

IS R. C. SPROUL WRONG ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER?  
AN ANALYSIS OF R. C. SPROUL'S *FAITH ALONE:  
THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION*  
WITH RESPECT TO AUGUSTINE, LUTHER, CALVIN,  
AND CATHOLIC LUTHER SCHOLARSHIP<sup>1</sup>

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R. C. Sproul's thesis in his book, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, states that justification *sola fide* (by faith alone) is the essence of the biblical gospel. He marshals the witness of Scripture in support of this assertion and brings the testimony of the Reformers, specifically Martin Luther and John Calvin, to bear as secondary witnesses. From this evidence Sproul draws the implication that without the doctrine of *sola fide*, the gospel is so deprived of vital content that it ceases to be the gospel. Sproul draws the further implications that those bereft of the doctrine of *sola fide*, like the Roman Catholic Church, are apostate, and that modern evangelicals who declare unity in the gospel with Rome are guilty of compromising the good news. The declarations of such gospel unity with Rome and the denials of the same constitute this justification controversy that Sproul addresses.

In this essay, I am primarily concerned with the Reformers—Luther and Calvin—and Sproul's exposition of their cause against Roman Catholic opponents in the sixteenth century and how Sproul uses the Reformers' teachings on justification to support his thesis today. While I conclude that Sproul is basically correct in his understanding of the Reformers, I also believe that his thesis is deficient in three areas: first, it raises serious historical and theological questions about the Christian status of Augustine and the pre-Reformation Church that it does not answer but to which the Reformers did address themselves; second, it fails to account for a Reformation emphasis on what might be called an existential appropriation of the gospel by faith alone without an explicit awareness of the doctrinal formula—*sola fide*; and third, it fails to consider how the Catholic theologians, since the beginning of the twentieth century, have dialogued with Luther, moved beyond rejection of the Reformer, and how the Catholic Church has officially adopted many of his theological reforms of the doctrine of justification.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this article is a play off of an article entitled "Was Martin Luther Wrong?" adapted from R. C. Sproul's booklet, *Justified By Faith Alone*, [www.antithesis.com](http://www.antithesis.com), c. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 1999. The work that is subjected to critique is R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

In response I will, first, present the background of this controversy and how R. C. Sproul has framed the issues involved; second, demonstrate the implications of Sproul's thesis on the pre-Reformation Church by relating it to St. Augustine, whose doctrine was determinative for the pre-Reformation period;<sup>2</sup> third, show that the Reformers acknowledged their divergence from Augustine over the role of faith in justification;<sup>3</sup> fourth, explain that while Augustine and the medieval, papal theologians held to the same view of faith, the Reformers distinguished Augustine and other Church fathers, who they accepted as a Christian teachers, from the papal theologians, whom they did not, and explore the possible bases for this; and fifth, demonstrate how the Catholic Church has moved beyond its rejection of Lutheran teaching and consider if evangelicals and Catholics might be faithful to their justification traditions and still achieve gospel unity today.

### I. THE JUSTIFICATION CONTROVERSY

*Faith Alone* emerged at a time when various evangelical and Roman Catholic church leaders were declaring a unified mission to counteract the moral disintegration in society. This mission was outlined in a 1994 document known as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT)*, which claimed that the shared vocation was based on a common faith held by each group.<sup>4</sup> Sproul's book deals largely with what he considers to be a betrayal of the gospel by *ECT* and thus a betrayal of the Reformation that recovered the gospel in the sixteenth century. The book is not purely reactionary, however. Sproul lays out what he considers to be the "justification controversy" and proceeds to explain the Reformation understanding of justification from the Scriptures and historical and systematic theology.

The Christian doctrine of justification addresses the question of how a person gains a favorable or righteous standing before God and so is found acceptable to him and worthy of eternal life. For this reason, the doctrine of justification is integrally related to the gospel or "good news" proclamation

<sup>2</sup> Augustine's determinative influence is documented by Alister McGrath who refers to him as the "fountainhead." *Iustitia Dei: The Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2d ed.; Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 17–36. See also Anothony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002) 45–46.

<sup>3</sup> I will focus my analysis on Luther and Calvin, because these are the primary historical sources Sproul uses in his discussion of the controversy and because my critique concerns his handling of these sources. Sproul regards Luther and Calvin as providing the primary antithesis to Catholicism and the model for later Protestant responses to Rome. Thus, any detailed discussion of the scholastic treatments of justification, whether of the medieval scholastics or of the Protestant scholastics, is outside the scope of my essay. The reason why I bring Augustine into the scope of my essay is that for Sproul has largely overlooked his doctrine of justification, the Reformers' attitude towards it, and the gaps that these omissions open up in his thesis.

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millenium* (March 29, 1994). Available from BASIC Truth Ministries, P.O. Box 504M, Bay Shore, NY 11706. *First Things* (May 1994) 15–22 (cited in Sproul, *Faith Alone* 193).

of the Christian Church.<sup>5</sup> *Faith Alone* made a major contribution to the ensuing discussions between the signers of *ECT* and those who abstained. The talks have yielded two more significant documents: *The Gift of Salvation (GOS)*,<sup>6</sup> which was the follow-up to *ECT*, and *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration*.<sup>7</sup> The latter was a response by some leading evangelicals, like Sproul, who were still not satisfied by *GOS*. Around the same time, Sproul had another book forthcoming—*Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together*, which served as a critique of *GOS* and an exposition of *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*.<sup>8</sup> Sproul's thesis in *Faith Alone* seems to be the driving force for the opponents of *ECT* and *GOS*. This fact and the provocative nature of Sproul's thesis as a modern-day restatement of the concerns of Luther and Calvin move me to concentrate upon it.

Sproul's thesis asserts that justification *sola fide*, or "by faith alone," is the essence or heart of the gospel. He writes, "I am convinced, as were the Reformers, that justification by faith alone is essential to the gospel and that Rome clearly rejects it."<sup>9</sup> Sproul claims that when Rome rejected the Reformers' doctrine of justification *sola fide* at the Council of Trent (1545–63), the Roman church rejected the gospel itself and officially became an apostate body. He continues, "The flap over *ECT* is over this very point: the recognition of Rome as a true church despite its view of justification."<sup>10</sup> Sproul seems to be arguing that a church body must subscribe to justification by faith alone as an article of faith, in order to be, in fact, justified by faith alone, since the context of his statements is the salvation status of those who do not believe the doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Sproul claims support for his position from the Reformers.

Sproul writes that Luther's great concern was the appropriation of justification.<sup>12</sup> Luther said that justification was appropriated by faith alone, and according to Sproul, "Luther called justification by faith alone 'the article upon which the church stands or falls' (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*)."<sup>13</sup> While Sproul seems to be quoting Luther, this formula actually belongs to the age of Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> Though the same sentiment can

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion see McGrath, "Prolegomena," in *Iustitia Dei* 1–16.

<sup>6</sup> *The Gift of Salvation* (1997). Printed in *Christianity Today* 41/14 (8 December 1997) 35–36, 38; and *First Things* 97 (January 1998) 20–23, quoted in R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 197.

<sup>7</sup> *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration* (1999). Printed in *Christianity Today* 43/7 (14 June 1999) 51–56, quoted in Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right* 197.

<sup>8</sup> Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right*.

<sup>9</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone* 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>11</sup> Sproul argues that Rome's denial of *sola fide* is an act of apostasy (*ibid.* 176–82). Lane makes the same point with respect to a work of John Gerstner's (*Justification* 146, n. 55).

<sup>12</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone* 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 18. See also pp. 30, 40–44.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase first appears in 1718 in an anti-Pietist essay by Valentin E. Löscher. Eric W. Gritsch, "The Origins of the Lutheran Teaching on Justification," in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (ed. H. George Anderson et al.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) n. 3, 351.

be found in Luther's writings,<sup>15</sup> his approach to the issue goes deeper than a surface reading allows.

Justification is indeed at the center of Luther's theology. Luther said that without the doctrine of justification, "the church of God is not able to exist for one hour."<sup>16</sup> Luther also included *sola fide* in his definition of justification: "By faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ, without works, are we declared just (*pronuntiarī iustos*) and saved."<sup>17</sup> It must be pointed out, however, that Luther's statements do not indicate that the experience of justification is necessitated upon a cognitive understanding that it happens by faith alone. I intend to show that, for Luther and Calvin, faith is essential and not the knowledge of how faith works, so that people can be justified through faith alone without understanding that the experience of justification happens in that way. In fact, as with St. Augustine and other Church fathers, a person's notion of the role of faith in justification could differ materially from the Reformers without negating one's Christian profession or disqualifying one as a Christian teacher. Anthony N. S. Lane comments, "The Reformation doctrine is that justification is by Christ and received through faith in Christ, not through subscribing to a particular doctrinal formula."<sup>18</sup>

Sproul supports his thesis from Reformation sources, but his conclusions are not informed by an engagement with patristic and medieval treatments of justification; this is one of the major weaknesses of the book. He does introduce Augustine and Aquinas into the conversation to establish that they believed justification to be exclusively by grace, and he uses their theology to accuse the Council of Trent of semi-Pelagianism.<sup>19</sup> Beyond this, Sproul does not substantially treat the views of Augustine or Aquinas on justification. If he had, his thesis would surely have led him, as it did the Reformers, to deal with the question of the Christian status of the pre-Reformation church, since Augustine and the rest of its theologians did not teach that we are justified *sola fide* in the Reformation sense.<sup>20</sup> In fact, unless Sproul's

<sup>15</sup> *Smalcald Articles* 2/1:1–5. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert Kolb et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 301. Luther's exposition of Psalm 130:4, 1532, 1533. WA 40 III, 351, 352. *Lectures on Galatians* 1535. WA 40 I, 49.24–27. LW 26, 10. See also the discussion in *Justification by Faith* §27, also n. 51, 320.

<sup>16</sup> WA 30 II, 650.20–21. All translations are mine unless a translator is cited.

<sup>17</sup> *Lectures on Galatians* 1535. WA 40 I, 355.24–25. LW 26, 223.

<sup>18</sup> *Justification* 146, n. 55. This is true despite the fact that the doctrinal formula was still crucial for the Reformers and that the rejection of it (even by friends) raised serious questions for them. See n. 125 below.

<sup>19</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone* 135–39.

<sup>20</sup> John Gerstner argues that Augustine and especially Aquinas were essentially Protestant in their understanding of justification and that "if the Roman church had followed Aquinas the Reformation would not have been absolutely necessary" ("Aquinas Was a Protestant," *Table Talk* [May 1994] 14). For a pointed critique of Gerstner's position see Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John H. Gerstner on Thomas Aquinas as a Protestant," *WTJ* 59 (1997) 113–21. One of the most forceful statements of presence of the Protestant doctrine in the pre-Reformation era comes from the nineteenth-century Scottish polemicist James Buchanan (whom Sproul cites repeatedly). Buchanan declared his intent ". . . to prove a matter of fact . . . namely, that the Protestant doctrine of Justification was not a 'novelty' introduced for the first time by Luther and Calvin,—it was held and taught, more or less explicitly, by some in every successive age,—and that there is no truth

thesis is qualified, it would lead to the unintended consequence of consigning to perdition the entire Church from the patristic period up to the dawn of the Reformation, something the Reformers did not do. This is because the Reformation understanding of justification *sola fide* was unheard of in the pre-Reformation church and thus not believed until Luther. Alister McGrath points out that "there are no 'Forerunners of the Reformation doctrines of justification.'" <sup>21</sup>

To put it another way, Luther's doctrine of justification *sola fide* was not a recovery but an innovation within the Western theological tradition. What is provocative about Sproul's thesis is that the equation of the construct of *sola fide* with the gospel itself would mean that the Roman Catholic Church not only rejected the gospel at Trent, but the Church never possessed it at

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in the allegation that it had been unknown for fourteen hundred years before the Reformation" (*The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955] 80). Lane comments that this could only be sustained in "less historically acute centuries" ("Bernard of Clairvaux: A Forerunner of John Calvin?" in *Bernardus Magister* [ed. John R. Sommerfelt; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1992] 536). Remarkably, Thomas C. Oden has recently attempted to establish this thesis in *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002). Anticipating challenges, Oden has already given a preliminary response: ". . . at least I can establish the point clearly that there are in patristic texts clear anticipations of the Reformer's teaching of justification. . . . So one modest objective will be accomplished: It will no longer be possible hereafter to say that the Fathers had no developed notion or doctrine of justification by grace through faith" (49, 50). This is modest indeed. I do not think it is commonly disputed today that the Fathers had some developed ideas of "grace" and "faith," especially the later Fathers during the Pelagian controversy, or that they intimated the later Reformation doctrine. The central divide between the Reformation and pre-Reformation conceptions of justification concerns the formal basis of justification, i.e. the most immediate cause of justification or the actual grounds that elicit God's acceptance. For Luther and Calvin this was faith, but before the Reformation this was associated with the merit of good works or love (*caritas*). This also relates to the nature of justifying righteousness, i.e. whether it is grasped in Christ by faith or worked in us through love. The formal basis of justification also serves as the organizing principle around which all other terms tend to receive their meanings and function. If Oden wants to demonstrate meaningful consensus between the Fathers and the Reformers, then he must show that the common biblical terms and concepts receive the same significance around a common center of gravity in both periods.

