argues that only the Word of God can bring righteousness, and it must be received by faith, not works.²⁹ He then expounds three effects of

²⁶WA 2: 513; LW 27:255-56.

²⁷Luther, *Galatians* (LW 27:256).

²⁸Luther's prefatory address to Pope Leo X indicates both his extremely low estimation of the current condition of the Roman Church but also his desire to remain in submission to the pope in hope of bringing at least some measure of reform. Martin Luther *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. W. A. Lambert and Harold J. Grimm (LW 31:334-43).

²⁹"Una re eaque sola opus est ad vitam, iustitiam et libertatem Christianam. Ea est sacrosanctum verbum dei, Euangelium Christi." Martin Luther *Tractatus de libertate christiana* (WA 7:50).

faith. First, faith alone justifies.³⁰ This argument is dependent on the distinction between commands and promises, a distinction that would later be formulated in terms of law and gospel. The law demands perfect obedience, an obedience that no human being can render, as Luther states:

Now when a man has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law—since the law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope—then, being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself nothing whereby he may be justified and saved. Here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God which declare the glory of God, saying, “If you wish to fulfill the law and not covet, as the law demands, come, believe in Christ in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things are promised you. If you believe, you shall have all things; if you do not believe, you shall lack all things.”³¹

The law exposes the sinfulness of humanity, thereby revealing the emptiness of works and demonstrating that justification must be by faith alone. Thus the law is preparatory for the gospel.

The second effect of faith is that it truly fulfills the law of God. By ascribing to God truthfulness and reliability, faith fulfills every divine demand.³² Unlike Calvin and the Reformed tradition, Luther does not speak of faith as something empty in and of itself. For Luther, faith is the righteousness of a Christian.³³ The third effect of faith “is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom.”³⁴ Herein lies the doctrine of alien righteousness, for the sinner’s wickedness and damnation now belong to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness now

³⁰Ibid., 52.

³¹Luther, *Freedom*, (LW 31:348-49); WA 7:52-53.

³²“At nonne talis anima hac fide sua per omnia obedientissima deo est? Quod ergo praeceptum est reliquum, quod talis obedientia non abunde impleverit? Quae plenitudo plenior quam omnimoda obedientia? At hanc non opera, sed sola fides praestat.” Luther *de libertate* (WA 7:54).

³³“Hoc nomine fides sola est iustitia Christiani hominis et omnium praeceptorum plenitudo.” Ibid., 56. This does not mean that faith has become a surrogate work by which the one who believes performs a meritorious act before God. Faith is the work of the gospel, and its righteousness consists in the fact that Christ is present in it. Like the Reformed tradition, Luther ties righteousness ultimately to Christ, but he does not thereby remove the quality of righteousness from faith itself.

³⁴Luther *Freedom*, (LW 31:351); WA 7:54-55.

belongs to the sinner. The doctrine of imputation flows from the faith-union that a believer shares with Christ. It is out of the righteousness that comes by faith that good works grow naturally like fruit from a tree.³⁵

In the years after his break from Rome (1522-1546), Luther apparently did not undergo any major theological shifts comparable to his discovery of the true meaning of the righteousness of God and the corresponding theological developments that grew out of it from the period already discussed. The most notable development in his theology during this time is that the doctrine of justification became the center and organizing principle of his whole theology.³⁶ This fact is evident as early as 1522, where in his “Preface to the New Testament” Luther clearly articulates a law-gospel distinction as a hermeneutical axiom. The command-promise dichotomy previously mentioned in *The Freedom of a Christian* now becomes the key to faithful interpretation of Scripture: “. . . no one any longer knows what is gospel or law, New Testament or Old. Necessity demands, therefore, that there should be a notice or preface, by which the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track, and taught what he is to look for in this book, so that he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God.”³⁷ The reason Luther considers it so important for the ordinary reader of Scripture to recognize the difference between law and gospel is for the sake of justification: “Hence it comes that to a believer no law is given by which he becomes righteous before God . . . because he is alive and righteous and saved by faith.”³⁸ Justification by the free grace of God, given in the gospel, determines his approach to Scripture as a whole.³⁹

³⁵Luther *libertate* (WA 7:61); LW 31:361.

³⁶McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 223.

