Was There a "Reformation Doctrine of Justification"?*

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In this essay I take up cudgels against a central construct in the confessional historiography of the Protestant Reformation: The notion that there existed a clear, well-defined doctrine of justification shared by all the major reformers from the earliest stages of the conflagration and that this "Reformation doctrine of justification" served as the "material principle" in the formation of the emerging Protestant self-identity.[1] In contrast with this traditional view, I argue that the first-

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Abbreviations—*BC: The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert W. Kolb and Timothy K. Wengert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); *BSLK: Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (3d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); *BSRK: Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche* (ed. Ernst Friedrich Karl Müller; Leipzig: Deichert, 1903); *CCER: Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum* (ed. Hermann Agathon Niemeyer; Leipzig: Klinkhardt, 1840); *CCFCT: Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003); *CCFR: Confessions et catéchismes de la foi réformée* (ed. Olivier Fatio; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986); CR: Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia (ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider and Heinrich Ernst Bindseil et al.; 28 vols.; Halle: Schwetschke, 1834–60); LW: Luther's Works (55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia [1–30]; Philadelphia: Fortress [vols. 31–55]; 1955–86); MSA: Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe] (ed. Robert Stupperich; 7 vols.; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951–75); *OER: Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (ed. Hans Hillerbrand; 4 vols; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); OS: Ioannis Calvini Opera Selecta (ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel; 5 vols.; Munich: Kaiser, 1926–1936); *Schaff: Creeds of Christendom* (ed. Philip Schaff; 6th ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983); WA: D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (65 vols.; Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–); WABr: D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel (18 vols.; Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1930–78).

[1] August Twesten is widely regarded as the first scholar to identify justification as the *principium essendi* of the Reformation in the initial volume of his *Vorlesungen über die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1826). This notion was further developed by Albrecht Ritschl, in his landmark work, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (Bonn: A.

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generation reformers, galvanized by Luther's protest against the indulgence trade, adopted a common "rhetoric of dissent" aimed at critiquing the regnant Catholic orthopraxy of salvation in the interest of a common set of primarily existential-religious concerns. During the course of the next several decades following the *initia Lutheri,* however, an "orthodox" doctrine of justification quickly emerged—several of them, in fact. The Roman Catholic church and the emerging Protestant confessions, Lutheran and Reformed, quickly found it necessary to formulate their teachings in increasingly precise terms, so as both to integrate their central soteriological affirmations within a wider body of contested doctrines and practices and to demarcate clearly the boundaries of confessional identity in opposition to competing confessions. As with earlier periods of intense theological controversy within the Christian tradition, this conflict represented not a sudden breakthrough, but rather "a search for orthodoxy, a search conducted by the method of trial and error."[2] Unlike earlier debates, however, what emerged in the aftermath of the Reformation was not a single, dominant orthodoxy which carried the field, but rather multiple, competing orthodoxies, each one with its own Gospel.

This essay will focus on the emergence of one of those gospels, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. The break with the medieval church occasioned by Luther's theological protest resulted in what I shall describe as an invention of orthodoxy—understood here in the usefully ambiguous sense of the Latin term *inventio,* as both discovery and contrivance. Protestant theologians were adamant that they were not presenting the world with novel teaching. Rather, they insisted that in confessing the faith in their distinctive way they were simply carrying forward Luther's "rediscovery of the Gospel"—which was, after all, simply a more accurate reading of St. Paul.[3] On the other hand, the rise of confessional conflict in the years following this "rediscovery" demanded a coordinated response. Protestant leaders had to craft a new theological grammar which would not only preserve and defend a set of common commitments but also clarify those insights for the catechetical task and allow for their ready defense against Catholic and radical polemicists. They had to articulate an "ancient" Gospel in an unprecedented new context in which opposing conceptions of the Gospel itself were rapidly hardening into what would become a permanently factionalized state of intra-Christian conflict: the confessional era.

Marcus, 1870), whence it passed into general usage. ET: *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (trans. John S. Black; Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872). See Konrad Raiser, "Protestantism," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (ed. Edwin Fahlbusch et al.; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005) 4:395.

[2] I have adapted this characterization for the present context from Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006) 13.

[3] David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and Calvin on Church and Tradition," *Michigan Germanic Studies* 10 (1984) 108.

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My argument in this essay proceeds in three stages. First, I survey recent historical scholarship which has highlighted the importance of confessionalization as an interpretive category for the social and cultural history of early modern Germany, and I suggest that this concept has been under-utilized in analyzing the development of Christian doctrine. Second, I engage in some detail with a seminal essay by Berndt Hamm, in which I critique what I take to be the strongest version on offer of the traditional synthetic account of the "Reformation doctrine of justification." With these methodological and critical pieces in place, I attempt in the final section of the essay to reframe the question more plausibly on historical grounds by tracing out a skeletal account of the emergence of the confessional consensus on justification through a survey of creedal and catechetical statements between Augsburg (1530) and the Formula of Concord (1577).

Confession, Confessionalization, and Post-Confessional History

The emergence of this permanently factionalized state of intra-Christian conflict in Western Christendom has been described by historians in the last generation as a process of *Konfessionsbildung,* or "confession-formation," a process running parallel in Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic contexts and affecting not only the ecclesiastical, but also the political and social spheres of life. Each confessional church quickly came to view itself as a universal *confessio catholica,* vested with divine authority as the exclusive mouthpiece of revealed truth and entrusted with the task of safeguarding the doctrine, ritual, and discipline of its members.[4] This task involved not only specifying the content of Christian teaching with ever increasing precision, but doing so as to highlight theological differences with rival confessions.

More recently, this notion of *Konfessionsbildung* has been incorporated into a broader category, that of *Konfessionalisierung,* or "confessionalization," a concept including not only the formation of distinct and opposing ecclesiastical identities, but also describing the relationships which developed between these confessional churches and the emerging nation-states of early modern Europe.[5]

[4] Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Konfessionsbildung. Studien zur Reformation, Gegenreformation und katholischen Reform* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985) 67.

[5] The literature on the so-called *Konfessionalisierungsthese* is immense, but it is limited, for the most part, to scholarship originating in Germany. Seminal contributions include Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung. Eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1981); Wolfgang Reinhard, "Konfession und Konfessionalisierung in Europa," in *Bekenntnis und Geschichte. Die Confessio Augustana im historischen Zusammenhang* (ed. Wolfgang Reinhard; Munich: Verlag Ernst Vögel, 1981) 165–89. See also the essays from the following symposia on confessionalization by the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, in *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland. Wissenschaftliches Symposion des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1988* (ed. Hans–Christoph Rublack; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1992); *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: wissenschaftliches Symposion der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993* (ed. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling; Gütersloh:

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Confessionalization is thus presented as a fundamental social process running parallel to the rise of the modern state and the formation in early modern society of disciplined subjects, beginning as a symbiotic relationship between church and state, but ending with the monopolization of religious life by the latter.[6]

The "confessionalization thesis" has generated an impressive body of scholarship aimed at reevaluating, among other things, the place of religion in macro-historical descriptions of the social, political, and cultural development of early modern Europe. Not all historians are convinced that this paradigm has quite the explanatory power urged by some of its most vocal proponents;[7] nevertheless, it seems clear that this trend has at the very least secured a prominent place for the role of religion in early modern European history, even as it has challenged the privileged place of the Reformation in accounting for the origins of European modernity. As Heinz Schilling explains:

> In light of the insights of scholarship on confessionalization during the last decade, we will not be able in the long run to avoid the recognition that the societal changes effected by confessionalization were more profound than the changes directly effected by the Reformation. Of course, we must not fail to notice that confessionalization is unthinkable without the Reformation, even as the Reformation itself is unthinkable without the preceding late medieval reform. . . . The late Middle Ages were the boarding, the Reformation was the runway, and confessionalization was the take-off of European modernization.[8]

Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995). For a recent survey in English of the scholarship on confessionalization, Thomas A. Brady, Jr., "Confessionalization: The Career of a Concept," in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan* (ed. John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas; Burlinton, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004) 1–20; Ute Lotz–Heumann, "Confessionalization," in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research* (ed. David Whitford; Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State, 2008) 136–57.

[6] Heinz Schilling, "Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft: Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaftlichen Paradigmas," in *Katholische Konfessionalisierung*, 41.