<sup>21</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 187. For a fuller treatment see Alister McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification," *HTR* 75 (1982) 219–42. Lane, while in basic agreement with McGrath, asserts that McGrath's thesis needs to be qualified by a study of Bernard of Clairvaux. Lane shows that while Bernard follows the contours of Augustine's doctrine of human merit achieved through grace (*meritum ex gratia*), he also speaks of justification through the merits of Christ. Lane notes that even though Bernard is inconsistent on this point, he appeals to an imputation of Christ's righteousness out of a pastoral concern that Christians not look to their works for assurance. Lane argues that Bernard serves Calvin as a theological forerunner in this way. Lane faults McGrath for focusing on medieval theologians to the neglect of spiritual writers like Bernard ("Bernard of Clairvaux" 533–45). See also Lane's review of McGrath's book in *EQ* 63 (1991) 281–85, and his "Justification in Sixteenth-Century Patristic Anthologies," in *Auctoritas Patrum: Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (ed. Leif Grane *et al.*; Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1993). Franz Posset illumines a similar influence of Bernard on Luther in "Divus Bernardus: Saint Bernard as Spiritual and Theological Mentor of the Reformer Martin Luther," in *Bernardus Magister* 517–32; see esp. the section "Bernard's Principle of Grace Alone and Faith Alone" 519–23.

all from the post-apostolic period up to the time of Luther. In this unqualified form, Sproul's thesis would also mean that since no one knew the gospel in the pre-Reformation church, no one experienced justification, and thus there was no Church.

## II. AUGUSTINE'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Luther and Calvin stood with Augustine on justification *sola gratia* (by grace alone) against the Pelagian tendencies within Rome (represented by the *via moderna* of William of Ockham), but Luther and Calvin diverged from Augustine in their teaching on the role of faith and in their denial of the merit in justification. Augustine did not use faith to deny merit, as did the Reformers. Rather, Augustine used faith to affirm human merit as the grounds of justification. Augustine was not a proto-evangelical regarding the role of faith in justification.

Pelagius began his controversy with Augustine by arguing that man is justified by the observance of the law without the aid of special grace. Augustine responded in the year 412 with his work, *The Spirit and the Letter*, in which he argued that man could only be justified by the law through a work of grace. Augustine used Paul's statement, "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,"<sup>22</sup> to explain man's relationship to the law in justification. According to Augustine, the law is "the letter that kills, unless the life-giving Spirit is present."<sup>23</sup> Augustine further explained the role of the Spirit by appealing to Rom 5:5:

And when what we should do and the goal we should strive for begins to be clear, unless we find delight in it and love it, we do not act, do not begin, do not live good lives. But so that we may love it, the *love of God* is poured out *in our hearts*, not by free choice which comes from ourselves, but *by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5).<sup>24</sup>

For Augustine, "the love of God said to be poured out in our hearts is not that by which he loves us, but that by which he makes us love him."<sup>25</sup> According to Augustine, the Spirit pours the love of God, also called charity (*caritas*), into our hearts so that we may keep God's law rightly, out of love and not out of fear.<sup>26</sup> Through charity, the law becomes our friend, for as Augustine quoted Paul, "*Love is the fulfillment of the law* (Rom 13:9–10)."<sup>27</sup> Once this work of grace occurs, the law is kept by faith. The role of faith is to trust in God to work obedience to the law in our lives. He wrote, "By that

<sup>22</sup> 2 Cor 3:6 ESV.

<sup>23</sup> *The Spirit and the Letter*, in *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (trans. Roland Teske; ed. John E. Rotelle; Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), vol. 23: *Answer to the Pelagians*) 4, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (trans. Teske) 3, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 32, 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 8, 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 17, 29.

faith they believed that only God's grace can help their weakness to fulfill what the law of works demands."<sup>28</sup>

While Augustine held that justifying righteousness is found in faith's obedience to the law, he maintained that this human obedience is also God's righteousness given to the sinner. Augustine asserted that we are made just by a righteousness from God, "not that by which God is righteous, but that with which he clothes a human being when he justifies a sinner."<sup>29</sup> This statement, which confirmed Luther's insight into righteousness as a gift, does not conflict with Augustine's position that God's righteousness is love's obedience to the law which he produces in a person's life. Noting the distinction between the external Mosaic letter and the internal Spirit, Augustine said, "So in the former case the law (*lex*) was placed on the outside, so that the unrighteous would be terrified (*qua iniusti terreantur*), but in the latter case the law was given on the inside to be their justification (*qua iustificarentur*)."<sup>30</sup> Augustine added that those under the letter do not understand this until "they pass over to Christ and the veil is taken away, that is until they pass over to grace and understand that our justification (*nobis iustificationem*), by which we do what he commands (*qua faciamus quod iubet*), comes from him (*ab ipso esse*)."<sup>31</sup> Our justification, according to Augustine, is "given on the inside" and is "from him," and finds its outward expression in the "law," in doing "what he commands." Thus Augustine's doctrine has been characterized as "transformative," as it begins in a work of grace that renews us inwardly, and proceeds by grace moving us to keep the works of the law outwardly. By contrast, Luther located justification in faith alone excluding the works of the law.<sup>32</sup> Faith was crucial for Augustine, too, but it was not alone in justifying, as its purpose was to do the works of love and thus provide the basis of justification. Thus, we might say that what Augustine joined together in justification (i.e. faith and works), Luther forever tore asunder.<sup>33</sup>

On the importance of faith, Augustine taught that without faith "there is lacking the good fruit that springs up from the root of love. But if *faith that works love* is present (Gal 5:6), one begins to find delight in the law of God in the interior being."<sup>34</sup> Faith was important to Augustine for the very reason that it works the "good fruit" of love, so that good works could serve as the basis for justification. In a later work, Augustine writes that the righteous live from "*the faith which works through love*, so that God gives them

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 10, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 9, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. CSEL 60, 17, 29.19–20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 30.23–24.

<sup>32</sup> Luther added *sola* to his translation of Rom 8:28 in order to emphasize the exclusion of works. For Luther's defense of his translation see *On Translating: An Open Letter*. WA 30 II, 636–37. LW 35, 187–89.

<sup>33</sup> Luther asserted, "But you cannot teach works unless you hurt faith, since faith and works stand at opposite extremes in the matter of justification" (*Judgment On Monastic Vows*. WA 8, 600.34–36. LW 44, 289 [trans. Atkinson]).

<sup>34</sup> *The Spirit and the Letter* (trans. Teske) 14, 26.

eternal life in accord with their works.”<sup>35</sup> In this framework, Augustine was aware of a tension between the gratuitous nature of a salvation that was by faith and grace on the one hand and also considered the reward of works and love on the other, for he immediately adds:

From this there arises no small question which needs to be resolved by God’s gift. For, if eternal life is given in return for good works, as Scripture says with perfect clarity, *God will repay each according to his works* (Rom 2:6), how is eternal life a grace since grace is not a repayment for works, but is given gratuitously. . . . It seems to me then that this question can only be resolved if we understand that our good works themselves for which eternal life is our recompense also pertain to the grace of God because of the Lord’s words, *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5).<sup>36</sup>

Thus we see how, for Augustine, faith, grace, and love all function together to bring eternal life. The biblical tension between faith and works that Luther was so adamant to maintain in justification, Augustine located in the pre-conversion state before justification (i.e. under the letter of the law).<sup>37</sup> In the pre-conversion state the works of the law justify no one. But as soon as one passes over to Christ, grace relieves the tension between faith and works (by making justifying works the result of faith), and faith not only believes in God’s grace to work love but also becomes active in love in order to bring about justification.<sup>38</sup> In sum, grace pours in the love for God so that faith is produced that then turns love into action. In this way, God gives the righteous eternal life “in accord with their works.”

Thus, we see that Augustine’s doctrine of justification is not “by faith” in the Reformation sense, but by the works of love produced by faith.<sup>39</sup> Faith is not justifying in any formal way. The basis of justification is the Chris-

<sup>35</sup> *Grace and Free Choice* (trans. Teske, in *The Works of St. Augustine* [1999], vol. 26: *Answer to the Pelagians*) 7, 18. In this treatise, dated 426/7, Augustine is not disputing with the Pelagians *per se*, but with Catholic monks who questioned his response to the Pelagians.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 8, 19, 20. Luther also felt a tension between his doctrine of justification by faith without works and a final judgment that was based on works. It must be granted that this is a biblical tension, but the difference between Augustine’s and Luther’s positions can be seen in their different resolutions to it. Whereas Augustine posited that justifying works are really the gratuitous gift of grace, Luther posited that good works are simply the incarnation of justifying faith (*fides incarnata*) and thus, *contra* Augustine, do not justify as such but can only be said to receive a reward by virtue of the faith that does them. Luther distinguished *fides incarnata* from *fides absoluta*, the latter referring to faith without the works of the Law, which is justifying in the formal sense. For Luther’s whole argument see *Gal. Comm.* WA 40I, 415–17. *LW* 26, 265–67. Luther also taught that justifying faith works love in the Christian life and such works confirm true justifying faith. See WA 40I, 427.11–14. *LW* 26, 272–73. WA 40II, 37.15–17. *LW* 27, 30. See also Peter Manns, “Absolute and Incarnate Faith—Luther on Justification in the Galatians’ Commentary of 1531–1535,” in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (ed. Jared Wicks; Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970) 121–56, 205–23. For Calvin’s view see Lane, *Justification* 33–39, 198–210.

<sup>37</sup> In dealing with Rom 3:24, 28, the text Luther used to exclude works from justification, Augustine wrote, “For he says that it is *gratuitously* that *human beings are justified by faith without the works of the law* (Rom 3:24, 28). He meant nothing else to be understood by his term *gratuitously*, but that works do not precede justification” (*The Spirit and the Letter* [trans. Teske] 26, 45).

<sup>38</sup> Augustine makes the same argument in *On Faith and Good Works* 14, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Lane, *Justification* 45–46, shows that Augustine did consider the later Protestant definition but ended up going in a different direction.

tian's new obedience to the law out of love for God. McGrath cites Bavaud, saying that Augustine's doctrine of justification, instead of being characterized by *sola fide*, is more properly called justification *sola caritate* (by love alone).<sup>40</sup> Luther scholar David Steinmetz comments, "Augustine regards love rather than faith as the central principle of justification."<sup>41</sup> For Augustine, love is both poured in and worked out in the process of justification, and faith is the link between these two aspects of justifying love that moves the process along.

It deserves to be noted that Augustine's doctrine makes human merit the basis of justification. He writes, "For the purpose of our temporal life is to gain the merit (*meritum*) by which we may live in eternity (*quo in aeternitate vivatur*)."<sup>42</sup> While human merit is the means to eternal life, Augustine again lays more emphasis on the idea of gift. He writes, "Nothing but grace produces good merit in us; and what else but His gifts does God crown when He crowns our merits?"<sup>43</sup> Winning merits for eternal life is accomplished by man, but only through a work of grace, so that all human merit is attributable to God. Augustine was fond of quoting 1 Cor 4:7: "That to which eternal life is owed is true justice, but if it is true justice, it does not originate in you. . . . [I]f you do have it, you must have received it, for '*what good hast thou that thou hast not received?*'"<sup>44</sup> For Augustine, each person's merit is his own works of love, but this merit can also be said to belong to God, for it is his generous gift of grace.