³⁷Martin Luther “Preface to the New Testament,” trans. Charles M. Jacobs, LW 35:357.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 361.

³⁹Luther’s doctrine of justification is what led him to elevate certain books of Scripture (John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Peter) over other books (the Synoptic Gospels and the letter of James). Justification by faith

In 1525 Luther published what has widely been regarded as his greatest work, *The Bondage of the Will*,⁴⁰ a response to Erasmus of Rotterdam's *The Free Will*.⁴¹ In the conclusion of this work, Luther commends Erasmus for being the only theological opponent to cut through extraneous matters and address the main issue of contention between Luther and Rome.⁴² This comment indicates the importance of the doctrine of the bound will for Luther, a doctrine that requires in turn a monergistic work of grace to result in salvation. Although monergism and alien righteousness are not identical concepts, for Luther they necessarily go together, so that Luther's doctrine of the bound will becomes a succinct expression of his doctrine of justification.⁴³ Whereas the early Luther conceived of the righteousness of God as a personal attribute by which he upholds the terms of the covenant and so allows human beings to distinguish themselves by their own free will, the mature Luther regarded such a notion as antithetical to the gospel and instead conceived of the righteousness of God as a divine gift given through the gospel to the elect. There is and can be no human preparation for justification. It is the work of God, who creates faith by means of the gospel. The act of creating faith in the hearer of the gospel is the act of justification, for the faith that apprehends Christ thereby possesses him as righteousness.

became for him the criterion by which to determine a canon within the canon. See *ibid.*, 362 and his "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude" (*LW* 35:395-98).

⁴⁰Martin Luther *De servo arbitrio* (WA 18:551-787); *idem*, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Philip S. Watson and Benjamin Drewery (*LW* 33:3-295). For an analysis of Luther's argument, see Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁴¹Desiderius Erasmus *De libero arbitrio*, in *Desiderii Erasmi Opera Omnia* (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2001), 9: 1215-47; *idem*, *The Free Will*, in *Discourse on Free Will*, ed. and trans. Ernst F. Winter (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961).

⁴²Luther, *Bondage*, (*LW* 33: 294). Among the extraneous matters are the Papacy, purgatory, and indulgences.

⁴³Luther, *Bondage*, (*LW* 33:266-70).

Although the subject of imputation arises rarely in this work, Luther does speak of justification, in line with Romans 4:2-3, as a forensic reckoning of righteousness.⁴⁴ Because, according to Paul, righteousness is reckoned not to the one who works but to the one who does not work, justification cannot result from a synthesis of grace and merit, faith and works, law and gospel. One must either work or not work in order to attain justification:

In short, Paul sets the one who works and the one who does not work alongside each other, leaving no room for anyone between them; and he asserts that righteousness is not reckoned to the former, but that it is reckoned to the latter provided he has faith. There is no way of escape for free choice here, no chance for it to get away with its endeavoring and striving. It must be classed either with the one who works or with the one who does not work. If it is classed with the former, so you are told here, it does not have any righteousness reckoned to it, whereas if it is classed with the latter—the one who does not work but has faith in God—then it does have righteousness reckoned to it. But in that case it will no longer be a case of free choice at work, but of being created anew through faith.⁴⁵

Luther's problem with Erasmus is not that the latter lacks any conception of grace.⁴⁶ It is, rather, that by failing to understand the true nature of justifying grace, Erasmus has sought a middle ground between grace and works. For Luther, this error entails the nullification of grace, replacing the gospel with a kind of moralism comparable to the error of the Pelagians.

Luther's 1535 commentary on Galatians reiterates the centrality of justification. In his summary of the letter's argument, he asserts that the whole of true Christian doctrine hangs on this one article.⁴⁷ Justification does not occur through the active righteousness of works, the

⁴⁴“Ac vide, quomodo Paulus nitatur verbo reputandi, ut urgeat, repetat et inculcet. Ei (inquit) qui operator, merces non reputatur secundum gratiam, sed secundum debitum, Ei vero, quo non operator, credit vero in eum qui iustificat impium, reputatur fides eius ad iustitiam secundum propositum gratiae Dei. Tum adducit David itidem de reputatione gratiae dicentem: Beatus vir, cui non imputavit Dominus peccatum etc. Pene decies eo capitulo repetit verbum reputandi.” Luther *servo* (WA 18:772).