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

[8] Heinz Schilling, "Reformation. Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Temps des Réformes?" in *Die fruhe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch. Wissenschaftliches Symposion des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1996* (ed. Stephen E. Buckwalter and Bernd Moeller; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998) 24; cited in Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?" *CH* 72 (2003) 549.

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This renewed focus on religion has not come without certain ironies, however. With all the attention given to *Konfessionsbildung, Konfessionalisierung,* and *Konfessionalismus,* the central term in metonymic relation to which all these concepts stand is often overlooked: confession. While it is now almost universally acknowledged that confessionalism—"salvation within, perdition without," in one critic's snappy phrase[9]—played a central role in the social and political history of early modern Europe, relatively little heed has been paid either to the intellectual history of the confessions themselves or to the effects of this process on theology and exegesis. This ought not to be viewed as a failing of the confessionalization thesis itself, a paradigm which has, from the beginning, been presented as a conceptual model for understanding the social and cultural history of early modern Europe.[10] Yet the implications of this approach for intellectual history—and for the history of Christian doctrine in particular—have yet to be fully explored.[11]

At one level, of course, it might seem strange to suggest that the intellectual history of the confessions themselves has not been sufficiently examined. After all, the confessional theology of none of the three traditions has ever wanted for careful, even loving, historical attention. Each of the three *Groβkonfessionen* took significant pains to document and to narrate its respective history with the goal of justifying its very existence and discrediting that of its opponents. Much of this work maintained exceedingly high standards of documentation and evidence—the fruit, no doubt, of an awareness on the part of these historians that their labors would be scrutinized in agonizing detail by unfriendly eyes—and for this they remain indispensible for our knowledge of the period. Yet for better *and* for worse, this historiographic tradition has played a central role in the formation of the modern historical consciousness.[12]

Indeed, one might even say that the confessional historians of the late-sixteenth century did their work *too* well. Perhaps more than any other field in the discipline of church history, Reformation studies remains the most closely

[9] Henri Desroche, *Sociologies religieuses* (Paris: Presse universitaires de France, 1968) 83.

[10] See the retrospective remarks in Heinz Schilling, "Confessionalization: Historical and Scholarly Perspectives of a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Program," in *Confessionalization in Europe,* 21–36. If the confessionalization paradigm is open to criticism on this point, it may arise from an overly functionalist account of its phenomenon. "Ein zentrales Postulat der Konfessionalisierungsthese ist die weitgehende sachliche und zeitliche Parallelität und funktionale Äquivalenz des Prozessverlaufs in allen drei Groβkonfessionen"—without much regard for the concrete particularities of "diskurs-, text-, ritual- oder praxisinterpretativen Ansätzen." Cornel Zwierlein, "'(Ent)konfessionalisierung' (1935) und 'Konfessionalisierung' (1981)," *ARG* 98 (2007) 220, 222.

[11] One impressive attempt in recent scholarship to apply the confessionalization paradigm to intellectual history is Erika Rummel's well-received monograph, *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[12] A point argued developed at some length in Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) esp. 107–12.

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tied to this confessional historiographic tradition.[13] "This is not to say," one critic explains, "that modern scholars are apologists for particular Christian confessions as they often were in the past, but rather that the confessional dynamics of the Reformation continue to structure the questions we ask and the sorts of answers we find satisfactory."[14] This problem is particularly acute in the present inquiry, not only because the doctrine of justification lies so close to the heart of confessional identity—in the sixteenth century as well as today—but also because when studying the phenomenon of confessionalization, confessionalism itself is the object of our study. It thus cannot serve as the lens through which we approach the material. This is not to suggest, of course, that confessionally-committed historians cannot do good work on this question—they have and continue to do so.[15] What I do mean to suggest, however, is that an approach to intellectual history which takes seriously the confessionalization of theological discourse will inevitably relativize its subject matter to a certain extent, insofar as it moves beyond simply representing the views of individual historical figures and attempts to explain why certain discursive patterns take the shapes they do. This sort of inquiry need not foreclose on the ultimate truth or legitimacy of any of the discourses in view—indeed, it must not. As Brad Gregory has so forcefully argued, "The point is precisely *not* to relativize competing faith claims themselves, but to let each resonate fully, creating a formal relativism of competing absolutisms."[16] I prefer to think of such an approach as a useful heuristic discipline, rather than as an act of final, metaphysical closure on the questions in view. After all, if one is going to resurrect the dead and let them speak, one cannot always just tell them to sit down and shut up when one is finished with them. But rather than defend this assertion at length, it will perhaps be more helpful to explain more fully how the sort of "post-confessional" approach I have in mind might look. Since I cannot improve on the description recently offered by Philip Benedict, I will reproduce it here in full:

> Two features define it [post-confessional Reformation history]. The first is a strong sense of the historical contingency of the various post-Reformation confessions: the recognition that their essential features were not fixed from the start, but instead both their core beliefs and their boundaries came to be defined over time in dialogue and dispute with rival confessions. The second

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

[14] Ethan H. Shagan, "Can Historians End the Reformation?" *ARG* 97 (2006) 298.

[15] See the reflections on this issue by Scott H. Hendrix, "Post–Confessional Research and Confessional Commitment," *ARG* 97 (2006) 284–88.

[16] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) 12.

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> defining feature is the recognition that few components and impulses found within any given confession were unique to it. On the contrary, many values and practices were shared widely across the churches that emerged from the Reformation. As a result, strong claims for the uniquely progressive role of any one confession can be advanced only with the utmost caution.[17]

The burden of this essay will be to argue, contrary to widely held opinion, that not all of the essential features of the Protestant doctrine of justification were "fixed from the start," but rather that they "came to be defined over time in dialogue and dispute" with opponents both within and without the Protestant confessions themselves. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to give due consideration to what the best recent confessional scholarship has to say on the matter.

Status Quaestionis: The Hamm Proposal

The most impressive attempt in recent scholarship to identify a coherent pattern of theorizing among the Protestant reformers on this central matter of debate comes from Berndt Hamm, Professor of Modern Church History at the theological faculty of the University of Erlangen.[18] Hamm's work is uniformly characterized by careful scrutiny of the relevant primary sources, methodological sophistication, and even-handed judgment. I have thus chosen his widely-cited essay as a point of departure in order to critique the traditional view in its strongest form. Even though I shall conclude that Hamm's proposal ultimately proves inadequate, his essay is deeply instructive not only in its mature historical-theological reflection, but also in illustrating the difficulty of the problem as it has hitherto been construed.

Hamm himself certainly recognizes the difficulty of the question he is posing: "I am not asking," he writes, " 'What is the *Lutheran* doctrine of justification?' but 'What is the *Reformation* doctrine of justification?' "[19] For Hamm, there is a coherent set of core convictions which all four of the major Protestant reformers—Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin—hold in common against their Catholic opponents, a thesis which militates against two current trends in Reformation scholarship. The first, and for our purposes the most significant, is a historicizing trend highlighting the variegation and particularity of individual reformers and localized movements at the expense of unifying criteria. Hamm opines that "Reformation historians in recent decades have encouraged an awareness of the diversity of currents in the Reformation to such an extent that it is becoming increasingly difficult to retain a grasp on those features that are common to the Reformation as a whole, and to

[17] Philip Benedict, "What is Post–Confessional Reformation History?" *ARG* 97 (2006) 277.

[18] Berndt Hamm, "What Was the Reformation Doctrine of Justification?" in *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm* (ed. Robert J. Bast; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 179–216; repr., *The German Reformation: Essential Readings* (ed. C. Scott Dixon; New York: Blackwell) 53–90. This essay updates an argument Hamm first put forward in his 1985 *Antrittsvorlesung* at the University of Erlangen, published as "Was ist reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre?" *ZThK* 83 (1986) 1–38.

[19] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 179.