Though Augustine insisted that merit is God's gift to the sinner, his doctrine is a merit system nonetheless and should be distinguished from the Reformation denial of merit. The concept of human merit as the basis of justification is assumed and goes largely unchallenged in the Western theological tradition until Luther.<sup>45</sup> The development of a "merit-through-grace" (*meritum ex gratia*) doctrine in the West has been ascribed to theologians like Tertullian, who said, "The good deed puts God in debit," but the real

<sup>40</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 30.

<sup>41</sup> David Steinmetz, "Luther and Augustine on Romans 9," in *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 12. See also A. G. Dickens, "Augustine and Luther," in *The Counter Reformation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969) 38–41. Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 28–35, provides a summary of the efforts since Karl Holl to distinguish the thought structures of Luther and Augustine. Robert Louis Wilken, "Salvation in Early Christian Thought," in *Catholics and Evangelicals* 56–76, gives a treatment of the thought of Augustine and the whole patristic era in general. Steven Ozment, "*Homo Viator*: Luther and Late Medieval Theology," in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective* (ed. Steven Ozment; Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971) 142–54, argues for *sola fide* as the criterion that distinguishes Luther from the late medieval mystics and their doctrine of union with Christ through love. Lane, "Traditional Catholic Doctrine: Trent," in *Justification* 45–85, gives a treatment of Augustine, the Sixteenth Century Colloquies, and the Council of Trent. For a comprehensive historical overview of the issues see *Justification by Faith* §§5–72 and for more detail McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* chaps. 2–7.

<sup>42</sup> *Letters*, CSEL 44, 130.14.14–16.

<sup>43</sup> *St. Augustine Letters: Volume IV (165–203)*, vol. 30 FC (ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari; trans. Wilfrid Parsons; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958) 194.19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 194.21 (emphasis mine).

<sup>45</sup> Bernard has been noted as one possible exception. See n. 21.

culprit may be the Latin language itself.<sup>46</sup> There are two Latin words which figured decisively in Western theology, the one being *meritum* and the other *iustificare*.

*Meritum*, which is from the participle form of the verb *merere*, speaks of something “deserved” or “earned,” and so the West approached Scripture asking, “What has one *done* in order to be considered righteous?”<sup>47</sup> Thus, justification became a matter of “just deserts” rather than of gracious estimate. Merit, in Latin, is an intrinsic quality in a person’s constituent nature, as opposed to an extrinsic, adjectival quality attributed to the person. Merit is something concrete and ontological in the Latin mindset, rather than an estimation in which a person is held legally or forensically, as in a law court. Greek, on the other hand, has no such verb as *merere*, and its verb *δικαίωω*, as used in the Septuagint (following the meaning of the Hebrew original קָדַשׁ) means “to hold in a righteous estimate” or “to make *legally* righteous.”<sup>48</sup> Correspondingly, *iustificare* in Latin theology means “to make righteous” (*iustum facere*) rather than to declare righteous in the legal sense.<sup>49</sup> Augustine inherited these concepts and was constrained by them but adopted the usage in a unique way, speaking of gracious merit.<sup>50</sup> The genius of Luther may be seen in his exegetical insight, prompted by his struggles over assurance, into Rom 1:16–17, through which he was able to break out of his Augustinian fetters and recover the divine estimate in justification.<sup>51</sup>

Luther came to the conclusion that human works were too unsure a foundation and could never quiet the troubled conscience.<sup>52</sup> Augustine, on the

<sup>46</sup> John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938) 235, 237.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 235.

<sup>48</sup> Luther himself noted something of this difference between the Latin and Hebraic mindsets when he said, “You can take the glory of God in two senses, active and passive . . . Similarly ‘The righteousness of God’ in Latin means the righteousness that God possesses, but a Hebrew would understand it as the righteousness that we have from God and in the sight of God” (WA 18, 769, 1–2. LW 33, 265 [trans. Rupp *et al.*]). Even though God is the first subject of righteousness in Luther’s comparison, it is an intrinsic righteousness in God’s own nature contrasted with the Hebraic notion of a righteousness passively received from God (and thus *extra nos*, i.e. extrinsic) and attributed to us before God.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine stated, “For what is justification other than to be made just” (*quid est enim aliud ‘iustificati’ quam ‘iusti facit’*) (*The Spirit and the Letter. CSEL* 60, 26, 45.10–11). Cf. Luther, “the term justified means that a man is considered righteous” (*Disputation Concerning Justification. WA* 39 I, 98.13, 14. LW 34, 167 [trans. Spitz]). Luther adds “*fide scilicet propter Christum*” (WA 39 I, 83. 35, 36. LW 34, 153).

<sup>50</sup> For a fuller discussion see Burnaby, *Amor Dei* 235–41; see also McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 12–22.

<sup>51</sup> Lohse suggests various influences that led to Luther’s recovery of the divine estimate. Augustine had employed the terminology of *reputare* and *imputare*, and Nominalism had emphasized the *acceptatio divina*. But he says, “It was chiefly the biblical text itself that furnished Luther his stimulus,” adding, “What is new is that Luther furnished the term *reputare/imputare* with its content” (*Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999] 261, see also pp. 75, 18–20).

<sup>52</sup> Randall Zachman argues that Augustine’s doctrine of justification led to a crisis of assurance that erupted in the Reformation. Zachmann contends that both Luther and Calvin sought to correct this by locating the basis of assurance not in the transforming work of God in us but in the

other hand, emphasized that Christian works were wrought by the Holy Spirit and, as such, could be designated as the meritorious basis of justification.<sup>53</sup> For Luther, faith receives righteousness in Christ, and the sinner becomes just in a single act. Augustine expressed justification in terms of an inner, progressive transformation, a making righteous, and did not speak of the merits of Christ.<sup>54</sup> Thus, John Burnaby comments that Augustine's doctrine is "far from being a disguised equivalent of the Lutheran denial of human merit."<sup>55</sup> Moreover,

Fresh accents in the Reformation understanding of justification as by faith alone (*sola fide*), not simply grace alone (*sola gratia*), fundamentally challenged Augustine's transformationist thinking. The Reformation wanted to restore Augustinian emphases on sin and grace. With its stress on faith, however, it also went beyond these emphases and conceptualized salvation in a new way.<sup>56</sup>

A common, central concern for both Augustine and Luther was the forgiveness of sins. While this concern led Luther to formulate justification by faith without the works of the law, Augustine never used this aspect of justification to deny the merit of human works. Augustine asserts, "God, of course, justifies sinners, not only by forgiving the evil deeds they committed, but also by bestowing love so that they avoid evil and do good through the Holy Spirit."<sup>57</sup>

### III. THE REFORMERS ON AUGUSTINE

Luther was not unaware of his position with regard to Augustine. He was quoted in his *Table Talk*, dated from November of 1531:

It was Augustine's view that the law, fulfilled by the powers of reason, does not justify, even as works of the moral law do not justify the heathen, but that if the Holy Spirit assists, the works of the law do justify. The question is not whether the law or the works of reason justify, but whether the law, kept with the Spirit's help, justifies. I reply by saying No. . . . Works never give a peaceful heart.<sup>58</sup>

Almost a year later Luther was quoted as saying:

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objective work of God for us in Christ. *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 1, 2, 6, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Aquinas would later say, "Man, by his will, does works meritorious of eternal life; but as Augustine says . . . it is necessary that the will of man be prepared by God through grace" (*Summa Theologica* 1, 2, 109.5). Thomas, following a development in Augustine's doctrine, added that man's meritorious work considered in itself has only a congruous merit or relative worthiness but inasmuch "as it proceeds from the grace of the Holy Spirit moving us to eternal life, it is meritorious of eternal life by condignity [i.e. an absolute or equivalent worthiness]" (ibid. 114.3).

<sup>54</sup> Burnaby, *Amor Dei* 240.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 238, 240.

<sup>56</sup> *Justification by Faith* §20. See also §§24, 25.

<sup>57</sup> *Answer to Julian* (trans. Roland Teske, *The Works of St. Augustine* [1999], vol. 25, *Answer to the Pelagians*) 165.

<sup>58</sup> *WA TR* 1, 32.7–15. *LW* 54, 10 (trans. Tappert).

Ever since I came to an understanding of Paul, I have not been able to think well of any doctor [of the church]. They have become of little value to me. At first I devoured, not merely read, Augustine. But when the door was opened for me in Paul, so that I understood what justification by faith is, it was all over with Augustine.<sup>59</sup>

Late in life, Luther acknowledged both his debt to and his distance from Augustine.<sup>60</sup> He wrote about a time shortly after his momentous insight into Rom 1:16–17:

Afterwards, I was reading Augustine's *On the Spirit and the Letter*, where beyond hope I found that he interpreted the righteousness of God in a similar way, as that righteousness with which God clothes us, when he justifies us. And although it was thus far spoken imperfectly, as he did not clearly explain everything concerning imputation (*ac de imputatione non clare omnia explicet*), nevertheless it was pleasing that the righteousness of God, by which we are justified, was taught (*placuit tamen iusticiam Dei doceri, qua nos istificemur*).<sup>61</sup>

Luther recognized that Augustine "interpreted the righteousness of God in a similar way," but that Augustine "did not clearly explain everything concerning imputation." Yet, Luther says Augustine did teach "the righteousness of God, by which we are justified." Luther contextually defines this justifying righteousness in terms of righteousness as gift as opposed to righteousness as standard. Thus he seems to be affirming Augustine's teaching as Christian insofar as Augustine explicated the nature of justifying righteousness as a gratuitous gift. Luther also located justifying righteousness in Christ *extra nos* (outside of us).<sup>62</sup> This righteousness becomes ours, Luther said, by imputation.<sup>63</sup> According to Heiko Oberman, Luther identified *extra nos* as the heart of the gospel,<sup>64</sup> and thus broke with the entire medieval tradition (not the *via moderna* only), which had taught that justifying righteousness was *in nobis* (inside of us).<sup>65</sup> For this reason, Luther regarded the medieval papacy as losing Christ, though the true church and true Christians still persisted under it.<sup>66</sup> What remains remarkable is that Luther seemed

<sup>59</sup> WA TR 1, 140.3–7. LW 54, 49 (trans. Tappert).

<sup>60</sup> For the Reformation's attitude to the Church fathers in general, see Scott Hendrix, "De-parentifying the Fathers: The Reformers and Patristic Authority," in *Auctoritas Patrum* 55–68. For Calvin specifically see his exposition of 1 Cor 3:15. *Corpus Reformatorum (CR)* 77.356–57, *Calvin's Commentaries: The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1960) 77–78. See also Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 33–47, 170–73.

<sup>61</sup> *Preface to the Latin Writings* (1545). WA 54, 186.16–20. My translation is from *Studienausgabe (SA)* 5, 637.10–14. LW 34, 337.

<sup>62</sup> *Disputation Concerning Justification* (1536). WA 39 I, 83.24–27, 35, 36; 108.25–109.3. LW 34, 153 (theses 27–29, 33); 177, 178.

<sup>63</sup> *Lectures on Galatians* (1535). WA 40 I, 41.15–43.25. LW 26, 4–6.

<sup>64</sup> Hampson agrees, saying that for Luther living "*extra se . . . by an alien righteousness . . . is nothing less than what it means to be a Christian*" (*Christian Contradictions* 12, see also pp. 10, 11, 25).

<sup>65</sup> Heiko Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," *HTR* 59 (1966) 1–26. See especially pp. 19–22, 24, 25.

<sup>66</sup> See *The Bondage of the Will*. WA 18, 649–51, 764.13–22. LW 33, 85–87, 258. Scot Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), details the development of Luther's view of the papacy.

to regard Augustine's doctrine as Christian even though Augustine did not clearly explain justifying righteousness as imputed either. Did Luther concede the concept of *extra nos* to Augustine even though he "did not clearly explain everything concerning imputation?" The larger question begs to be asked, "How do we account for Luther's different estimations of Augustine and the medieval papal theologians, since none of them conceived of justifying righteousness as being imputed from outside?" I will treat the possible reasons for Luther's differing valuation below.