⁴⁵Luther, *Bondage* (LW 33:271).

⁴⁶On Erasmus's doctrine of grace, see *The Free Will*, sections 20, 44, 48-50, 52, 56.

⁴⁷“Siquidem amisso articulo iustificationis amissa est simul tota doctrina Christiana.” Martin Luther *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius [1531] 1535* (WA 40/1:48).

righteousness that operates on the earthly plane among human beings.⁴⁸ Rather, justification results from the passive righteousness of faith, the righteousness that is Christ himself, seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father: “Sin cannot happen in this Christian righteousness; for where there is no Law, there cannot be any transgression (Rom. 4:15).”⁴⁹ Faith alone takes hold of Christ in heaven and his righteousness, in spite of the fact that the sinner remains on earth under the condemnation of the law.⁵⁰ The believer is, therefore, *simul iustus et peccator*, a sinner in this earthly sphere but righteous in Christ. It is, therefore, essential that these two kinds of righteousness be distinguished, and this distinction corresponds to that between law and gospel, a distinction that is absolutely necessary to a proper understanding of justification.

A particularly striking contrast between Luther and Rome appears in his comments on Galatians 2:16. Whereas Rome attributes the formal righteousness of faith to the virtue of charity that animates it, Luther attributes the justifying power of faith to Christ himself.⁵¹ 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 the faith itself.”⁵² This contrast constitutes a succinct expression of the major difference between Rome and Luther on the question of justification. For Rome, faith derives its significance from an infused virtue, and Christ’s atoning work is relegated to the position of a necessary precondition for the infusion of grace. For Luther, faith

⁴⁸Ibid., 40-42; Martin Luther *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, *LW* 26:4-6; Clark (*Iustitia Imputata*, 294) oversteps the evidence when he argues that *iustitia activa* “is that accomplished by Christ.” Luther does not mention Christ’s own righteousness in this context.

⁴⁹Luther, *Galatians 1535* (*LW* 26:8; *WA* 40/1:47).

⁵⁰“Ita utrumque manet dum hic vivimus: Caro accusatur, exercetur, contristatur et conteritur iustitia active legis, Sed spiritus regnat, laetatur et salvatur passive iustitia, quia scit se habere Dominum sedentem in coelis ad dexteram patris, qui abolevit legem, peccatum, mortem et omnia mala conculcavit, captiva duxit et triumphavit de eis in semet ipso.” Luther *Galatas 1535* (*WA* 40/1:48).

⁵¹“Nos autem loco charitatis istius ponimus fidem, Et sicut ipsi dicunt fidem monogramma et charitatem vivos colores et plenitudinem ipsam, ita nos e contra dicimus fidem apprehendere Christum quie est forma, quae fidem ornate et informat, ut color parietam. Quare fides Christiana non est otiose qualitas vel vacua siliqua in corde quae possit existere in peccato mortali, donec charitas accedat et eam vivificet, Sed si est vera fides, est quaedam certa fiducia cordis et firmus assensus quo Christus apprehenditur.” Ibid., 228.

justifies because the crucified Christ is present in it, and *he* constitutes the believer's righteousness. The former locates the legal basis of right standing with God in a grace-wrought virtue intrinsic to the believer; the latter locates it outside of the believer, in Christ, who is possessed by faith.

To summarize, for Luther the Reformer, the article of justification is the cornerstone of Christian theology, for it alone expresses what is required for sinful humanity to be made right with God. In the particularity of his grace, God creates faith in his elect by means of the gospel. Faith justifies because it takes hold of Christ, who is the righteousness of the sinner. God's act of justifying is essentially his act of evoking faith through the effective power of his Word, so that faith is not so much the condition of justification as it is the means by which God justifies. For Luther, unlike Calvin and the Reformed tradition, justification is completely unconditional. Crucial to this doctrine is the distinction between law and gospel, in contrast to the Roman Catholic synthesis. The law demands perfect obedience, and without the hope of offering such to God, the sinner's only recourse is to the gospel. God does not offer eternal life as a reward for grace-wrought merit. He gives it freely and unconditionally through his Son, whose righteousness belongs to the sinner by faith.