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define their content precisely."[20] On the other hand, "enthusiastic ecumenists" have sought to divert the force of Luther's critique of scholastic soteriology away from the "fully catholic" position, represented perhaps by some of the more Augustinian versions of Thomism, by describing it as an attack on the "Ockham-infested doctrine of the late Middle Ages."[21]

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

> Historically, there is little point in understanding the essential features of the Reformation in such a narrow sense—perhaps on the basis of certain interpretations of remarks made by Luther—that our criterion would prove Zwingli or even Calvin to be the proponents of non-Reformation theology. Or to put it in more positive terms: the nature of Reformation theology must always be defined by comparison. The objective common ground between the reformers when they move away from medieval systems must find a place in our definition of its features.[22]

The problem with this approach, however, is that Hamm assumes in advance what he is setting out to prove. Such an approach might make better sense if we were characterizing the thought of a figure in general terms, but I see no patent absurdity in maintaining that certain currents within a figure's thought might be more or less in keeping with the *reformatorische Lehre* on any given point—or better yet, that there is no monolithic, uncontested *reformatorische Lehre*, but rather a range of options which are held by figures widely regarded as "reformational." Indeed, when it comes to other more hotly contested matters within Protestant circles, such as the Lord's Supper, this is precisely what we observe.[23] The same may or

[20] Ibid. Hamm cites Ulrich Gäbler and Heinz Scheible as two representatives of this approach. Gäbler writes that "in view of the diversity of theological positions among sixteenth-century Protestants, it is impossible to trace a historically distinct outline of the term 'evangelical.'" Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli. Eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk* (München: Beck, 1983) 47. Scheible, Hamm argues, allows for a certain amount of common ground among the various reformers, but "formulated in such vague and amorphous terms" that it become difficult to differentiate them from medieval Catholic theology. Cf. Heinz Scheible, "Reform, Reformation, Revolution. Grundsätze zur Beurteilung der Flugschriften," *ARG* 65 (1974) 117. Hamm is clearly uncomfortable with these characterizations; what is less clear is whether his discomfort ultimately rests on historical or theological grounds. If the historical reality in view—in this case, a supposed evangelical consensus on the nature and scope of justification—is in fact "vague and amorphous," then it must be described in terms which do not obscure this situation.

[21] This trend has only strengthened in the years between Hamm's initial version of the essay and the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999. For a more recent critique of this scholarship, see David C. Steinmetz, "The Catholic Luther: a Critical Reappraisal," *TToday* 61 (2004) 187–201.

[22] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 182.

[23] Luther regards Zwingli's Eucharistic theology as far too close to that of the *Schwärmerei* for

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may not be true of any supposed *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre,* but this is a conclusion which can only be drawn *a posteriori* on the basis of a careful examination of the sources.[24] It cannot serve as a criterion for establishing such conclusions in advance.

Hamm's second criterion for ascertaining the *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre* is less problematic, though it may require some adjustments to be more useful. This criterion, Hamm explains, is based on an assessment of "what the theological exponents of Catholicism in the sixteenth century thought of the doctrine. What features of the doctrine were perceived as 'mold-breaking' and what features (in their eyes) could be integrated?"[25] This criterion guards against the excesses of ecumenical air-brushing by forcing us to compare Reformation teaching not only against the Scotist-Occamist theologians, the traditional villains of ecumenical historiography, but also against the more robustly Augustinian figures who wrestled seriously with Reformation ideas on their own terms, figures such as Johannes von Staupitz, Johannes Gropper, Gasparo Contarini, and Girolamo Seripando.

This is a salutary observation, yet I am not sure how consistently Hamm's analysis has been guided by it. He makes no mention, for example, of the fact that at Regensburg in 1541 Philipp Melanchthon and Martin Bucer, two reformers of unimpeachably Protestant credentials, reached an agreement with, among others, Johannes Gropper and Gasparo Contarini on a compromise formula for

his taste, while Zwingli in turn regards Luther's teaching as still trapped in the labyrinth of Popish superstition. Yet modern historians do not seem overly concerned that such diversity of opinion on so central a matter as the Eucharist disqualifies either figure as genuinely "Reformational." Instead, we are forced to use terms such as "the Lutheran Eucharist" and "the Reformed Eucharist," rather than lumping them together under a common generic category. For a recent treatment of the Lord's Supper illustrating just this point, see Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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

[25] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 183.

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the doctrine of justification.[26] Were Melanchthon and Bucer departing from the *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre* insofar as they found common ground with these Catholics? Luther certainly seems to have thought so.[27] But Hamm has already avowed that it is "pointless" to draw these lines in such a way as to exclude major reformers such as Melanchthon. It would seem, then, that the line between *reformatisch* and *unreformatisch* runs straight through the likes even of Melanchthon, one of Hamm's four representatives of Reformation thought. But to entertain this suggestion is to run smack into one of the oldest and most bitterly contested debates in Reformation scholarship, the question of whether Melanchthon corrupted Luther's gospel or simply developed its core assertions with greater consistency and precision.[28] Hamm wisely avoids embroiling himself in this fruitless controversy, yet the problem remains: what sort of index do we have in judging when an ostensibly reformational figure, such as Melanchthon, strays from the authentic *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre* if such a figure himself is one of the primary yardsticks for establishing the doctrine in the first place?

It might be argued that Hamm's use of this criterion is designed to provide just this. Whenever we find Catholic thinkers responding favorably to a Protestant proposal—in Hamm's words, whenever they are capable of integrating it—then we may safely conclude that because this new teaching does not "break the mold," it must not be genuinely reformational. There are two distinct advantages to this approach. First, using Catholic reaction as a criterion for establishing the reformational view allows us to bring into sharp relief the precise profile of the issues at stake by discerning where specific Reformation formulations touch a raw nerve with Catholics. Reformation scholarship has, for far too long, examined its chief figures and ideas in isolation from contemporaneous developments within the Catholic world, and Hamm is quite right to insist that any approach to this question must be comparative. Second, comparative criteria allow us to avoid centering our definition on one figure. The traditional response to the question of how we understand the willingness of Melanchthon and Bucer to compromise with the Catholics on the article of justification has simply been to assert that this represented a departure from the teaching of Luther. As Hamm correctly points out, however, this leaves us with at best a *Lutheran* doctrine of justification, not a *Reformation* doctrine.

[26] For a overview of the negotiations, see Athina Lexutt, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch. Das Rechtfertigungsverständnis in den Religionsgesprächen von Hagenau, Worms und Regensburg 1540–41* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 236–60.

[27] In a letter of 10/11 May to the Elector of Saxony, Luther derides the formulation as a "patched and all-embracing" affair. He claims that "the two ideas of justification by faith alone without works (Rom 3:28) and faith working through love (Gal 5:6) had been "**zu samen gereymet und geleymet**" (thrown together and glued together): whereas one refers to becoming righteous, the other to the life of the righteous." See *WABr* 9:406–9, #3616 ; see also **Anthony N. S. Lane**, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002) 53.

[28] For a recent survey of debate, see Reinhard Flogaus, "Luther versus Melanchthon? Zur Frage der Einheit der Wittenberger Reformation in der Rechtfertigungslehre," *ARG* 91 (2000) 6–46.

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This criterion is not without problems, however, when deployed apart from a careful assessment of the shifting and fluid contexts which shaped the Reformation debates well past the middle of the century. The most significant of these is the assumption that genuinely reformational theology was always defined in opposition to Catholic thought. This, it seems to me, is far from self-evident. Nor would it have been so to most of the first-generation Protestant reformers, who saw themselves quite consciously as working for reform and renewal *within* the Catholic Church, not for schism.[29]

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

Eventually it was recognized by both Protestants and Catholics that this new *Rechtfertigungslehre* could not be accommodated within the existing theology and practice of the Roman Catholic church. Yet when exactly did this recognition occur? We have already noted the willingness of front-rank Protestant and Catholic theologians to seek compromise on this issue at Regensburg in 1541; a second colloquy at Regensburg in 1546 continued the discussion, though without any further progress.[30] At the Council of Trent, beginning in 1545, the condemnation of the Protestant schism as a whole may have been a foregone conclusion, but it was still by no means obvious which aspects of the doctrine of justification would be condemned and which might yet be assimilated. In part, the difficulty was caused by the absence of an authoritative *katholische Rechtfertigungslehre* against which to measure the *reformatorische*.[31] This was one of the major problems the Council of Trent was expected to solve. That it did so by firmly and comprehensively rejecting core Protestant teachings should not blind us to the fluidity of the situation within

[29] On this point, see David C. Steinmetz, "The Intellectual Appeal of the Reformation," *TToday* 57 (2001) 459–50.