Sproul seems to go beyond Luther on the issue of imputation when he states:

To be declared just on the sole grounds of the imputation of Christ's righteousness was to them [the Reformers] the very essence of the gospel. *ECT* nowhere mentions forensic justification or the concept of imputation, the fiery issues of the Reformation. Is a doctrine that denies the forensic character of justification properly called the gospel? If justification rests in part or in toto on anything other than the imputed righteousness of Christ, may it properly be called the biblical gospel?<sup>67</sup>

Sproul claims that the Reformers declared imputation to be "the very essence of the gospel," but Luther, at least, conceded that Augustine "did not clearly explain everything concerning imputation," while also maintaining that Augustine did teach "the righteousness of God, by which we are justified." Despite the fact that Augustine did not give a full account of imputation, did Luther recognize justifying righteousness in Augustine's doctrine, at least in the sense of righteousness as gift? This could mean that Luther recognized the concept of "righteousness as gift" as containing the idea of *extra nos* even without a clear notion of imputation. Thus, while forensic imputation was important to Luther, it may not have corresponded exactly to *extra nos* in his thought.<sup>68</sup>

Calvin was also aware of his discontinuity with Augustine on this point. In 1543 Calvin took up his pen in defense of the Lutheran doctrine of the bondage of the will against the Dutch Roman Catholic Albert Pighius, and his work *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* came to light. Calvin's dispute about grace and free choice led him to distinguish himself from Augustine, something he was normally loath to do. Calvin argued against Pighius that Augustine supported his doctrine of grace even though Augustine differed

<sup>67</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone* 44.

<sup>68</sup> Oberman points to the reality of *extra nos* apart from the notion of imputation, saying that "the meaning of the term 'extra nos' comes through in connection with the term possessio" ("Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei'" 21, 22). Oberman also points out that when Luther reached for imagery for his concept he was not limited to the law court. He cites *Two Kinds of Righteousness* saying, "Whereas one root of the new righteousness as possessio rather than as proprietas is to be found in Roman civil law, the other root can be discerned more specifically in the application of marriage imagery—contractus, sponsalia, consummatio—with the exchange of possession between the partners" (p. 25, n. 52; see the whole section pp. 20–26). Thus something *extra* the marriage partners (i.e. each other) is declared as their possession and is not made an intrinsic property. Likewise, for Luther, the new righteousness, which is *extra nos*, becomes our possession without being our property, and this could be explained without recourse to the imputation of the law court.

from him on the nature of justifying righteousness. He writes, “But Augustine reckons [people to be] holy on the basis of good works, while I deny works, whatever they may be, any power for attaining righteousness; [I deny this] to the extent that they are wicked if they have this intention.”<sup>69</sup> Then Calvin adds, “I answer that now is not the place for a discussion about how men attain righteousness before God.”<sup>70</sup> Calvin realized that the nature of justifying righteousness and how people come to receive it are not the same question. Calvin knew himself to be in agreement with Augustine on the exclusive role of grace in bestowing righteousness and that he differed with Augustine over whether this righteousness was in Christ or in “good works.” In the *Institutes*, Calvin writes,

Even the judgment of Augustine, or at least his manner of stating it, is not to be fully received. For although he admirably strips man of all praise for righteousness and attributes it to the grace of God, nevertheless, he refers this grace to sanctification, meaning the sanctification by which we are regenerated (*regeneramur*) by the Spirit unto newness of life.<sup>71</sup>

Calvin recognized that, for Augustine, the “grace” of justifying righteousness is regenerative to a person’s nature and thus belongs to the doctrinal category of regeneration or sanctification. Calvin, on the other hand, distinguished justification from regeneration and sanctification, and thus from any notion of intrinsic transformation.<sup>72</sup> While Augustine and Calvin both agreed that grace is monergistic in salvation, Calvin conceived of justifying righteousness as distinct from the inherent righteousness of the Christian life, and he acknowledges this difference between them.<sup>73</sup>

In summary, Luther and Calvin differed from Augustine primarily over three issues: (1) the formal basis or cause of justification—the Reformers maintained that the most immediate cause of justification is faith (*fides*), or faith righteousness, not love (*caritas*);<sup>74</sup> (2) the nature of justifying righteousness—the Reformers held that righteousness is in Christ outside of us (*extra nos*), and is not gracious merit produced in us (*in nobis*); it is imputed from the outside, not imparted from within; and (3) how righteousness is

<sup>69</sup> CR 34.312. *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius* (Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought 2; ed. Lane; trans. G. I. Davies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 116.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> CR 30.547. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.11.15.

<sup>72</sup> CR 30.533, 534, 537, 538. *Institutes* 3.11.1, 2, 6.

<sup>73</sup> The Reformers distinguished two kinds of righteousness. One corresponds to our status before God (*coram Deo*) and the other to the Christian life lived before man (*coram hominibus*). Calvin put this in terms of a double grace (*duplex iustitia*) with both kinds of righteousness flowing from the common source of union with Christ (*Institutes* 3.11.1, 3.11.10). Luther, on the other hand, spoke of one kind of righteousness flowing from another (WA 2, 145–47. LW 31, 297–99). Both are in contradistinction to Augustine who posited the righteousness of love only.

<sup>74</sup> Luther wrote that faith is the “formal righteousness, on account of which a person is justified, not on account of love, as the Sophists say” (*formalis iustitia, propter quam homo iustificatur, non propter caritatem, ut Sophistae loquuntur*) and added that faith is not formed by love but by Christ (*Lectures on Galatians* [1535]. WA 40 I, 229.25, 26. LW 26, 130, for the whole section see 225–35, 127–33 respectively). Calvin also equated the formal cause of justification with faith (*Institutes* 3.14.17).

appropriated—the Reformers contended that justifying righteousness is appropriated by faith alone (*sola fide*), not also by faith working love (*fides quae per caritatem operatur* or the later Medieval formula *fides caritate formata*). These lead to different conceptions of how we are found acceptable to God and worthy of eternal life. The Reformers tended to speak of justification as an instantaneous declaration of a righteous status (*pronuntiari iustos*) before God (*coram Deo*), not as being made righteous (*iustum facere*) by an inpouring of love.<sup>75</sup> But these differences with Augustine did not move Luther and Calvin to renounce him, though they do renounce the medieval papacy and its theologians for holding the same set of beliefs.<sup>76</sup> Sproul has ably demonstrated Luther's and Calvin's rejection of the papacy and used their testimony to support his modern-day critique of ECT and GOS, while, again, saying nothing with regard to the question his thesis raises concerning the status of Augustine and the pre-Reformation church.<sup>77</sup> I believe Sproul's gap can be filled, since the Reformers did address their status.

<sup>75</sup> It is true that Luther also spoke of justification as an ongoing process that included inner renewal. This seems to be because he thought of justification as a daily acquittal that needed to be reapplied until the consummation (*Disputation Concerning Justification* [1536]. WA 39 I, 122.13–15; 98.7–11. LW 34, 191, 167). Luther clearly distinguished what would later come to be known as sanctification from justification proper, when he distinguished our primary righteousness in Christ from our proper righteousness in the Christian life (*Two Kinds of Righteousness* [1518/9]. WA 2, 145–47. LW 31, 297–300). But Luther's flexibility of expression can also be seen when he spoke of "two parts in justification . . . grace and the free gift. Accordingly it is not only necessary for us to be justified, but also that a new obedience be begun in us" (*Licentiate Examination of Heinrich Schmedenstede* [1542] WA 39 II, 202.28–31. LW 34, 320 [trans. Spitzl]).

<sup>76</sup> Trent repeatedly cited Augustine in order to demonstrate the continuity of doctrine. In chapter VII of Trent's Sixth Session, the Council declares, ". . . the single formal cause [of justification] is the justice of God, *not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just. . . .* For though no one can be just except he to whom the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet this takes place in that justification of the sinner, when by the merit of the most holy passion, *the charity of God is poured forth by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of those who are justified and inheres in them. . . .*" (emphasis mine) (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: English Translation* [trans. H. J. Schroeder; Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978] 33–34). In chapter XVI, Trent affirms that eternal life is both "a grace mercifully promised" and "a reward promised by God himself, to be faithfully given to their good works and merits . . ." and adds Augustine's sentiment that Christ's "bounty toward all men is so great that He wishes the things that are His gifts to be their merits" (*ibid.* 41–42). Sproul makes much of the fact that Trent does not sound Augustine's tones of monergism (*Faith Alone* 140–42). This seems to be the substantial difference between them.

<sup>77</sup> It is odd that Sproul would not notice this problem, since he demonstrates his awareness of McGrath's work (*Faith Alone* 99). He notes that McGrath views Augustine's doctrine "as pivotal to the subsequent development of the doctrine of justification in the Roman Catholic Church" and quotes McGrath as saying that Augustine regards justifying righteousness as inherent rather than imputed. But he does not interact with this point. He simply goes on to insist on the essentiality of imputation, never raising the question of the status of Augustine and the pre-Reformation church (p. 106, see also p. 44). Sproul states elsewhere that any doctrine that does not define justifying righteousness in terms of imputation is "another gospel" and to teach it is "to fall under the anathema of God" ("The Forensic Nature of Justification" in *Justification by Faith Alone: Affirming the Doctrine by which the Church and the Individual Stands or Falls* [ed. Don Kistler; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995] 39; see also 49). Sproul does not attempt to salvage Augustine for the Reformation beyond noting that he spoke of "gracious merit" and "God's crowning his own gifts" (*Faith Alone* 148). But Sproul does not grapple with the fact that Augustine used these concepts in his doctrine of justification.

Sproul's treatment of ECT and GOS also needs to be assessed in light of new historical developments and changed context where the doctrine of justification has been addressed today by Catholics and Protestants in hopes of a different outcome.<sup>78</sup>

Before I proceed to the best explanations for the Reformers' differing attitudes to Augustine and the medieval tradition, I will attempt to dispel one unhelpful explanation. It might be contended that the Reformers' differing attitudes lie in the fact that Augustine lived before the Reformers and thus could not explicitly reject their doctrine. In fact, a person, like Augustine, might possess the essence of the gospel (*sola fide*) as long as that person has not rejected its essence. There are two historical-theological problems with this view. First, the chronological distance did not make a difference to Luther and Calvin when dealing with the medieval popes and theologians that preceded them. They believed that works had obscured Christ, and they renounced the practitioners of such theology with hardly any hesitation. Second, Augustine's non-explicit denial of the Reformers' *sola fide* doctrine does not deal with the fact that Augustine conceived of the essence of the gospel differently. For Augustine, the essence of the gospel is grace and love, not grace and faith. Even if Augustine did not formally deny the Reformers' doctrine, since no true equivalent existed in his day, he did negate it, *de facto*, by asserting the truth of his doctrine.<sup>79</sup>

#### IV. LIGHT FROM THE REFORMERS

Now we must address the question already posed above, "How do we explain the way Luther and Calvin regarded the papacy as losing Christ and Augustine and various Fathers as Christian, when it appears they espoused the same error on the decisive doctrine of faith?" If *sola fide* is part of the vital content of the gospel, why did Luther regard the papacy as antichrist and Augustine as teaching "the righteousness of God, by which we are justified?" I believe there are three possible interpretations that arise from the evidence and must ultimately be weighed by the same. The Reformers believed that, first, justification *sola gratia*, not *sola fide*, was the essence of the gospel, and it was this difference that divided the Pelagian theologians of the *via moderna* from St. Augustine. According to this perspective, *sola fide* was important to the Reformers as a biblical principle and corollary of *sola gratia* that safeguarded it from Pelagian corruption. Second, *sola gratia* created a felicitous inconsistency in Augustinian theology that prevented its adherents from actually trusting in charity when it came to their stand-

<sup>78</sup> See "The Catholic Contribution" below.