Having surveyed Luther's doctrine of justification, we may now proceed to Melancthon, organizing the discussion first around elements of continuity between the two and then proceeding to elements of discontinuity. Regarding the continuity that exists between Luther and Melancthon, it is worth noting first that the 1521 edition of Melancthon's *Loci Communes* may best be described as an organized arrangement of Luther's theology. On point after point Melancthon follows closely on the heels of his Wittenberg colleague. He affirms that all things

⁵²Luther *Galatians* 1535, *LW* 26:129. "Sic ut Christus sit obiectum fidei, imo non obiectum, sed, ut ita dicam, in ipsa fide Christus adest." Luther *Galatas* (*WA* 40/1:228-29).

happen by necessity and that, therefore, there is no such thing as free will.⁵³ He draws a clear distinction between law and gospel, attributing justification solely to the mercy of God to the exclusion of all human merit.⁵⁴ He affirms that faith itself is righteousness and that it is not within the power of human nature.⁵⁵ He argues that the law's proper function is "to reveal sin and especially to confound the conscience."⁵⁶

The main contours of Luther's doctrine of justification would remain in place throughout all of Melancthon's subsequent works. In the 1521 *Loci* he affirms repeatedly that the law demands the impossible,⁵⁷ a conviction that remained unchanged by the time he published his 1543 edition:

There is no doubt that the law of God demands both inner and outward obedience, as it says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart," Deut. 6:5. But since this corrupted nature of men cannot produce perfect obedience, as Paul so clearly testifies in Romans 7-8, and since this sin remains in us in this life in the form of doubt, lack of faith and insufficient fear and love of God, and countless desires which run counter to the law of God, it follows that men are not pronounced righteous, that is, accepted before God by reason of the Law.⁵⁸

⁵³"Quandoquidem omnia quae eveniunt, necessario iuxta divinam praedestinationem eveniunt, nulla est voluntatis nostrae libertas." Philip Melancthon *Prima Aetas Locorum Theologicorum ab Ipso Melancthone Editorum* 7a.19-20 (ed. Henry Ernest Bindseil, CR 21 [1854]:87-88).

⁵⁴"Duae in universum scripturae partes sunt, Lex et Evangelium. Lex peccatum ostendit, Evangelium gratiam. Lex morbum indicat, Evangelium remedium." Ibid. 54b.21-24 (CR 21:139).

⁵⁵"Sed sola fides de misericordia et gratia dei in Iesu Christo iustitia est. . . . atque has duas quidem sententias [Rom 4:5 and Gen 15:6] ob hoc volo tibi commendatores esse, ut intelligas apposite dici fidem, iustitiam. Offenduntur enim hac loquendi forma sophistae, cum dicimus fidem esse iustitiam." Ibid. 73a.15-17; 73b.3-8 (CR 21:159-60).

⁵⁶Philip Melancthon, *Loci communes theologici*, trans. Lowell J. Satre with rev. Wilhelm Pauck, LCC 19: 118; see idem, *Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, trans. D. C. Parker (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1989), 64-66 for an exposition of a twofold use the law. The latter work was originally published in 1527. The third use of the law would not make its appearance in Melancthon until 1534.

⁵⁷"Exigit lex impossibilia, coarguitur peccati rea conscientia." Melancthon *Prima Aetas* 70a.13-14 (CR 21:156); cf. ibid. 61b.23-62a.1 (CR 21:147); 103b.1-2 (CR 21:190)

⁵⁸Philip Melancthon *Loci Communes 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 72; "Non dubium est Lege divina flagitari interiorem et perfectam obedientiam, iuxta illud [Deut. 6, 5]: Diligas Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde. Cum autem haec corrupta natura hominum non possit praestare integram obedientiam, sicut clare testator Paulus Rom. 7 et 8 et maneat in hac vita peccatum, scilicet dubitation, diffidentia, non satis timere et diligere Deum, et infiniti motus errantes contra Legem Dei, sequitur homines non pronuntiari iustos, id est, acceptos coram Deo propter Legem." Idem *Tertia Aetas Locorum Theologicorum ab Ipso Melancthone Editorum* 4 (ed. Henry Ernest Bindseil, CR 21 [1854]:716).