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

[31] As Jedin explains, the Tridentine Fathers "were without the guidance of clear directives by the supreme teaching authority in the Church when they sought to bring out the contrast between the Catholic and the Protestant attitude of mind in regard to matters of faith." Jedin, *Council of Trent*, 167. See also Gillian R. Evans, "Vis verborum: Scholastic Method and Finding Words in the Debates on Justification of the Council of Trent," *DRev* 106 (1988) 264–75.

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the Catholic context up to and including the Tridentine debates in the late 1540s. Not until the promulgation of the canons of Session VI in January of 1547—roughly three decades after Luther's initial "Reformation breakthrough"—do we have an authoritative index of Catholic teaching against which to measure Reformation doctrine.[32] To return to Hamm's metaphor, Reformation theology did not "break the mold" of medieval Catholic doctrine because prior to 1547 there was no mold to break.

This does not mean, however, that early Catholic responses to evangelical teaching can safely be ignored. There may not have been an orthodox *doctrine* of justification prior to the Council of Trent, but there most certainly was an orthodox *practice* of justification.[33] That practice, as we have already noted, centered on the sacrament of penance. Even "moderate" Catholic reformers, such as Contarini, who thought that at least some of the Protestant reformers' concerns could be integrated into authentic Catholic theorizing about the sacrament, ultimately regarded the "Lutheran disease" as a grave threat to the well-being of Christendom because it diverted Christians away from the only God-ordained means by which post-baptismal sin could be forgiven and the penitent sinner returned to a state of grace.[34] Catholic reactions to the evangelical proclamation of reconciliation apart from this sacramental orthopraxy ranged from the baffled hostility of a John Eck to the pastoral *suavitas* of a Jacopo Sadoleto. Yet by and large, the Catholic response to the evangelical challenge in the first decades of the conflagration centered on a defense of traditional Catholic practices (such as penance and indulgences) and the authority structures which legitimated those practices, rather than a defense of a clearly received and demarcated soteriological doctrine.[35]

[32] As one scholar has recently put it, "Luther was finally excommunicated for indiscipline, but never actually condemned for heresy by any authority with the necessary jurisdiction until the council of Trent defined propositions with which Luther's views were clearly incompatible." Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 282.

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

[34] William V. Hudon, "Two Instructions to Preachers from the Tridentine Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 20 (1989) 458–59.

[35] Surveying initial responses to Luther's attack on indulgences, David V. N. Bagchi concludes that "the first reactions to Luther's indulgence theses show that there was a complete agreement only in a belief that Luther was in error." In pinpointing where, exactly, Luther was in error, these theologians varied wildly among themselves. It is therefore not surprising that a unanimity quickly developed with regard to the importance of papal power as a means of settling the disputed issue. *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518–1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 26.

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The reformers, however, were on the offensive. Those figures who identified most closely with Luther's protest movement singled out certain aspects of traditional Catholic practice and the assumptions which undergirded it for sustained criticism, and the nature of their writings, focusing as they do on specific grievances, often gives a certain sharpness to many of their formulations. This should not blind us, however, to the fact that among themselves there still existed wide divergences in how salvation was interpreted scripturally and theorized systematically. The first-generation reformers were generally at their most lucid—and unified—in explaining what justification was *not:* it was not a reward for human merit (*de congruo* or otherwise); it was not a result of the believer's cooperation with the gift of grace; it was not regulated by the church's sacrament of penance. Indeed, the vaunted *sola* of Reformation theology—*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus,* and even *sola scriptura*—are all *negative* assertions; that is, they seek to isolate certain key terms from specific theological contexts in which they had become embedded.[36] Thus, they function not so much as summaries of Protestant belief but as rallying cries against specific Catholic teachings or practices. They constitute, in other words, a "rhetoric of dissent," rather than a fully-orbed theological or ideological program.

Eventually the Roman Catholic church got around to defining the doctrine of justification in precise terms specifically aimed to exclude any rapprochement with their opponents.[37] And so, of course, did the Protestants. During the late-1550s and early 1560s, a whole raft of confessional statements were issued by Protestant churches which defined justification in terms far more comprehensive and precise than the those of the first-generation reformers. I will examine anon in some detail the distance between these first- and second-generation confessional statements on the matter of justification, but first I must conclude our engagement with Hamm's proposal by examining the eleven characteristics he advances in describing what he takes to be the *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre*. Although I have rejected Hamm's first criterion for establishing this construct and suggested major qualifications to the second, his work in synthesizing the views of the major reformers on this issue cannot be ignored.

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

[37] For a summary of the Council's decrees on justification, see "Trente (Concile de)," in *DThC* 15.1, cols. 1435–39. For a somewhat different take on the thrust of Trent's decrees on justification, see Otto Hermann Pesch, "La réponse du Concile de Trente (1545–1563): les décisions doctrinales contre la Réforme et ses conséquences," *Irénikon* 73 (2000) 5–38.

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In tracing the profile of his *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre,* Hamm suggests ten points at which this "evangelical factor can first be clearly perceived in historical terms." They are, in summary form:[38]

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

Space will not allow a detailed engagement with each of these points here, and in any event, I have very little in the way of substantive critique to make concerning Hamm's elaboration of most of these theses. What is claimed concerning the reformers' views on these issues is, in my view, generally correct (with a few significant exceptions, explained below). Two important questions remain, however: to what extent do these characteristics constitute a fully-developed and coherent *Rechtfertigungslehre,* and when exactly does it emerge?

A careful reading of Hamm's theses will reveal that several are really just variations, or restatements, of a common principle, while others are tangential to the question in view. Theses 2, 7, 9, and 11 relate justification to the reformers' doctrines of sin, scripture, and theological anthropology. These are not irrelevant considerations, to be sure, but they set the context for the evangelical notion of justification rather than telling us what justification actually *is*. Theses 1, 5, and 6 are all variations on a common theme: granted the "unconditionally given acceptance of mankind" (*die bedingungslos geschenkte Annahme des Menschen*) in justification (1),[39] the final validity of God's initial pronouncement at the eschaton

[38] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 189–208. Eleven points are listed here, of course, but the tenth, "Breaking the mold," is really just a summary of the ways in which the other ten points differ from medieval thought.

[39] In describing the *Bedingungslosigkeit* of justification, Hamm refers to Melanchthon's statement in the *Confessio Augustana Variata,* whereby it is affirmed that "remissio . . . non pendere ex condicione nostrae dignitatis, sed donari propter Christum" (MSA 6:16). Hamm is quite right in his assertion that for Melanchthon—as, indeed, for all the reformers—forgiveness of sins (*remissio*) is not dependent on inherent worth (*dignitas*) in the sinner. Thus, there is no "cause" for justification to be found in the human. He may push this line of argument too far, however, when he writes that "not even God himself stands in such a causal relation to man and his actions. The acceptance of God, his bestowal of grace on his creature, is not subject to reasons or conditions." Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 192. It is perfectly correct to describe the reformers' view of justification as an "unconditional promise" in the sense that it does not depend on the human subject meeting any condition in advance. To call it "causeless" in such an absolute sense, however, ignores the detailed

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cannot be doubted (5).[40] The logical corollary of this position, of course, is the assurance of salvation (6). Thesis 4 introduces Luther's famous phrase, *simul iustus et peccator,* referring to the simultaneous persistence of both sin and righteousness throughout the believer's life. Thesis 8 introduces the *sola fide* principle, by which it is affirmed that "the sole grounds and cause of justification reside in God's mercy in Jesus Christ, not any morality inherent in man and manifesting itself in

discussions and fierce polemics by and among the reformers relating justification to predestination. Justification does not just happen: It is *caused* by God's electing will. The following comment by Martin Bucer is typical of the reformers' voluntarism in regard to all of God's saving acts: "Caeterum ut iudicet pro nobis Deus, & vitam aeternam adiudicet, prima causa est eius ultronea benevolentia. Sua enim voluntas prima causa est omnium." Moreover, for Bucer, as for many of the other reformers, affirming that the "voluntas Dei" is the "prima causa omnium" does not preclude assigning more proximate causes within the created order. Bucer continues: "proxima meritum Christi: nam mortuus est pro salute mundi, sed hoc ipsum benevolentiae divinae gratuitum donum est. Tertia, fides, qua hanc Dei benevolentiam & Christi meritum amplectimur & percipimus. Nam qui credit, habet vitam aeternam. Sed haec ipsa quoque fides opus & donum est in nobis propitii iam Dei propter meritum Christi. Postrema caussa [sic], bona opera sunt: nam iuxta opera cuique rependitur, sed haec ipsa quoque sunt dona benevolentiae Dei, effectus meriti Christi, & fructus fidei. . . . Omnia igitur salutis nostrae donum sunt, & opus ultroneae & gratuitae benevolentiae Dei." *In sacra quatuor Evangelia, enarrationes perpetuae*. . . . (Basel: Hervagius, 1536) 364. According to Bucer, even *bona opera* have their place in this causal scheme. Other reformers tend to be less willing to follow Bucer in this regard, but the emphasis we see here on the will of God as the *causa iustificationis* is typical. See Calvin, *Institutio* (1559) 3.4.25 (OS 4:114.14–18).