<sup>79</sup> Some might say that Augustine did explicitly reject the Reformation doctrine when he asserted, "We feel that we should advise the faithful that they would endanger the salvation of their souls if they acted on the false assurance that faith alone is sufficient for salvation or that they need not perform good works in order to be saved" (*On Faith and Good Works* no. 48, *Ancient Christian Writers* [trans. Gregory Lombardo; ed. Walter Burghardt *et al.*; New York: Newman, 1988] 14, 21). But Augustine was dealing with an antinomian version of *sola fide* and thus his rejection does not directly touch the Reformation doctrine (1, 1, 2).

ing before God. According to this perspective, Augustinians abandoned their works out of a keen awareness that sin still compromised them, and grace led them to sense that their standing before God was based on faith. They were saved by this faith alone despite their formal theology, thus the felicitous inconsistency. Third, Augustine and other Fathers taught the substance of *sola fide* without the formula itself, and thus the Reformers considered them to be Christian. According to this perspective, only the formula needs to be changed from *caritas* to *fides* so that the same doctrinal substance would be expressed better, as no real inconsistency was involved.

J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston have succinctly stated the basis of the first position:

The doctrine of free justification by faith only, which became the storm-centre of so much controversy during the Reformation period, is often regarded as the heart of the Reformers' theology, but this is hardly accurate. The truth is that their thinking was really centered upon the contention of Paul, echoed with varying degrees of adequacy by Augustine, and Gottschalk, and Bradwardine, and Wycliffe, that the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only. The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace.<sup>80</sup>

From this perspective Sproul would be wrong in his contention of what is "the heart of the Reformers' theology." According to Packer and Johnston, their heart does not beat for "the doctrine of free justification by faith only," but for salvation "by free and sovereign grace only."<sup>81</sup> Notice, too, that this has been "echoed with varying degrees of adequacy by Augustine, and Gottschalk, and Bradwardine, and Wycliffe." Thus there would be no need for Packer and Johnston to doubt the status of the pre-Reformation church, because Augustinians throughout had adequately confessed the heart of the Reformers' teaching. From this viewpoint, the path to modern-day unity between Rome and the Protestant church would be convergence around our common Augustinian heritage.

This interpretation has much to commend it. Luther called justification "the article of grace."<sup>82</sup> In *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), Luther congratulates Erasmus, "You alone, apart from all the rest, have attacked the

<sup>80</sup> "Historical and Theological Introduction," in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1957) 58.

<sup>81</sup> Sproul recently used Packer's and Johnston's quote to argue, "The principle of *sol[i] fide* is not rightly understood until it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *sola gratia*" ("The Pelagian Captivity of the Church," *Modern Reformation* 10/6 [May/June 2001] 23). Sproul even said that the concept of *sola gratia* was more basic to the Reformers. But he also played down Packer's and Johnston's antithesis between what is at the heart of the Reformers' teaching (i.e. *sola gratia*) and what is simply a safeguard (i.e. *sola fide*) by stating that for Luther and the Reformers, "justification by faith alone is an essential truth of Christianity" (ibid. 27; see also *Getting the Gospel Right* 19–22, 66; Kistler, *Justification by Faith Alone* 39, 49; "What Was Wrong with Luther?" in *Justified by Faith Alone* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1999] 9–13). But if Packer and Johnston are correct, *sola fide* is only essential for safeguarding "the heart of the Reformers' theology," not for making it what it is. Thus, either *sola fide* is an essential, heart issue for the Reformers, and Sproul is right, or it is a protective safeguard, and Sproul is wrong.

<sup>82</sup> WA 25, 375.17–18.

essence of the matter (*rem ipsam*), the point in question (*summam causae*). . . you and you alone, have seen the heart of the matter (*cardinem rerum*), and have aimed for the jugular itself (*ipsum jugulum*).<sup>83</sup> What was this “essence of the matter” in the debate between Luther and Erasmus? The issue was whether salvation was by grace alone or whether man’s free choice could play an independent role in contributing to salvation.<sup>84</sup> Here we see that Luther spoke of *sola gratia* as the essential issue dividing him from his Roman opponents. This can be seen again in Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians* (1535): “We are willing to carry the pope in our hands, even to kiss his feet, as soon as this is established, namely that God alone (*scilicet quod solus Deus*), out of pure grace (*ex mera gratia*), justifies us through Christ (*per Christum iustificet*).”<sup>85</sup> What continued to divide Luther from Rome in 1535? Faith is not mentioned. According to Luther here, it was justification in Christ by grace alone that perpetuated the schism with the papacy.

When Calvin began his list of essential doctrines of the Christian faith, he did not speak of justification *sola fide*. He writes in the *Institutes*, “For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; *our salvation rests in God’s mercy*; and the like.”<sup>86</sup> Like Luther, Calvin speaks of salvation by grace when it comes to essential Christianity.

It might seem from this that the doctrine of justification is *essentially* about grace for Luther and Calvin and that *sola fide* was simply a corollary doctrine of appropriation that safeguarded the purity of the doctrine from any Pelagian notion of works. In this way it would nicely differentiate Augustinians from the medieval papacy and Ockhamist theologians and preserve the status of the pre-Reformation church. But this thesis does not appear to account for all the evidence. At least three sources from Luther weigh heavily against this view. The first is the *Smalcald Articles* (1537). Luther declared:

Now because this must be believed [that justification is by grace without merit] and may not be obtained or grasped otherwise with any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us . . . Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up. . . . On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world.<sup>87</sup>

It is important to note that Luther drew up these articles (at the behest of the Lutheran princes) in order to clarify the non-negotiable issues for the Lutheran cause in light of the general council called by Pope Paul III, which would not meet until 1545 in Trent. This general council was needed by the Emperor Charles V to establish ecclesiastical unity for the sake of political stability in the empire. But Luther would not compromise *sola fide*. He made

<sup>83</sup> WA 18, 786.26–31. My translation is based on SA 3, 355.5–9. LW 33, 294.

<sup>84</sup> WA 18, 613, 723, 765. LW 33, 35, 197, 260.

<sup>85</sup> WA 40 I, 181.11–13. LW 26, 99.

<sup>86</sup> CR 30.755–56. *Institutes* 4.1.12 (emphasis mine).

<sup>87</sup> 2/1:3–5, *The Book of Concord* 301.

no concessions to an Augustinian notion of *sola gratia*. Merit had to be denied as the basis of justification and faith alone asserted in its place in order to stand “against the pope, the devil, and the world.”<sup>88</sup>

The second source is Luther's epistolary responses to *The Regensburg Agreement, Article 5* (1541).<sup>89</sup> Charles V continued to press for unity by sponsoring a series of colloquies between Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians. In 1541 at the Diet of Regensburg, the representatives reached agreement on justification. The agreement asserted that justification was based on an imputation of Christ's righteousness received through faith. It also affirmed an inherent righteousness whereby the faithful receive reward in this life and in the life to come. Remarkably, inherent righteousness is expressly denied as a basis, not only of assurance, but also of justification itself. And such imparted righteousness receives reward only on account of the promise and “not according to the substance of the works.”<sup>90</sup> In its final paragraph the agreement even affirms the *sola fide* formula as a “way of speaking” that characterizes what “has been previously mentioned.”<sup>91</sup> The only caveat was that those who use the formula must also teach repentance and good works, thus preventing an antinomian interpretation.<sup>92</sup> Despite this, Luther was suspicious that mention of inherent righteousness would be interpreted by the Catholic side in terms of justification by faith working love. He responded by insisting on the difference between becoming righteous before God, which “is without works through faith,” and being righteous in the Christian life, “as the tree does not remain without fruit.”<sup>93</sup> Luther maintained that the article did not sufficiently distinguish between these two aspects of Christian experience and thus believed that there could be no agreement with “such false and changeable people.”<sup>94</sup> While Luther suspected the Regensburg article of other errors,<sup>95</sup> the doctrine of justification

<sup>88</sup> Luther's comment on Ps 130:4 (1532/33) anticipates this posture, “*Stante enim hac doctrina stat Ecclesia, ruente autem ruit ipsa quoque*” (WA 40 III, 251.34–35).

<sup>89</sup> The original Latin of the agreement can be found in *Acta Reformationis Catholicae* (ed. Georg Pfeilschifter; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1974) 6.52–54. *CR* 4.198–201. Calvin's French edition is in *CR* 33.524–27. For English translations see Lane, *Justification*, Appendix 1, 233–37. Phillip Edward Pederson, *The Religious Colloquy of Regensburg (Ratisbon), 1541* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978 [Ann Arbor: UMI, 2000]) Appendix 2, 384–88.

<sup>90</sup> Paragraph 8 (trans. Lane). See also paragraphs 4 and 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Luther and Bugenhagen to Elector Johann Friedrich, 10 or 11 of May 1541. WA *Br* 9, 407.40–50 (trans. Pederson 185, 186). See also Letter of Luther to the Princes Johann and Georg, 11 and 12 June 1541. WA *Br* 9, 438.19–44, 441.36–42. See also WA *Br* 9, 456–63, 486–87; 12.309–13.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 407.21–23.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 441.36–37. Luther was responding to paragraph 8, which had stated that good works “proceed from the Holy Spirit . . . free choice concurring as a partial agent” (trans. Lane). But Calvin, who was present as a representative of Strasbourg, commented on the preceding articles that specifically addressed original sin and free choice, “Our friends in the commission have come to agreement on the doctrine of original sin without any difficulty; a discussion followed on that of free-will, which was drawn together out of the writings of Augustine; they departed in neither of these points from ourselves” (Letter to Farel 11 of May 1541. *CR* 39.215. *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. 1 [ed. Jules Bonnet; trans. D. Constable; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858–1973] 260).

by faith alone, which also *clearly* denied the works of the law, was a test of church unity.<sup>96</sup>

The third source is *The Licentiate Examination of Heinrich Schmedensteede (1542)*. In the first thesis, Luther asserted, "One and the same God has been worshipped from the beginning of the world in different ways through faith in the same Christ."<sup>97</sup> Thus this disputation set out to explain how God's people were redeemed from the very beginning until Luther's day when "that article concerning justification is always assailed."<sup>98</sup> Although the forms may have varied through time, Luther related salvation to faith in the promise of Christ so that in all periods, "Justification by faith alone is decisive."<sup>99</sup> When it came to the papacy, Luther said:

The papists and sophists believe in vain in God the Father and all the other articles of our faith, since they reject the work of Christ completed for us. For they deny that we are justified by faith alone, or what is the same thing, solely by Christ's completed work . . . Thus it is by faith alone, so that neither reason, nor law, nor the very fulfillment of the law, which is called love accomplish anything toward justification . . . Yes they blaspheme also in this way, holding that a man can by pure natural powers love God above all things and keep God's commandments with respect to the substance of the deed, without the grace of God.<sup>100</sup>

Thus we see the problem caused for the first interpretation. While Luther may speak in terms of *sola gratia* as the essence of the gospel, he speaks of *sola fide* in the same terms. For Luther, Christ, grace, and faith are like the three legs of a stool. Take one away and everything falls (*articuli stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Luther even seems to be alluding to the controversy over the Regensburg agreement when he states, "These and similar monstrosities show sufficiently that the controversy between us and them is not only a matter of a word as certain dismal conciliators now assume."<sup>101</sup> While Luther is asserting, against certain late medieval theological propositions,<sup>102</sup> that grace alone is essential, he allows no qualification to faith alone either.

<sup>96</sup> For an assessment of the colloquy, especially article 5, and a survey of the secondary literature, see Lane, *Justification* 46–60. Hampson, *Christian Contradictions* 62–67, 181–86, 291, gives a more negative assessment. For other appraisals of the colloquy see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 222–28; *Justification by Faith* §§47, 48; Pederson, *Colloquy of Regensburg* 174–99, who also details the response from Rome; Walther von Loewenich, *Duplex Iustitia: Luthers Stellung zu einer Unionsformel des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972) 26–38, 48–55 (in the latter section von Loewenich criticizes Luther's response); Peter Matheson, *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 107–13; and Elisabeth Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993) 186–256.

<sup>97</sup> WA 39 II, 187. LW 34, 303 (trans. Spitz).

<sup>98</sup> WA 39 II, 191. LW 34, 307.

<sup>99</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther: Preservation of the Church* 228.

<sup>100</sup> WA 39 II, 188, 189. LW 34, 304, 305 (trans. Spitz).

<sup>101</sup> WA 39 II, 189. LW 34, 305.