It is the theological reality of divine justice, a justice that cannot be compromised by an easing of the law's demand, combined with the anthropological reality of sinful corruption, that drives Melanchthon to affirm that justification must be *propter Christum* as opposed to *propter Legem*.⁵⁹ Human righteousness must be radically distinguished from the righteousness that avails before God.⁶⁰ Contrary to the Roman doctrine, the atoning work of Christ is not the prerequisite for a gift of grace that enables sinners to attain right standing with God by law.⁶¹ On the contrary, for Melanchthon, Christ's righteousness is our righteousness, and the blessing of justification is given by God's free grace alone, apart from all works or merits.⁶² Given the divine demand for perfection, it could be no other way. The bicovenantal theology of Luther, in which law and gospel are clearly distinguished, a dividing line drawn between himself and Rome, remains intact for Melanchthon from beginning to end.

In the 1530s Melanchthon began to forge his own path on certain issues, although none of these theological developments threatened the central reality of alien righteousness or the law-gospel distinction. Three particular issues related to the doctrine of justification are worthy of mention.

First, Melanchthon eventually modified Luther's doctrine of free will and necessity. Whereas the first edition of the *Loci Communes* sounds virtually identical to Luther's later work, *The Bondage of the Will*, by 1535 Melanchthon had made some adjustments to his

⁵⁹"Ideo est Mediator, ut propter ipsum simus iusti, quia lege non sumus iusti." Ibid. 4 (CR 21:664); "Si enim iudicandum esset, tum demum nos habituros esse remissionem peccatorum, cum contritio aut dilectio sufficiens esset, adigeretur animus ad desperationem. Quare ut habeat certam et firmam consolationem, pendet beneficium Dei non ex conditione dignitatis nostrae, sed ex sola misericordia propter Christum promissa." Ibid. 8 (CR 21:741-42).

⁶⁰Melanchthon, *Colossians*, 38-42, 46-57.

⁶¹Melanchthon (*Prima Aetas* 58b.14-61b.4 [CR 21: 143-47]; LCC 74-77) criticizes the medieval teaching that the gospel is the "new law," a republication of divine demand that focuses on inward obedience instead of merely external obedience. For Melanchthon, not only does this teaching obscure the nature of the Mosaic Law (which addressed inward obedience as well), but it also conflates law and gospel, thereby obscuring the glory of God's provision of free justification in his Son.

former view. In later editions of the *Loci Communes* he denies that all things happen by necessity and affirms that human beings have some measure of free will in relation to external, or civic, righteousness.⁶³ However, he continues to maintain that humanity's fallen condition renders the will incapable of pleasing God, and so the will is still bound in some sense.⁶⁴ There is no evidence that Luther opposed Melancthon on this score, but it is important to note that the transition involved here constitutes an embrace of some form of synergism. This fact is evident from a passage in the 1543 *Loci*:

The free choice in man is the ability to apply oneself toward grace, that is, our free choice hears the promise, tries to assent to it and rejects the sins which are contrary to conscience. . . . Further, these points become clearer when the promise is considered. Since the promise is universal and since in God there are not conflicting wills, it is necessary that there is some cause within us for the difference as to why Saul is rejected and David received, that is, there must be a different action on the part of the two men.⁶⁵

Seeing a universal salvific will in God and refusing to allow for a hidden, discriminating decree behind the promise that has been revealed, Melancthon is driven to the conclusion that something in the individual constitutes the decisive cause of his or her salvation or damnation. The distinction between David and Saul is finally owing to David's assent to grace and Saul's obstinacy toward it. Such an idea is foreign to Luther's doctrine of unconditional justification. For Luther, God justifies by creating faith in his elect; justification is a monergistic divine work. For the mature Melancthon, the two issues of alien righteousness and monergism become separated, as he upholds the former but ultimately denies the latter. Melancthon gives free will

⁶²“ . . . et illi fide adhaeremus, nihil dubitantes quin Christi iustitia sit nostra iustitia, quin Christi satisfactio, sit expiatio nostri, quin Christi resurrectio nostra sit.” Ibid., 73a.7-10 (CR 21:159).