[40] Hamm contrasts this with prior scholastic thought, in which "man's acceptance into grace and righteousness in justification, and his acceptance into sanctification at the Last Judgment, are two separate things, divided by the way of life inherent in obedience to the law and the principles of satisfaction and merit. . . . Through the acceptance of the sinner, his entering into the righteousness of Christ, something final has taken place; it cannot be superseded even by the Last Judgment. . . ." Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 198. This line of argument is developed at greater length in Heiko A. Oberman, " 'Iustitia Christi' and 'Iustitia Dei': Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," *HTR* 55 (1966) 1–26. While I think that this interpretation is basically sound with regard to Melanchthon and Calvin, other reformers saw things differently. Martin Bucer, for example, maintained the medieval interval between the *iustitia Christi* and the *iustitia Dei;* on this point, see my essay, " 'The Doers of the Law Will Be Justified': The Exegetical Origins of Martin Bucer's *Triplex Iustificatio,*" *JTS* 58 (2007) 485–524, esp. 509–11. Furthermore, even Luther at times entertained doubts as to what seems to be the inescapable corollary of the latter position: "once saved, always saved." In a 1538 addendum to the Smalcald Articles, for example, Luther contradicts the notion (widely ascribed to Johannes Agricola) that "all who once have received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sin or have become believers, should they sin after that, would still remain in the faith, and such sin would not harm them." On the contrary, argues Luther, "when holy people . . . somehow fall into a public sin (such as David, who fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy against God), at that point faith and the Spirit have departed. The Holy Spirit does not allow sin to rule and gain the upper hand so that it is brought to completion, but the Spirit controls and resists so that sin is not able to do whatever it wants. However, when sin does whatever it wants, then the Holy Spirit and faith are not there." SA 3.3.42–45 (*BC* 318–19). In this passage Luther also explicitly rejects the position Calvin would later hold, namely, that those who fall into such grievous public sin simply demonstrate that they "never really had the Spirit and faith" to begin with. See *Institutio* (1559) 3.24.7 (OS 4:418–19). I am grateful to Reinhard Hütter for drawing my attention to this passage in Luther's writings.

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works."[41] If we restrict our focus to justification proper, setting aside for the time being such related but tangential matters as sin, scripture, and anthropology, we may summarize Hamm's findings to this point as follows:

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

Hamm argues that these characteristics represent common ground held by each of the four reformers he surveys against the backdrop of late medieval Catholic theology, a judgment I regard as more or less correct. Given the existential nature of the concerns clustered around (a), it seems to me altogether plausible that Luther's protest, beginning in 1517, against the sacramental regulation of justification in Catholic orthopraxy acted as a sort of lightning rod for reforming dissent, rallying opposition against the existing religious order around the slogan *sola fide* and proclaiming a Gospel aimed at providing relief for consciences troubled by the abiding persistence of sin.[42]

Grant that the major Protestant reformers all read scripture and theorized salvation with regard to these three concerns; grant further that they did so more or less within the context of similar convictions regarding scripture, sin, and theological anthropology, as Hamm argues. It is still the case, however, that considerable diversity persisted in the ways in which Protestant theologians theorized justification, even as they did so from the context of an emerging

[41] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 203.

[42] A generation ago, Steven Ozment famously argued that Luther's message of justification by faith alone gained so much interest because it provided relief from what he described as "the burden of late medieval religion." *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth–Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) 22. Alister E. McGrath ("Justification and the Reformation: The Significance of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith to Sixteenth Century Urban Communities," *ARG* 81 [1990] 5–19) was critical of Ozment's thesis, arguing that outside of the area of Luther's immediate influence—especially in upper Germany and Switzerland—there was little interest in deploying the new theology in "relieving individuals from the rigours of social discipline," 12. In fact, the Reformation often brought an *increase* in moral and religious obligations in these territories, rather than a reprieve. The point is well taken, but McGrath overstates his case, ignoring the fact that virtually all of these reformers adopted a similar rhetoric of justification, even if it meant different things in different contexts. The fact that upon his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin introduced "measures of social control over public morality, maintained by the oppressive sanction of consistorial excommunication" does not mean that Calvin was uninterested in the doctrine of justification, as McGrath maintains. It simply means that he saw no real conflict between the two, a fact which reinforces the suggestion that the doctrine itself was still in a state of development.

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"theological culture."[43] This is most readily apparent when we examine in greater detail the relationship of justification to grace and the ways in which justification interfaces in its objective aspect with the atonement and in its subjective aspect with regeneration. To this I now turn by way of engagement with Hamm's third thesis, "Grace Preceding Perfect Righteousness."

Hamm proceeds to specify the *reformatorische* content of this notion of grace in a number of suggestive ways. First, he points out that the reformers dismiss the scholastic doctrine of *gratia creata,* the idea that saving grace is a created reality, or habit, in the soul. More to the point, however, Hamm argues that for the reformers, "a conceptual approach in terms of the relationship replaces the traditional qualitative and moral attitude. Sin remains real in ourselves, but outside ourselves (*extra nos*), in the relationship, that is to say, we are justified in the way in which we are seen by God (*coram Deo*)."[44]

Hamm makes two further claims regarding this relational view of justification. The first has to do with the relationship between the reformers' understanding of atonement and redemption, between the saving work of Christ on the cross and the application of that work to believers through faith. Writes Hamm: "The propitiatory righteousness of Jesus Christ acting vicariously for us is of fundamental importance. It alone is the cause of justification; it alone provides satisfaction and wins merit. The new relationship in which grace justifies us means that God sees man in the light of Christ's righteousness, and allows it to stand for the righteousness of sinners."[45]

What Hamm is describing here comes to be summarized in the Protestant confessional symbols and in later scholasticism as the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness. "Luther," he writes, "and Melanchthon and Calvin with him, expresses this understanding of justification in terms of the relations by speaking of the imputation to us of righteousness (*reputatio, imputatio*), and by describing the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner as a righteousness that is external and alien to mankind (*iustitia aliena, externa*)."[46] As I shall argue below, this notion of the imputed righteousness of Christ is ubiquitous in both the Reformed confessions beginning in the late 1550s and in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* in 1577. Hamm, however, detects the idea from an early stage in all four of his paradigmatic figures, though he concedes that they do not all use the same language consistently; more importantly, he regards this concept as integral to Reformation teaching.

[43] I borrow this term from patristics scholar Lewis Ayres, who uses it to describe "sets of terminologies embodying similar logics," with the assumption that "such terminologies were read in the context of a set of wider theological assumptions and practices" (*Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004] 84).

[44] Hamm, "Reformation Doctrine," 194.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 194.

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Corollary to this notion of the *iustitia Christi imputata,* for Hamm, is another axiom which has long been regarded as a defining mark of the *reformatorische Rechtfertigungslehre,* the sharp distinction between justification and regeneration. This *iustitia aliena,* which is imputed to the believer through faith, "is indeed truly given to us, but it never exists in us, only in the manner of its acceptance and of divine absolution."[47] Not only is God's acceptance of the sinner and his imputation of Christ's righteousness regarded as notionally distinct from the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing the believer, but, Hamm argues, the two "can never be congruent." Justification stands in a causal relationship to the "partial renewal" which is effected by the Holy Spirit, and the believer's acceptance into a right relationship with God is never conditioned by it.