<sup>102</sup> Most notably the Ockhamist interpretation of the *Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*. See thesis 32.

The second position, that *sola gratia* created a felicitous inconsistency which, in the view of the Reformers, saved Augustine and other Church fathers, also has good evidence to commend it. Calvin, in his exposition of 1 Cor 3:10–15 on those who are saved through fire burning away wood, hay, and stubble from the foundation of Christ, identified the papists (*papistae*) as those who only give Christ the name of Redeemer, “while seeking righteousness, sanctification, and salvation elsewhere,” and thus “remove (*depellitur*) him from the foundation and substitute adulterous stones in his place.”<sup>103</sup> Calvin contrasts the papists with certain saints (*sanctis*), “Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine . . . Gregory and Bernard, and others like them,” “who always retained the foundation” (*qui retento semper fundamento*) and “whose purpose it was to build on Christ, but who, nevertheless, strayed from the right method of building.”<sup>104</sup> These Fathers built upon the foundation of Christ in inconsistent ways that would even bury the foundation. Calvin went so far as to say, “It will not be sufficient that the foundation has been laid, unless the whole superstructure (*tota superficies*) corresponds to it . . . so it is an abomination (*nefas*) to bury Christ under superimposed, alien doctrines.”<sup>105</sup> These Fathers were still saved in Calvin’s view since, “Paul says such ones can be saved, but on this condition: if the Lord blots out their ignorance; and purifies them from all defilement. And this is what it means to be saved through fire.”<sup>106</sup> Thus it might be argued that Calvin appealed to a felicitous inconsistency in order to show that the Fathers were saved from believing doctrines that would have otherwise annulled their confession of Christ. It also seems certain that Calvin was not speaking of disqualifying doctrines as a common ailment that plagues Christian life. To Calvin’s mind, the Reformers were innocent of the charge of inconsistent building. While Calvin did not specify the inconsistent doctrines, it is not tenuous to infer charity and good works, since it was these doctrines that the Reformers held at issue with the papists and the Fathers.

Luther argued in like manner. In the *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), Luther attacked the works of the “fictitious saints” of the papacy and contrasted them with Bernard who,

Did not set his monkery or his angelic life against the wrath and judgment of God but took hold of the one thing that is needful and thus was saved. I believe that Jerome, Gregory, and many other fathers and hermits were saved the same way. There is no doubt that . . . many kings of Israel and other idolaters were saved in a similar way, casting away their vain trust in idols at the hour of their death and taking hold of the promise of God.<sup>107</sup>

This “similar way” of salvation seems to consist of relinquishing the false doctrine of works and setting aside monastic practices and idolatry for the promise of God in a moment of true reflection and/or crisis. Thus the inconsistency

<sup>103</sup> CR 70.354. *Calvin’s Commentaries: First Corinthians* 74.

<sup>104</sup> CR 77.357. *Calvin’s Commentaries: First Corinthians* 77–78.

<sup>105</sup> CR 77.355. *Calvin’s Commentaries: First Corinthians* 75.

<sup>106</sup> CR 77.357. *Calvin’s Commentaries: First Corinthians* 77–78.

<sup>107</sup> WA 40 I, 687.19, 27–34. LW 26, 459–60 (trans. Pelikan).

consists in having one way of salvation formally taught and believed but coming to another in an existential moment of need.<sup>108</sup>

Also well represented by the evidence is the third position, which holds that the Reformers believed Augustine and other Fathers to have taught the substance of *sola fide* without the formula itself, and on that basis considered them to be Christian. In Luther's case, this can be seen in a disputation on justification he conducted with Melanchthon in 1536. Melanchthon began by saying that Augustine did not appear to be on their side when it came to the issue of justification. He explained that Augustine taught that "we are just not by faith alone, but through all endowments and virtues." He goes on to say that "Augustine meant this sensibly, but from this is born the 'grace making grace' of the scholastics." Then Melanchthon remarked, "With Augustine *sola fide* only excludes works preceding [conversion]." Luther responded:

Be this true or not, nevertheless the very voice of Augustine is evidence enough that he sides with us, where he says, "I was troubled, but not despairing, because I called to mind the wounds of the Lord." This clearly shows that faith is effective at the beginning, the middle, the end, and perpetually, even as with David, "Mercy is with you." "Do not enter into judgment with [your] servant."<sup>109</sup>

Luther was willing to concede that Augustine did not use the *sola fide* formula to deny works in justification, but added that this was immaterial, since Augustine found solace in "the wounds of the Lord" and not in works. From this, Luther appears to be saying that Augustine taught *sola fide* in effect. Luther's statements do not seem to understand a felicitous inconsistency on the part of Augustine since, "the very voice of Augustine" taught, not reliance on works, but that "faith is effective at the beginning, the middle, the end, and perpetually."<sup>110</sup> Luther asserted elsewhere, "Let him be anathema who teaches anything else but that justification and salvation are in faith alone."<sup>111</sup> Luther, in the preceding context, implied that Bernard and Augustine taught *sola fide*, since he excluded them from this anathema by saying they were justified by faith alone.<sup>112</sup> Luther's statement, quoted above, that Augustine taught "the righteousness of God, by which we are justified" even though "he did not clearly explain everything concerning imputation," points to a similar idea which might be characterized as "quali-

<sup>108</sup> Luther argued in similar fashion elsewhere. WA 40 I, 687; 7, 774; 8, 451–52; 54, 233. For a discussion see John Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale, 1963) 191, 211–12, 220–21. Luther held Augustine in the same position as Bernard on this point. See *Judgment on Monastic Vows* (1521). WA 8, 601.7–602.34. LW 44, 289–92.

<sup>109</sup> WA Br 12, 191.1–10; 193.88–94.

<sup>110</sup> Oberman has noted, "Modern scholarship cannot but agree with Melanchthon against Luther when he argues that *sola fide* does not characterize Augustine's doctrine of justification" (*The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] 72).

<sup>111</sup> *Judgment on Monastic Vows* (1521). WA 8, 602.33, 34. LW 44, 292 (trans. Atkinson).

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 601.18–602.33. *Ibid.* 289–92. Thus it appears that, in this instance, Luther was not distinguishing between what is formally taught from what is existentially believed.

fied equivalence" since imputation was noted as a lacuna.<sup>113</sup> Calvin made a similar point when he stated, "Even the judgment of Augustine, or at least his manner of stating it, is not to be fully received."<sup>114</sup> Like Luther, Calvin allows that the problem with Augustine's doctrine might only be a matter of words, though he went on, in the same sentence, to indicate that the difference seemed to be more real than merely semantic.

What do we make of this? Luther discounted the first position, and both Reformers tended to vacillate between the second and third (Calvin even in the same sentence), as they struggled with the lack of historical precedent for their doctrine and their view of the pre-Reformation saints. Their solutions reflected both ideas of felicitous inconsistency in the Fathers and Medievals themselves, as well as interpretations of them that corresponded to the Reformers' teaching. In either case these saints, unlike the papacy, retained Christ and were considered Christian teachers whose profession resulted in salvation. Moreover, Luther and Calvin, unlike Sproul, did not fail to address the doctrine and status of Augustine and the pre-Reformation church and thus kept them from becoming victims of a provincial version of *sola fide*. Instead of Sproul's unqualified assertion that *sola fide* is the essence of the gospel, we see that, for the Reformers, a doctrine may have been essential to the gospel, but its precise formulation was not essential to know in order to be saved by the gospel.<sup>115</sup> The formula—*sola fide*—was important to the Reformers because it was for them the biblical distillation of the heart of the experience.<sup>116</sup> But to gain the experience, the only thing that was needed was faith in Christ. Thus, for the Reformers, *sola fide* was a doctrinal formula whose truth worked in principle, even when that truth was not precisely known or accurately conceived. Sproul does not account for this stream in the Reformers' thought. Instead, Sproul's scheme seems to move *sola fide* from the category of the "saving" faith by which we believe (*fides qua creditur*) into the category of the "saving" faith that is believed (*fides quae creditur*). In this way, *sola fide* becomes an object of saving faith rather than Christ alone. Sproul's thesis sounds dissonant with the Reformers, because it requires a higher level of cognition than simple trust in the

<sup>113</sup> WA 54, 186. LW 34, 337. Elsewhere Luther indicated levels of purity in gospel doctrine: "Now that the languages have been revived . . . we have the gospel just as pure and undefiled as the apostles had it, that it has been wholly restored to its original purity, far beyond what it was in the days of St. Jerome and Augustine" (*To the Councilmen of Germany* [1524]. WA 15, 39.4–9. LW 45, 361 [trans. Steinhauser]). This is in line with the statements quoted above where Luther more fully distinguished himself from Augustine.

<sup>114</sup> CR 30.547. *Institutes* 3.11.15. See also CR 30.579, *Institutes* 3.15.2.

<sup>115</sup> Norman Geisler and Ralph McKenzie make the same distinction: "There is a difference between what is essential to the gospel itself and what is essential for people to believe about the gospel in order to be saved" (*Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995] 502). Similarly, C. S. Lewis wrote, "A man can eat his dinner without understanding exactly how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works" (*Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, Collier, 1952, 1960] 58).

<sup>116</sup> Also, "They [the Reformers] regard it as the heart of the gospel because the gospel message in its specific sense is the proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith" (*Justification by Faith* §28).

person and work of Christ. Thus Sproul's understanding of the appropriation of justification may be characterized as intellectual and the Reformers' doctrine as more existential.<sup>117</sup>

#### V. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONTRIBUTION

The soteriological doctrine associated with the nominalism of Ockham and Biel (*via moderna*) asserted, "God does not deny his grace to the one who does what is in him" (*Facientibus quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*). It was this theology and its manifestations that so plagued Luther and drove him in his quest for a grace that did not depend upon human resources.<sup>118</sup> One result of Luther's reform was that the Council of Trent either repudiated Ockhamism or else everyone since believed that it had.<sup>119</sup> Despite this, Catholic polemics against Luther and the Reformation continued unabated until the beginning of the twentieth century. A new Catholic appraisal of Luther began to take shape in the early part of the twentieth century and reached ascendancy in 1939/40 with the publication of Joseph Lortz's *Die Reformation in Deutschland*.<sup>120</sup> Lortz portrayed Luther sympathetically as a victim of Ockhamism and transferred a great part of blame for the schism to the late Middle Ages. Then came Stephanus Pfurtner's *Luther and Aquinas on Salvation*, which raised the possibility, for the first time, of a constructive criticism of Trent.<sup>121</sup> Pfurtner's work signaled a new Catholic

<sup>117</sup> Sproul appears to be exhibiting a post-Enlightenment rationalism that does not comport with the spirit of the Reformation. For instance, Calvin held that faith is more affective than intellectual, saying, ". . . assent itself . . . is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than the understanding" (*CR* 30.404, *Institutes* 3.2.8; see also *Institutes* 3.2.33). James Kittelson writes about the transition from the Reformation period to that of a more intellectual Protestant orthodoxy, "Now the odd situation presented itself that, in order to be saved by grace through faith, one had to believe that salvation occurred that way" ("Luther's Impact on the Universities and the Reverse," *CTQ* 48 [1984] 33). Timothy George warns in our day against those who would "turn justification by faith alone into justification by doctrinal precision alone" ("Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* [ed. Thomas P. Rausch; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000] 131).

<sup>118</sup> For Luther's relationship to the two forms of this doctrine see Heiko Oberman, "*Facientibus Quod in se est Deus non Denegat Gratiam*: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginning of Luther's Theology," in *Reformation in Medieval Perspective* 119–41. See also Paul Vignaux, "On Luther and Ockham," in *ibid.* 107–18.