⁶³“Prius autem dicemus de causa peccati, propterea quod cum constabit causam peccati non esse Deum, postea facile erit ratiocinari quondam esse contingentiam, seu quod non omnia necessario fiant necessitate absoluta.” Philip Melancthon *Secunda Aetas Locorum Theologorum ab Ipso Melancthone Editorum* 18a (ed. Henry Ernest Bindseil, CR 21 [1854]:271); “Quare voluntas humana potest suis viribus sine renovatione aliquo modo externa Legis opera facere.” Idem *Tertia Aetas* 4 (CR 21:654); cf. idem, *Colossians*, 39-42.

⁶⁴“Nunc vero in hac imbecillitate interiores motus congruentes Legi Dei non accenduntur sine Spiritu sancto.” Melancthon *Tertia Aetas* 4 (CR 21:663).

⁶⁵Melancthon, *Loci Communes 1543* (trans. Preus), 44.

a decisive role in salvation, but he consistently maintains that justifying righteousness is alien, rather than intrinsic, to the sinner.

A second way that the mature Melanchthon modified his earlier view is with his description of the nature of faith. Like Luther, the early Melanchthon did not hesitate to affirm that faith itself is righteousness. By 1543 Melanchthon no longer speaks with such terminology. Instead, he locates righteousness in Christ and affirms that faith is merely an instrument that grasps Christ, and, as such, is intrinsically unworthy in itself:

. . . we are righteous by faith, that is, through mercy for the sake of Christ we are righteous, not because faith is a virtue which merits the remission of sins by its own worthiness. . . . Therefore we do not say that we are righteous by faith in the sense that this is a worthiness of such great power that it merits remission, but in the sense that there must be some instrument in us by which we lay hold upon our Mediator who intercedes for us, and on account of whom the eternal Father is favorable toward us.⁶⁶

For Luther, Christ and faith are tied so closely together that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Melanchthon, on the other hand, offers some refinement on this question and argues for a conceptual distinction between Christ and faith. In doing so, he guards against the charge that faith is nothing more than a surrogate work, a charge that would reduce his gospel to another kind of law. For the mature Melanchthon, Christ alone is the sinner's righteousness. Even faith cannot stand in his place. But faith is necessary to take hold of Christ, and thus the doctrine of justification by faith means that God's imputation of righteousness occurs when the sinner, by the work of God's grace and the assent of free will, meets the condition of faith and so grasps Christ and his righteousness.

⁶⁶Ibid., 109.

The third element of discontinuity between Luther and Melanchthon is Melanchthon's promotion of a third use of the law.⁶⁷ Highly motivated to defend his gospel against the charge of antinomianism, Melanchthon began to argue by 1534 that the law has an ongoing function in the lives of believers, namely, to aid them in the practice of obedience.⁶⁸ In the 1543 *Loci* Melanchthon argues that believers have been freed from the law's condemnation, but nevertheless the law must continue to be preached to the regenerate in order to point out the remnants of sin in them and to inform them of what God demands.⁶⁹ It is evident in his argument that his concern is to safeguard an objective standard of righteousness for believers so that they will not seek to worship God on the basis of their own imaginations but will adhere to what he has revealed.⁷⁰ Although one must wonder how the first section of Luther's *Small Catechism* avoids using the law as an aid to obedience in the lives of the regenerate, the fact remains that Luther never explicitly articulated a third use of the law.⁷¹ Some have argued or implied that the rise of the third use in Melanchthon indicates an encroachment of law into

⁶⁷The historical context and origin of this doctrine in Melanchthon is explained in Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

⁶⁸Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 195-96.

⁶⁹“Tertio quaeritur de usu Legis in renatis. Quatenus autem renati et iustificati fide sint liberi a Lege, dicendum est suo loco. Sunt enim liberati a Lege, id est, a maledictione et damnatione seu ab ira Dei, quae in Lege proponitur, scilicet, si fidem retinent et fiducia filii Dei repugnant peccato et vincunt terrores peccati. Interim tamen docenda est Lex, quae reliquias peccati indicat, ut crescat agnitio peccati et poenitentia, et simul sonnet Evangelium de Christo, ut crescat fides. Item, Lex regnatis ideo proponenda est, ut doceat certa opera, in quibus Deus vult nos exercere obedientiam.” Melanchthon *Tertia Aetas* 6 (CR 21:719).