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

Termini a quo and *ad quem:* Emergence of the Confessional Model

By the end of the sixteenth century, Protestant theologians had developed a clear and consistent idiom for describing God's justification of the ungodly, the central concept in their doctrine of salvation.[48] This *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* represented a clear consensus among Lutheran and Reformed theologians in opposition to their Roman Catholic opponents. It also represented an "advance" with regard to earlier models of justification among the first-generation reformers, this in at least two respects. First, justification came to be defined as a transaction involving two conceptually distinct aspects: forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness. The former of these, the idea that justification involves the

[47] Ibid.

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

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remission (or non-imputation) of sin, was never particularly controversial, in and of itself, in the debates of the Reformation era.[49] It was the latter, the affirmation of the *iustitia Christi imputata,* which represented perhaps the most striking theological *novum* in Protestant teaching, particularly when it was claimed that this imputed righteousness was given independently of, and without subsequent reference to, the imparted righteousness which followed from regeneration. The second aspect of this *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* is thus a clear distinction between justification on the one hand and regeneration on the other.[50]

Between the years 1559 and 1566, a series of important confessional documents affirmed this model as the consensus view of the Reformed churches: the *Confessio Gallica* (1559), the *Scots Confession* (1560), the *Confessio Belgica* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1566). In 1577, this language of the imputed righteousness of Christ featured prominently in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*. By the time of its "first codification," then, Protestant theology had reached a cross-confessional consensus on the language of one of its most central soteriological affirmations, a consensus which would set the boundaries of orthodox teaching on the doctrine of justification for roughly the next two centuries.[51]

Viewed from the vantage point of this consensus, however, early evangelical teaching on justification often appears inchoate and at times even contradictory. The first-generation reformers did not clearly and consistently distinguish justification from regeneration, as Hamm asserts.[52] Indeed, one of the most heated controversies

[49] There was, of course, plenty about the ways in which Protestant thinkers explained the non-imputation of sins that raised the ire of their Catholic opponents; for example, its *Einmaligkeit* (that is, its once-and-for-all character), its removal from the context of the sacrament of penance, or its conferral of subjective certainty of salvation. But the basic idea of justification as involving the forgiveness of sins was standard medieval fare. Thomas Aquinas, for example, cites the *Glossa ordinaria* in a *sed contra* affirming that *remissio peccatorum est iustificatio* (*Summa Theologiae,* Ia–IIae q. 113 a. 1 s.c.). Though Thomas, like most medieval theologians in the West, views justification as a process which makes the sinner righteous, remission of sins is one of the primary effects of this infusion of grace (*ST* q. 113 a. 2 r.2).

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

[51] In dating the "first codification" of Protestant doctrine from the mid-1560s, I am following the historical framework given in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (2d ed.; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003) 1:52–59. By "two centuries," I mean simply to underscore the longevity of these documents' influence, not to suggest a clear end date for confessional orthodoxy—indeed, these confessional documents are still binding in many Protestant churches today. Muller's study of Reformed Orthodoxy terminates circa 1725, by which point its staying power is clearly on the wane.

[52] Even Melanchthon, who is often regarded as the source and font of a purely "forensic"

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prior to the first codification centered on Andreas Osiander's rejection of this very distinction.[53] Moreover, these early figures use a wide range of language to describe their views and often appeal to very different biblical texts to justify them. Terms such as *imputare* and *reputare* gain prominence only gradually in these discussions, and their use evolves as the discourse becomes more precise. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the concept of imputed righteousness ever comes to occupy the dominant place even in Luther's view of justification that it manifestly holds in the language of both the Lutheran and Reformed confessions by the time of the first codification.[54] One particularly well-known example from the later Luther will have to suffice for the present. In the 1545 preface to his collected Latin writings, Luther describes the moment early in his career, some thirty years earlier, when he first came to his new understanding of the *iustitia Dei* in Paul's letter to the Romans. Sometime after this, he explains, he read Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* and discovered, much to his delight, that this "new" insight into the righteousness of God could claim the sanction of an ancient and venerable Father of the Church. What follows is highly significant: "Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was

approach, does not decisively eliminate the idea of *renovatio* from his definition of justification until the *Römerbrief-Kommentar* of 1532, according to Timothy Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997) 179–80. Zwingli, on the other hand, never develops such a distinction; see W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 160.

[53] For a summary of this debate, see David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza* (2d ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 64–69.

[54] Scholarly opinion remains sharply divided on this issue. On the one hand, a strong tradition of confessional German scholarship from Ritschl to Althaus has maintained the centrality of imputed righteousness in Luther's view of justification, a view which continues to inspire spirited defense; see, for example, R. Scott Clark, "Iustitia Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification?" *EvQ* 70 (2006) 269–310. On the other hand, some lines of scholarship have cast the language of imputation as the distinctive contribution of Philipp Melanchthon, whether wholesome and salutary (as in Lowell Green, *How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel: The Doctrine of Justification in the Reformation* [Fallbrook, Calif.: Verdict, 1980]) or wicked and pernicious (as in Stephen Strehle, "Imputatio iustitiae: Its Origin in Melanchthon, Its Opposition in Osiander," *ThZ* 50 [1994] 201–19). While not denying the presence of imputation in Luther's theology, Tuomo Mannermaa and his disciples have emphasized instead the notion of *unio cum Christo* as the central theme in Luther's soteriology, downplaying what would become the later confessional emphasis on forensic justification. For a succinct introduction to the main trajectories in the Finnish interpretation of Luther, see *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); a foundational text for this school has recently been translated into English: Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present In Faith: Luther's View Of Justification*, (ed. Kirsi Stjerna; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005 [1989]). The "Finnish school" has often been charged with an ahistorical focus on selected texts in Luther's corpus to the exclusion of those which are deemed ecumenically unhelpful, with little consideration for how any of these texts fit into the ongoing development of the tradition. While I am sympathetic to much of this criticism, there are signs that the more recent Finnish scholarship is becoming aware of the problem. See, for example, the recent monograph by Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

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pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught."[55] This assessment of Augustine by Luther is important in two respects: On the one hand, it demonstrates that the language of imputation is important enough for Luther—the later Luther, that is—to elicit mild criticism of Augustine, with whom he is clearly in this context attempting to establish continuity. On the other hand, Luther still recognizes Augustine's work as supporting the key insight of his reformation *Durchbruch*.[56] Augustine's view is "imperfect" and "unclear" at points, but for all that Luther still finds it "pleasing."

By the time of Protestant theology's first codification, it is likely that many would have regarded the teaching of the first-generation reformers on this matter in a similar light: imperfect and unclear, but pleasing. The issue is thrown into clearest relief when we compare the statements on justification given in the major Lutheran and Reformed confessions earlier and later in the period. Comparing the confessional statements of the emerging Protestant churches seems to me a far better route to establishing the extent of any supposed *reformatorische* or *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre,* precisely because these documents are consensus texts—that is, they do not simply represent the personal opinions of a handful of individual authors. Rather, these symbols won the assent, between them, of virtually all of those reformers and theologians whose opinions ought to count in determining what the extent of "reformational" teaching might be, at least among the intellectual leaders of the movement.

For our purposes here, I will be dividing these statements into two distinct groups, corresponding to two waves of creative confessional activity in different periods of the century (see p. 226). The first took place fairly early on in the Reformation, while the Lutheran movement was still establishing its theological identity in the Empire and the urban reformation was in full swing among the south German and the Swiss. These "first wave" confessions thus give us a good indicator not only of what sort of consensus existed across a wide range of first-generation reformers but also what sort of theological program the princes, magistrates, and city councilmen who declared for the Reformation during this period thought they were signing up for. The "second wave" came concurrent with the early stages of confessionalization in the aftermath of the Peace of Augsburg, and thus gives us a snapshot of how Protestant doctrine had coalesced into a form suitable for sustaining a territorial ecclesiastical establishment. What follows is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the theology of these confessions; it simply represents a sampling of

[55] "Et quamquam imperfect hoc adhuc sit dictum, ac de imputatione non clare omnia explicit, placuit tamen iustitiam Dei doceri, qua nos iustificemur." "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," LW 34:337; WA 54:186.18–20.

[56] See Bernhard Lohse, "Zum Wittenberger Augustinismus: Augustins Schrift *De spiritu et littera* in der Auslegung bei Staupitz, Luther und Karlstadt," in *Augustine, the Harvest, and Theology (1300–1650): Essays Dedicated to Heiko Augustinus Oberman* (ed. Kenneth Hagen; Leiden: Brill, 1990) 89–109.