<sup>119</sup> Otto Hermann Pesch, "The Canons of the Tridentine Decree on Justification: To Whom do they apply? To Whom do they apply today?" in *Justification By Faith: Do the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?* (ed. Karl Lehman; New York: Continuum, 1997) 177–79, 192–93. *Justification by Faith* §52, see also n. 96, 324.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1940). In English translation, *The Reformation in Germany*, 2 vols. (trans. Ronald Walls; London and New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). For an article-length summation see Lortz's "Why Did the Reformation Happen?" in *The Reformation: Basic Interpretations* (ed. Lewis Spitz; Lexington, MA: Heath, 1972) 119–38. Leonard Swidler, "Catholic Reformation Scholarship in Germany" *JES* 2 (Spring 1965) 189–204, traces the movement from its beginnings to Lortz and beyond.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen Pfurtner, *Luther and Aquinas on Salvation* (trans. Edward Quinn; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964); originally published as *Luther und Thomas in Gespräch. Unser Heil zwischen Gewissheit und Gefährdung* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1961). For other important contributions on this topic see Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin*

approach to Luther, which eclipsed the first, moving from a mere sympathetic understanding of the historical causes of the Reformation to a theological appreciation of the Reformer, and which dialogues with Luther for the sake of reforming Catholic theology.<sup>122</sup> The first approach took Luther's historical concerns seriously. The second takes his conclusions seriously for today—so seriously, in fact, that Daniel Olivier has declared, "Rather than 'father in the faith,' as Peter Manns suggests, I would call Luther an expert, indeed, *the* expert on what Catholicism really is, and/or should be."<sup>123</sup> Olivier refers to Luther as "the Doctor of sin' who succeeded Augustine, the Doctor of grace."<sup>124</sup> According to Olivier, it was Luther's awareness of sin and his pressing need to find a gracious God that led him "to devise a way out of the Roman Catholic unchristological pattern of justification, and his new understanding of the Bible made him follow this logic."<sup>125</sup> With the advent of this approach hope had dawned on the ecumenical horizon of Catholics and Protestants.<sup>126</sup>

One of the main concerns of the Lortz School(s) has been to distinguish Luther's and Calvin's view of the sixteenth-century papacy from the church that still existed under it.<sup>127</sup> According to Luther, the Roman church still had word and sacraments and remained, by virtue of this, a true church,<sup>128</sup>

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(Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald, 1967); *idem*, "Existential and Sapiential Theology. The Theological Confrontation Between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970) 61–81, 182–93.

<sup>122</sup> For a summary of the developments see Pesch, "Twenty Years of Catholic Luther Research," *Lutheran World* 13 (1966) 302–16. For a recent book-length treatment that discusses both Catholic theologians and the Magisterium see Gregory Sobolewski, *Martin Luther: Roman Catholic Prophet* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001).

<sup>123</sup> Daniel Olivier, "Luther's Challenge to Roman Catholicism," in *Luther and Learning: The Wittenberg University Luther Symposium* (ed. Marilyn Harran; Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985) 117.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 124.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 123.

<sup>126</sup> This is also true for reasons of socio-political change since the sixteenth century. See *Justification by Faith* §23.

<sup>127</sup> For a good example see Alexandre Ganoczy, "Luther on the Unity of the Church and Schism," in *The Young Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 267–70. Ganoczy goes into greater detail with Calvin, pp. 271–87. He argues that Calvin held essentially the same view of the Church and the papacy as did Luther. The papacy is a sect which puts forth a false claim to be the head of the Church, and Calvin wishes to reform and remain within the true catholic Church, not to establish a new ecclesiastical body.

It is also instructive to note how Luther and Calvin regarded contemporaries who remained faithful to Rome while maintaining their friendships and some theological affinity with the two Reformers. When Staupitz submitted to the pope Luther was offended and concerned that Staupitz was turning his back on their doctrine. Luther wrote Staupitz expressing his concern. Staupitz responded to assure his friend that, despite their parting of the ways, they still agreed to the same evangelical doctrine. Luther's response has not survived, but we know that he continued to regard his mentor highly, remarking to his students in 1532 that he received everything from Doctor Staupitz. See *WA TR* 1, 173.6,7. See also Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 96–97. For Calvin's relationship to an unnamed old friend and the once fellow reformer Louis du Tillet see Ganoczy, "Luther" 274–79.

<sup>128</sup> Luther writes in the 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*, "Although the city of Rome is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, nevertheless there remain in it Baptism, the Sacrament, the voice and text

but the papacy, which Luther and Calvin called a sect, was obscuring the gospel.<sup>129</sup> Luther believed that the scholastic theologians and the papacy had turned charity into a cloak for works righteousness that removed Christ from his salvific function,<sup>130</sup> and that justification *sola fide* was the only way to combat them and to restore Christ to his proper place.<sup>131</sup> While Luther's reform sought not only to correct papal abuses but dangerous ideas in the Catholic tradition from the beginning (i.e. charity), the point remains that it is historically unsound to apply the Reformers' view of the sixteenth-century papacy to the Roman Catholic church in general, as is Sproul's tendency. Since the Reformers refrained from this in their day, such caution needs to prevail in our own.

Statements from members of the Lortz School(s) on the doctrine of grace have also proved advantageous for promoting doctrinal convergence with Protestants. Harry J. McSorely writes,

His [Luther's] main reason for opposing the term *liberum arbitrium* [free choice] is based, as we have already suggested, on his *pastoral* concern that people . . . are misled by this term into thinking that man's conversion depends primarily not on the grace and mercy of God but on the good use a man makes of his free will. Has not Luther put his finger on a problem that is widespread even today: the Pelagian tendency present in many Christians which inclines them to think that the effectiveness of God's grace depends ultimately on our free acceptance of it or that our response to the Gospel is mainly a matter of free resolution? Forgotten in this popular understanding of grace is the fact that our very free acceptance of grace and our good resolutions themselves are the work of grace! How often do preachers, under the guise that they "do not want to frighten the people" by teaching them of the mystery of predestination and the absolute necessity of grace for every salutary act simply succeed in having before them a congregation of superficially unfrightened—but often scrupulous—Semipelagi-

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of the Gospel, the Sacred Scriptures, the ministries, the name of Christ, and the name of God. Whoever has these, has them; whoever does not have them has no excuse, for the treasure is still there. Therefore the Church of Rome is holy, because it has the holy name of God, the Gospel, Baptism, etc." (WA 40 I, 69.23–28; LW 26, 24 [trans. Pelikan]). Compare this to *Faith Alone* 47. Sproul and Luther arrive at opposite conclusions concerning the status of Rome.

<sup>129</sup> For Luther's view of the papacy as a sect presiding over but distinct from the true Church see his *Answer to the Hyperchristian Book*. WA 7, 636.30–32; 640.36–38; 685.20–687.5. LW 39, 162, 166–67, 220–22. See also "Catholic Church," in *What Luther Says* (comp. Ewald M. Plass; St. Louis: Concordia, 1959) 126–30. Hendrix, in *Luther and the Papacy*, traces the development of Luther's views on the papacy from ambivalence, as late as 1517, to the conviction that the pope was the Antichrist in 1521–1522, with various stages in between. Similarly, Calvin held that the medieval Church was the true Church by virtue of the papacy being the anti-Christ, since Daniel and Paul foretold that the anti-Christ would set up his reign in the Church (Dan 9:27, 2 Thess 2:4). But Calvin goes on to say that while the sacraments remain and preserve individual churches, the papal anti-Christ has so corrupted the body that the visible appearance of the Roman church has perished. Differing in emphasis from Luther, Calvin concluded, "Everything is so confused that there we see the face of Babylon rather than that of the Holy City of God" (*Institutes* [trans. Battles (LCC, vol. 22)] 4.2.12). See also Lane, *John Calvin* 42–47. Calvin referred to the pope as a sect in *Reply to Sadoleto*. *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (ed. J. K. S. Reid; LCC, vol. 23) 230.

<sup>130</sup> Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate Faith" 151.

<sup>131</sup> In his *Lectures on Galatians* Luther wrote, "But where they put charity, we put faith (*Nos autem loco caritatis istius ponimus fidem*)." WA 40 I, 228.27–28. LW 26, 129.

ans and legalists who are confident that God does—or has done—his part and that it is up to them to do the rest? One need only ask the average Catholic, or modern Protestant, a few questions concerning grace and predestination to discover that many of them—including those who have been catechized and preached to for years—have very little awareness of the absolute sovereignty of God's grace.<sup>132</sup>

Otto Hermann Pesch has exhorted his fellow Catholic theologians and church leadership to demonstrate their sincerity by rehabilitating “the radical Augustinianism” of Baius, Jansenius, and Pascal, “who . . . fell under the verdict of the church because of anti-Reformation fears.”<sup>133</sup> Doctrinal convergence over *sola gratia* can also be seen in agreements from recent ecumenical discussions, encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, between Catholics and Lutherans as well as other Protestant traditions.<sup>134</sup> The most significant example of this comes from the Vatican-endorsed *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD)*, signed on Reformation Day October 31, 1999:

We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they . . . are incapable of turning by themselves to God . . . of meriting their justification . . . or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace. . . . When Catholics say that persons ‘cooperate’ in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.<sup>135</sup>

Lane notes, “This definition should satisfy the great majority of Evangelicals, even many of those who hold to a strongly Augustinian doctrine of grace.”<sup>136</sup>

But while *sola gratia* may serve as a bridge to unity between Catholics and Protestants, it goes no further than the common Augustinian heritage shared by both groups. While *sola gratia* and *sola fide* represent similar concerns, they are logically different issues, and the way a person comes down on one does not determine how he will come down on the other. This is demonstrated by the historical fact that Luther and Calvin strenuously asserted Augustine's doctrine of grace while differing with his doctrine of faith. Likewise, Melancthon and Arminius adhered to the Reformation *sola fide* but did not follow Luther and Calvin to the full extent of their Augustinian notions of grace. Given this, it is necessary to deal with *sola fide*

<sup>132</sup> Harry McSorely, *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (New York: Newman; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 267.

<sup>133</sup> Pesch, “Tridentine Decree on Justification” 214, n. 76.

<sup>134</sup> For a survey and assessment of eight of the most significant see Lane, *Justification* 87–126. For an equally adept survey but more pessimistic assessment see Hampson, *Christian Contradictions* 181–222.

<sup>135</sup> *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) §§19, 20, see also §§15, 16, 25, 27, annex 2C; first published as *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck, 1999).

<sup>136</sup> Lane, *Justification* 152.

as a separate topic for Catholic and Protestant relations, especially for Protestants who follow Luther and Calvin in considering it essential to the gospel. It must be remembered that Augustinianism was not enough for the Reformers; their Paulinism had to be confessed as well in order to consider unity with Rome.

While Sproul maintains that disunity persists over *sola fide*, the Catholic scholars Hans Küng and Peter Manns have attempted to show fundamental unity between Luther and Catholicism on this issue.<sup>137</sup> While Küng and Manns have made valiant efforts, both treatments tend to reduce Luther's emphasis on "faith alone" to a concern for "grace alone." They attribute Luther's concern to the presence of a Pelagian, works righteousness conception of charity that was prevalent in Nominalism and in the medieval Church as a whole. Both writers assert that Luther's concern is Catholic, and Manns attempts to blunt the force of Luther's denial of charity. Manns demonstrates that when Luther assesses charity outside of the polemical context, he locates it in the Christian life as a marker of true, justifying faith. Luther said, "He who wants to be a true Christian or to belong to the kingdom of Christ must be truly a believer. But he does not truly believe if works of love do not follow his faith."<sup>138</sup> Manns adds that for Luther, this is the faith "that takes hold of Christ" and will even now experience "what will constitute the perfection of love in the future, that is, the spontaneous and joyful surrender of the heart." This leads him to conclude, "This highest attribution [of faith] does not belong to justifying faith in itself, but only to faith that ends the struggle victoriously in conjunction with hope and charity."<sup>139</sup> Manns asks the question, "Would it be contrary to Luther's deeper intention to attach to the contribution of charity . . . the predicate 'necessary for salvation'?"<sup>140</sup> Notice that Manns's question does not speak of justification specifically, but is broadened to salvation generally. Even so, Manns fails to fully consider Luther's distinction between works as a necessary confirmation of salvation *coram hominibus* and means of heavenly reward vs. works as a formal basis for salvation *coram Deo*. Whereas Luther affirmed the former (as Manns aptly shows), he left no room for the latter in justification. For Luther, works simply testify to the faith that justifies without works. Thus, the division of labor between faith in justification and works in the Christian life remains intact from Luther's point of view. Luther also considered the exegetical reasons to be determinative for maintaining the distinction, as well as practical concerns, since Luther insisted that works are always a questionable basis for assurance. While Manns's appeal to Luther's deeper intention does not show the two doctrines to be equivalent as Sproul insists, it may help to propel a theological development beyond Luther and the original polemical context.