⁷⁰“Non enim vult nos Deus nostro consilio excogitare opera aut cultus; sed vult nos verbo suo regi, sicut scriptum est: Frustra colunt me mandatis hominum. Item: Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum etc. Et ratio humana cum non regitur verbo Dei, facile deerrat.” Ibid.

⁷¹After expounding both the positive and negative aspects of each of the Ten Commandments, Luther concludes the first section by saying, “God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments. However, God promises grace and every good thing to all those who keep these commandments. Therefore we also are to love and trust him and gladly act according to his commands.” Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). It is difficult to see how this kind of instruction differs from what Melanchthon advocated as a third use of the law.

gospel, resulting from a truncated doctrine of justification.⁷² Whether Melanchthon's doctrine of justification, in comparison to Luther's, is too narrowly forensic is not a question this study intends to address. What is of significance for this study, however, is the relationship between law and gospel in Melanchthon's mature theology. However his introduction of the third use of the law might be interpreted theologically, it must be kept in mind that the mature Melanchthon explicitly and consistently separated the believer's obedience to the law from the question of justification. Insofar as right standing with God is concerned, Melanchthon stands with Luther in his assertion that the law has no bearing on the issue, that faith alone justifies, and that justifying righteousness is alien to the sinner.

Luther continued to speak approvingly of Melanchthon's work, granting high praise to the 1535 edition of the *Loci Communes*, the first revision in which Melanchthon's independence had started to show:

If anybody wishes to become a theologian, he has a great advantage, first of all, in having the Bible. This is now so clear that he can read it without any trouble. Afterward he should read Philip's *Loci Communes*. This he should read diligently and well until he has its contents fixed in his head. If he has these two he is a theologian, and neither the devil nor a heretic can shake him. . . .

There's no book under the sun in which the whole of theology is so compactly presented as in the *Loci Communes*. If you read all the fathers and sententiaries you have nothing. No better book has been written after the Holy Scriptures than Philip's.⁷³

Clearly, Melanchthon was an independent thinker. But it is difficult to maintain the "Luther against the Lutherans" thesis, with Melanchthon as the primary villain, in light of such statements on Luther's part.

⁷²Seifrid ("Luther, Melanchthon, and Paul," 142) writes, "Since 'justification' no longer had an effective dimension, the Law (in its 'third use') moved in to fill the vacuum left behind." Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 190-91, hints very strongly at a similar evaluation.

⁷³Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, *LW* 54: 439-40. This comment is dated in the winter of 1542-1543.

For both Luther and Melanchthon, justification is developed on the basis of a divine demand for perfect obedience, which no sinful human being can attain. For this reason, in contrast to medieval Catholic theology, right standing with God must come from an alien righteousness, namely, the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to the sinner. Unable to seek righteousness on the basis of the law, the sinner must look only to the gospel, and thus the strong law-gospel distinction, a hallmark of Lutheran theology, stands firmly in place both for Luther and Melanchthon. This shared theological outlook ties these two men close together in their common opposition to the law-gospel synthesis of medieval Catholic theology.

Melanchthon eventually forged his own path with regard to the issue of free will, affirming a middle way between Luther and Erasmus on this issue. Unlike Luther, the mature Melanchthon regarded faith, not as righteousness itself, but as an empty vessel that receives the righteousness of Christ. Having put some distance between the forensic and transformative aspects of salvation, Melanchthon, unlike Luther, eventually came to espouse a third use of the law. However, none of these theological developments in Melanchthon threaten the centrality of alien righteousness, which in turn is tied to a clear law-gospel distinction and rooted in a divine demand for perfect obedience. The best way to assess the question of continuity and discontinuity between Luther and Melanchthon is to view them within their own historical-theological context, in which both men stand over against Rome by espousing a doctrine of justification by faith on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone. As long as they share this vision of how a sinner is placed in right standing with God, other matters of discontinuity between them are best considered in-house debates within a shared Lutheran tradition.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CR Corpus Reformatorum (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834-1900; reprint, New York: Johnston Reprint Corp., 1964)
- LW *Luther's Works*, American ed., ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986)
- WA *D. Martin Luther's Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883-)