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

Two Waves: Lutheran and Reformed Confessional Statements

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

Let us take the *Confessio Augustana* (*CA*) as a point of departure for the Lutheran tradition.[57] In 1530, Melanchthon and his colleagues were content to summarize their teaching on justification with a very brief statement which sticks closely to the syntax of the biblical text:

> Likewise, [the Lutheran pastors] teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. God reckons this faith as righteousness (*Hanc fidem imputat Deus pro iustitia coram ipso*).[58]

Aside from its brevity, what most impresses about this article in relation to later formulations is the way in which the mode of justification is described in language closely following the biblical syntax: in both the *CA* and in Gen 15:6 (and its NT quotations in Rom 4:3, 22, Gal 3:6, Jas 2:23), faith is the thing being "reckoned," and *iustitia* is an indirect object in a prepositional phrase—*ad iustitiam*/*pro iustitia*. Two observations are in order. First, as has often been noted, this article is capable

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

[58] *BC* 38–41; *BSLK*, 56.

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of sustaining a wide range of interpretations, from the purely forensic to a view of justification as involving both the acceptance and the transformation of the sinner.[59] The language is clearly forensic, but because the key formulation simply repeats the biblical syntax, no explicit foreclosure is made on a traditional Augustinian reading of justification as a transformative process concurrent with *acceptatio Divina*.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, what *CA* Art. IV describes is a one-stage model of justification: Reception into grace results in the forgiveness of sins, and this forgiveness of sins is tantamount to an imputation of righteousness.[60] This judgment takes place "on account of Christ" (*propter Christum*), but there is no suggestion of a "transfer" of righteousness or of merit from Christ to the believer—indeed, the concept of merit is conspicuously absent here.[61] This is not to suggest that the reformers equate justification with forgiveness of sins in a flat, one-dimensional way. In other contexts, both Luther and Melanchthon tend to describe salvation in broader terms, encompassing both the remission of sins and the believer's reception of Christ's righteousness. For example, in his 1528 treatise *Vom Abendmal Christi,* Luther describes salvation in terms reminiscent of the later confessional position, when he writes that Christ "gave himself and bestowed all his works, sufferings, wisdom, and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father."[62] So also, Melanchthon occasionally uses language in his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* which seems at times to anticipate the later confessional formulations.[63]

[59] Although noting that Article IV was rejected by the Catholic theologians charged by Charles V with drafting the *Confutatio* at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530*,* Robert Kress observes that the text "does not teach a merely external and forensic justification, as if nothing happened in the justified human being." Robert Kress, "The Roman Catholic Reception of the Augsburg Confession," *SCJ* 11 (1980) 119.

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

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

[62] **"Darumb hat darnach der son sich selbs auch uns gegeben, alle sein werck, leiden, weisheit** und gerechtickeit geschenckt und uns dem Vater versunet, damit wir widder lebendig und gerecht, auch den Vater mit seinen gaben erkennen und haben moechten." **LW 37:366; WA 26:505–6. The** inclusion of such terms as suffering and wisdom in this list of Christ's benefits makes it unlikely, however, that what Luther has in view here is imputation, narrowly construed.

[63] In only two places in the *Apology* is there any hint of the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. Toward the end of Art. IV on justification, in discussing various proof-texts alleged against the Protestant position by the writers of the *Confutatio,* Melanchthon argues that the righteousness which "covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8) is a righteousness of the law. He contrasts this hypothetical righteousness with that of the Gospel, "because the latter promises us

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This is not to say that justification has a narrower sense for the earlier reformers than it does for the later confessional theologians—in fact, their language can be quite expansive, particularly when discussing the matter under the heading of other loci. The salient point, however, is that notions of positive imputation remain peripheral in theological discourse and wholly absent from confessional formulations. When forced to describe succinctly what it is that justification accomplishes, the early texts consistently focus on the idea of non-imputation of sin. This may simply reflect an assumption that one who has been forgiven is ipso facto righteous in the sight of God, as the language of Ps 32:2/Rom 4:8 might seem to imply: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Or it may be that forgiveness is viewed as standing in synecdoche for all the benefits which justification conveys. Whatever the precise relationship, remission of sin and imputation of righteousness are viewed as parallel terms, as the following definition of justification from Melanchthon's 1556 *Enarratio* on Romans seems to suggest:

> Justification is the imputation of righteousness, by which God in his mercy receives (*recipit*) us and brings us to life (*vivificat*). Therefore we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.
>
> Justification is the remission of sins, by which God receives (*recipit*) us and brings us to life (*vivificat*) on account of the mediator, and through him. Therefore we are not righteous by means of our works or merits.[64]

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

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reconciliation and righteousness when we believe that on account of Christ as the propitiator, the Father is gracious to us, and that the merits of Christ are bestowed upon us (*donentur nobis merita Christi*)" (Art. IV.238; *BC* 156; *BSLK* 206). Likewise, in Art. XXI, Melanchthon returns to the idea of justification in a dispute over the invocation of saints. Arguing that the Catholics "actually make the saints out to be not simply intercessors but propitiators," Melanchthon denies them this function because they do not meet the two conditions essential to qualify as a propitiator. The first need not concern us here; the second, however, involves a "transfer" of righteousness in order to make atonement for sins:

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

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

[64] CR 15:888.

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> Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own, in the past, at present, or in the future, that he gives us and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience and that, because of this righteousness, we are accepted by God into grace and regarded as righteousness.[65]

This is only one affirmation in a much larger set of theses and antitheses, a set which not only continues the Lutheran polemic against Catholics views of salvation but also addresses itself to a number of intra-Lutheran debates as well.[66] The FC statement on justification contrasts with *CA* not only in size, but also in substance; this in two important respects. First, where *CA* preserves the syntax of the foundational biblical text, Gen 15:6, FC does not: now the "righteousness of Christ's obedience" is the thing being reckoned, not faith, and "we" are the recipients of something clearly external. Thus, the *iustitia* by which we are saved has been promoted from an indirect to a direct object. Second, this imputation of Christ's righteousness appears as an aspect conceptually distinct from forgiveness of sins. I am not suggesting that these are *chronologically* distinct stages or that they are ever thought of as happening independently from one another, simply that later descriptions of justification, such as we see here in FC, tend consistently to rely on just this sort of two-fold construction in affirming both a non-imputation of sin and the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness.[67] These observations may seem like overly-subtle points of grammatical nit-picking, but I would suggest that this departure from biblical syntax marks an important point of transition in the development of the doctrine. Hurling Bible verses at one another simply was not getting the job done. The shift to a two-stage model reflects the realization that the debate was fundamentally an argument over the meaning of the biblical terms themselves, and this realization demanded a model which could explain, rather than simply restate, the key passages to which both sides appealed.

Nor is this only the case in the Lutheran tradition. A similar comparison of early and late confessions in the Reformed tradition demonstrates a parallel pattern of

[65] *BC* 495.

[66] For more on the polemical background of this text, see Robert Kolb, "Human Performance and the Righteousness of Faith: Martin Chemnitz's Anti-Roman Polemic in Formula of Concord III," in *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde* (ed. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 125–39.

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

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development from a one-stage model of justification as non-imputation of sin with no distinction made between justification and regeneration to a purely forensic, two-stage model. Zwingli's *Sixty-Seven Articles,* possibly the first formalized statement of faith in what would become the Reformed tradition, makes no mention whatever of justification.[68] In the following decade, however, a whole series of confessional statements poured from the pens of south-German and Swiss reformers. In 1528 Berthold Haller and Francis Kolb issued *Ten Theses* on behalf of canton Bern, a statement which met with the warm approval and Zwingli and the Zurich reformers. The text on salvation reads: "Christ is our only wisdom, righteousness, redemption, and payment for the sins of the whole world. Hence it is a denial of Christ when we acknowledge another merit for salvation and satisfaction for sin."[69]

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

> First, therefore, since for some years we were taught that man's own works are necessary for his justification, our preachers have taught that this whole justification is to be ascribed to the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ, and to be received by faith alone.[70]

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

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

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

[69] Art. 3, *CCFCT* 2:217.

[70] Ch. 3, *CCFCT* 2:222; *CCER* 746.