<sup>137</sup> Hans Küng, "Sola Fide," in *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964) 249–63. Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate Faith" 121–56, 205–23.

<sup>138</sup> WA 40II, 37.15–17. LW 27, 30 (trans. Pelikan).

<sup>139</sup> Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate Faith" 149.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

Lane suggests this route when he maintains that different systems of thought are not necessarily contradictory and may in fact be complimentary, especially when they accommodate each other's concerns. Daphne Hampson, on the other hand, has insisted that this kind of approach can never result in true convergence between Catholics and Lutherans, since the two traditions are working from completely different paradigms.<sup>141</sup> Lane counters by asking, "But is that not to imply that there is only one normative paradigm? Is it not possible for those holding to different paradigms each to recognize that their essential concerns are satisfied by the other paradigm?"<sup>142</sup> In making his point, Lane argues that reality is complex and the status of scriptural and theological language is not the same as mathematical propositions. If it were, he continues, there would be no room for any diversity, "If the result of the sum is 15, all other answers are simply wrong. . . . If this naïve approach were true there would be no hope of reconciling a document that proclaimed justification by faith alone with another that denies it. I am referring, of course, not to the Reformers and Trent but to Paul and James."<sup>143</sup> Lane adds, "To suppose that to describe the opposing views in verbally incompatible ways is to have demonstrated an irreconcilable difference assumes an extreme and naïve form of linguistic realism."<sup>144</sup> Lane argues that while theological language does not participate in the same level of precision as mathematics, it is not "purely subjective, like some forms of abstract art." He says, "We should compare our theologies . . . with models or maps of reality."<sup>145</sup> Thus, like different maps of the same terrain, our words may vary while meanings convey the same truth, and in theology it may be common to have different paradigms that accurately describe the same reality, though often in varying degrees of accuracy. In the pursuit of greater accuracy, Lane argues that it is not always necessary to insist on identical terminology. It is more important for dialogue partners to define their terms in order to distinguish actual contradiction from compatibility, while recognizing that different paradigms can do the same work.<sup>146</sup>

Is *JD* a successful example of this approach? Not only do the dialogue partners recognize each other's concerns and address each other's fears, but the agreement even adopts the *sola fide* formula: "Justification takes place

<sup>141</sup> The Catholic paradigm from Augustine bases a person's relationship to God on intrinsic transformation through infused grace and love, while the Lutheran bases a person's relationship to God on faith that makes one live extrinsically in the righteousness of Christ. Hampson characterizes the Catholic thought structure as a linear *via* and the Lutheran as a dialectic thought structure epitomized by *simul iustus et peccator*. *Christian Contradictions* 1–3, 10–16, 24–29, 91–92, 97–101, *passim*. See pp. 28, 29, where Hampson acknowledges Oberman's work, "Tustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei.'"

<sup>142</sup> Lane, *Justification* 130.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* 128. Lane points out that "the Bible almost without exception does not use precise technical terms"; that revelation is, as Calvin said, a divine accommodation; and "our talk about God is," as Aquinas pointed out, "not univocal, or equivocal, but analogical" (p. 129). On the parallel to Paul and James see also pp. 129, 130, n. 5, 154, 155.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 128–29.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

'by grace alone' (*JD* 15 and 16), by faith alone, the person is justified apart from works (Rom. 3:28; cf. *JD* 25).<sup>147</sup> While the *Joint Declaration* speaks of "faith active in love," like Regensburg it clarifies, "But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis for justification nor merits it."<sup>148</sup> Also, "When Catholics affirm the 'meritorious' character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works."<sup>149</sup>

Does this represent real convergence? What would the Reformers say? Perhaps the best way to get their help is to revisit Regensburg. That colloquy also approved the *sola fide* formula and denied inherent righteousness as a basis for justification (like *JD*, it was only a means of reward). As has been noted, Luther was skeptical of true convergence, but Calvin, who was there as a representative of Strassbourg, seemed quite satisfied:

The debate in controversy was more keen upon the doctrine of justification. At length a formula was drawn up, which, on receiving certain corrections, was accepted on both sides. You will be astonished, I am sure, that our opponents have yielded so much. . . . Our friends have thus retained also the substance of the true doctrine, so that nothing can be comprehended within it which is not to be found in our writings; you will desire, I know, a more distinct explication and statement of the doctrine, and, in that respect, you shall find me in complete agreement. . . . However, if you consider with what kind of men we have to agree upon this doctrine, you will acknowledge that much has been accomplished.<sup>150</sup>

Calvin confirms that the Catholic side "yielded so much," and that the substance of the Protestant doctrine was retained so that nothing in the statement falls outside of the evangelical writings.<sup>151</sup> Calvin also acknowledged that the evangelical side could give "a more distinct explication and statement of the doctrine." Though more could be said, Calvin seemed to think that the remaining differences were non-divisive. This is remarkable for the fact that Calvin was not one to be carelessly accommodating. In fact, he criticized Bucer and Melancthon for this at Regensburg.<sup>152</sup> It is true that the

<sup>147</sup> Annex 2C.

<sup>148</sup> §25, see also §15. On the similarity between Regensburg and *JD* see Lane, *Justification* 165–67. There is one perplexing difference. Lane points out the serious omission that *JD* only speaks of the non-imputation of sins, not the positive imputation of righteousness in Christ (ibid. 157, 158, 201). From a Protestant perspective, *JD* falls short of Regensburg (art. 5.3, 4) in this respect.

<sup>149</sup> §38. Lane says, "This need be no more than a linguistic difference" (*Justification* 210).

<sup>150</sup> Letter to Farel of 11 May 1541. *CR* 39.215. *Letters of Calvin*, vol. 1, 260 (trans. Constable).

<sup>151</sup> Lane comments on a work by Colin Smith, "Colin Smith argued . . . that the reason that agreement was reached at Regensburg but the Reformers were thoroughly opposed to Trent was that the participants at Regensburg shared a similar sense of sin and that this was lacking in most of the Tridentine fathers" (C. S. Smith, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification in Relation to the Sense of Sin and the Dialogue with Rome" [M.Phil. thesis, London Bible College, 1993] 147–48 [cited in *Justification* 168]).

<sup>152</sup> Calvin said, "Philip and Bucer have drawn up ambiguous and insincere formulas concerning transubstantiation" in order that the other side "would begin to see more clearly if the matter of doctrine shall be left an open question for the present." He added, "In their method of proceeding they accommodate themselves too much to the time." Calvin dreaded "that equivocation in matters of conscience, than which nothing can possibly be more hurtful" (Letter to Farel 12 of May 1541. *CR* 39.217. *Letters of Calvin*, vol. 1, 263 [trans. Constable]). Sounding similar to Luther he asserted, "Believe me, in matters of this kind, boldness is absolutely necessary for strengthening

agreement failed to achieve any official unity as talks on other issues broke down and Rome, like Luther, would not approve article 5.<sup>153</sup> The one advantage that *JD* has over the Regensburg Agreement lies in the fact that it not only endorses *sola fide*, but it has also been officially adopted by Rome. In *Faith Alone*, Sproul lays out three options for establishing agreement between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: "One is for Evangelicals to abandon their historic position of *sola fide*. A second is for Rome to adopt *sola fide*. The third is for agreement to be reached that *sola fide* is not essential to the gospel."<sup>154</sup> It appears that since Sproul's work, the Vatican has chosen the second option. Lane comments, "The affirmation of *sola fide* in the Annex is truly a historic step."<sup>155</sup>

Sproul has failed to address these developments in Catholic theology and modern ecumenical relations between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>156</sup> In fact, Sproul's almost exclusive focus on the Council of Trent belies the assumption that no such development can occur. But Catholics do not generally treat their confessional documents like an inerrant Bible; instead, they tend to treat them contextually.<sup>157</sup> Thus interaction with Sproul in this area can only be a limited enterprise until he addresses it.

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and confirming others" (Letter to Farel of 11 May 1541. *CR* 39.215. *Letters of Calvin*, vol. 1, 260 [trans. Constable]). In an earlier quarrel with Bucer, Calvin sided with Luther on the nature of justifying righteousness. See W. Van't Spijker, "The influence of Bucer on Calvin as becomes evident from the Institutes," in *John Calvin's Institutes: His Opus Magnum. Proceedings of the Second South African Congress for Calvin Research* (ed. B. Van der Walt et al.; Potchefstroom, South Africa: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1986) 127.

<sup>153</sup> Pederson, *Colloquy of Regensburg* 174–99. Lane, *Justification* 52–53. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini* 244, has commented that article 5 failed not so much because of what it said but because each side feared how the other would exploit it. Vinzenz Pfnür has noted, "Luther and Bugenhagen were 'fully one' with the statement of article 5 but considered them dubious as long as the opponents had not publicly repudiated specific nominalistic positions" ("Colloquies," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 1 [ed. Hans Hillerbrand; New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996] 379).

<sup>154</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone* 43.

<sup>155</sup> *Justification* 185. Lane believes that *JD* has gone beyond a mere affirmation of our common Augustinian heritage but it "still leaves some important points untouched [like imputation of righteousness]" (p. 225). To those who remain skeptical of any Catholic movement Lane adds, "In my view the consensus that has been achieved has come about mainly through Roman Catholics being willing to move beyond the positions of the sixteenth century. . . . The dialogue documents have not required Protestants to go back on any of their traditional doctrines. . . . As at Regensburg, Protestant substance has been conceded not as a negotiating tactic but out of conviction" (*Justification* 226). But Lane notes that these changes have been limited to a select group of Catholic theologians and leaders who lament the indifference of other theologians and the ignorance of lay people (*Justification* 229–31). Sobolewski notes the continued ecclesiastical reservation of the current Magisterium that "most deeply characterized Rome's initial objection," though this "does not belie its recognition of Luther's outstanding faith" (*Martin Luther* 147).

<sup>156</sup> Sproul has been criticized for this before by Protestant Donald Bloesch and the Catholic Jeffrey Gros in "Betraying the Reformation? Two responses to R. C. Sproul's critical assessment of the ecumenical document 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together,'" *Christianity Today* 40/11 (Oct. 7, 1996) 54–56.

<sup>157</sup> A good example of this is Pesch's "Tridentine Decree on Justification." *Justification by Faith* states, "The adequacy of polemical statements made in the atmosphere of the Counter Reformation can no longer be taken for granted." It also notes how Catholic theologians have broadened

## VI. CONCLUSION

Sproul's assertion that the Reformers considered *sola fide* the essence of the gospel is not fundamentally wrong. Yet it is unqualified and dangerously misleading. Why? Sproul's thesis fails to interact with the doctrine of justification in its pre-Reformation forms and in its post-Reformation developments. Without input from Augustine, the pre-Reformation church and a whole host of saints become the victims of Sproul's polemic, because he does not distinguish between justification by faith alone as an experience and justification by faith alone as an article of faith. Sproul does not seem to allow for faith alone to save apart from believing it as a formula. The Reformers themselves provide an antidote to this narrowly confined approach, since they applied their doctrine throughout church history and did not make explicit knowledge of *sola fide* a necessary condition for the experience of *sola fide*. Sproul also fails to appreciate that our own context today is not polemical but largely ecumenical. The Catholic Church has officially moved beyond its rejection of Luther, accepting many if not the most important aspects of his theological reforms of the doctrine of justification. The closest the Reformation ever came to this kind of experience was at Regensburg, where the uncompromising Calvin believed convergence had been achieved on the doctrine of justification. Based on this Reformation model, could evangelicals not strike a similar pose toward Roman Catholics today? Sproul's vision is limited to a sixteenth-century polemical context. Does Sproul's treatment of the Reformation doctrine lead to the wrong approach today? Could evangelicals come to regard Roman Catholicism as genuinely Christian and at least achieve unofficial unity and mutual recognition as ECT proposed? If so, then Regensburg might not only be revisited but reclaimed.

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their definition of faith as they have grown dissatisfied with late Scholastic modes of thought "as being too individualistic, intellectualistic, abstract, and legalistic" (§§74, 78ff.).