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> are granted to us in Christ, who is our righteousness, holiness, redemption, the way, the truth, the wisdom, and the life.[71]

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

> We do not obtain such sublime and great benefits of God's grace and the true sanctification of God's Spirit through our merits or powers but through faith which is a pure gift of God. This faith is a sure, firm, and solid foundation for and a laying hold of all those things for which one hopes from God, and from which love and subsequently all virtues and the fruits of good works are brought forth. . . . Such a faith is the true and proper service with which a man is pleasing to God.[72]

Nowhere in any of these statements is a distinction even hinted at between justification and regeneration. Nor is there any mention of imputation, either in the early-Lutheran sense of *fides imputata pro iustitia* or in the later orthodox sense of *iustitia Christi imputata*. This becomes all the more plain when we compare these early formulations with the second wave of Reformed confessions, beginning in 1559.

The *Confessio Gallica*, written by Calvin in cooperation with Théodore de Bèze and Pierre Viret, begins its definition of justification in Art. 18 in fine Melanchthonian form: "We believe that all our justification rests upon the remission of our sins, in which also is our only blessedness, as the Psalmist says" (Ps 32:1). The statement then draws a conclusion regarding the imputation of Christ's merit which is not found anywhere in the Lutheran confessional texts in use at the time: "We therefore reject all other means of justification before God, and without claiming any virtue or merit, we rest simply in the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed (*allouée*) to us as much to blot out all our sins as to make us find grace and favor in the sight of God."[73] This is not quite a two-stage model, in that the non-imputation of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are not distinguished; rather, the *iustitia Christi* functions here in two distinct ways, to "blot out all our sins" and to "make us find grace and favor in the sight of God." And if there is any remaining doubt that this imputation excludes any notion of merit communicated through regeneration, it is removed in Art. 22: "Moreover, although God works in us for our salvation, and renews our hearts, determining us to that which is good, yet we confess that the good works which we do proceed from his Spirit, and can not be accounted to us for justification."[74]

[71] Art. 9, *CCFCT* 2:277; *CCER* 98–99.
[72] *CCFCT* 2:285; *BSRK* 104.
[73] *CCFCT* 2:380; *BSRK* 226.
[74] *CCFCT* 2:381; *BSRK* 227.

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The *Confessio Belgica* (1561), like the *French Confession,* begins its discussion of justification in Article 23 with reference to Psalm 33 and Romans 4: "We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is contained, as David and Paul teach us when they declare that man blessed to whom God grants (*imputata*) righteousness apart from works."[75] No explicit mention is made of the *iustitia Christi imputata;* rather, *iustitia coram Deo* is "contained" (*contineri*) in the forgiveness of sins. The emerging confessional position is hinted at in the previous article, however, when it is denied that faith itself (*ipsam fidem*) justifies; rather, faith is the instrument by which we grasp Christ, who is our righteousness. The idea that Christ himself is our righteousness, expressed in the language of 1 Cor 1:30, *Christus, iustitia nostra,* becomes a favorite way of summarizing justification for many of the reformers and confessional theologians. The expression is biblical, however, and therefore not new. The challenge for Protestant theologians was to describe in a convincing manner *how,* exactly, Christ is our righteousness and to do so in a way which set their teaching apart from that of their Catholic opponents.[76] This was done by appealing to what amounts to a Protestant version of the treasury of merits: "Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available (*imputans*) to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits."[77] With the further differentiation between justification and sanctification in Art. 24, all of the pieces of the confessional doctrine are clearly in place, if not succinctly stated.

The two documents which bear clearest testimony to the emergence of a *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* are the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1562) and the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). The *Second Helvetic Confession,* initially written as a personal statement of faith by Heinrich Bullinger beginning in 1561 and presented to the Imperial Assembly in 1566, is regarded by many as the most comprehensive and influential Reformed confession of the sixteenth century.[78]

[75] *CCFCT* 2:416; *BSRK* 241.

[76] Nineteenth-century theologians intent on finding anticipations of Luther's mature thought often fastened on biblical expressions such as these in the writings of late medieval theologians. Carl Ullmann, for example, argued on the basis of this language that John of Wesel was one such "forerunner." *Reformatoren vor der Reformation, vornehmlich in Deutschland und den Niederlanden* (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1866) 325–25. Ritschl, however, points out that this Pauline language is perfectly capable of sustaining a Catholic reading, drily noting that "in the time of the Reformation . . . men had occasion to learn that contradictory senses could be attached by the conflicting parties to words that had the same sound." *Critical History,* 91, 114.

[77] *CCFCT* 2:416; *BSRK* 241. Later in the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, Reformed theologians would give this concept even more definite shape in distinguishing between the "active" and "passive obedience" of Christ. See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

[78] So Timothy George (*OER* 2:220), who points out the acceptance of this confession in the Swiss cantons and the Palatinate, as well as in the Reformed churches of France, Hungary, Poland, and Scotland in *OER*, s.v. "Helvetic Confessions." The date of 1562 given in the text above is the

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The *Second Helvetic*, interestingly, departs from the common practice of most of the previous Protestant confessions in not centering the discussion of justification on Ps 32:2/Rom 4:8: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." This is because, for Bullinger, justification is more than simply forgiveness of sins; it involves a positive aspect which is consistently set parallel to forgiveness: "to justify means to remit sins, to absolve from guilt and punishment, to receive into favor, and to pronounce a man just."[79] To underscore the dual nature of this action, however, Bullinger devotes an entire paragraph to defining the nature of this *imputativa iustitia:*

> For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ's righteousness to us as our own, so that now we are *not only* cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, *but also*, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us (*non imputans nobis peccata, sed imputans eius nobis iustitiam*).[80]

This two-fold formula—*non imputans nobis peccata, sed imputans [Christi] nobis iustitiam*—represents the key formulation for what I am here describing as the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre*.[81] It appears with equal clarity in the *Heidelberg Catechism* the following year:

> Question 56. What do you believe concerning "the forgiveness of sins"? That, for the sake of Christ's reconciling work, God will no more remember my sins or the sinfulness with which I have to struggle all my life long; but that he graciously imparts to me the righteousness of Christ so that I may never come into condemnation.
>
> Question 60. How are you righteous before God? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having

date given in the critical edition by Müller (*BSRK* 170), and presumably represents the year when the text was completed.

[79] Art. 15.1, in *CCFCT* 2:486; *BSRK* 191.

[80] Art. 15.3, in *CCFCT* 2:486–87 [emphasis mine]; *BSRK* 192.

[81] Also Ernst Koch: "Die imputatio des Werkes Christi bedeutet gleichzeitig non-imputatio der peccata, positiv gesehen imputatio der iustitia Christi. Hier ist einer der Schlüsselpunkte für die Rechtfertigungslehre der Confessio erreicht." Ernst Koch, "Die Heilslehre der Confessio helvetica posterior," in *Glauben und Bekennen. Vierhundert Jahre Confessio helvetica posterior* (ed. Joachim Staedtke; Zürich: Zwingli, 1966) 284.

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> fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.[82]

Conclusion

It would be easy to exaggerate the distance between these first- and second-generation confessions on the matter of justification, and I have no intention of suggesting that the later confessions represent a radical departure from the earlier. What should be clear, however, even from this cursory survey, is that the later confessions describe justification with much greater precision than the earlier documents. Moreover, several key elements of what is typically regarded as essential to the "Reformation doctrine of justification" emerge in confessional form only when virtually all of the first-generation reformers are cold in their graves (Calvin being the one significant exception) and the agendas of the continental churches have already begun to shift from reform of the late medieval church to the consolidation of confessional identity. To be sure, these elements make their appearance in the writing of individual figures long before they are codified in confessional form. As we have already noted, Melanchthon's 1532 commentary on Romans marks the beginning of a decisive shift to a purely forensic conception of justification, clearly distinguished from *renovatio* or *regeneratio*. So also, the notion of justification as the positive *iustitia Christi imputata* appears in Calvin's *Institutio* of 1536.[83] All the pieces of the puzzle are on the table by the end of this decade, but they are not yet put together in the final form they will take in the confessions of the first codification.[84]

So was there a "Reformation doctrine of justification" in the sixteenth century? Well, sort of. Hamm and others have demonstrated the existence of a good deal of common ground between several of the key figures in the early Reformation, especially between Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin, though I have suggested that when we broaden the scope of our investigation to include other important reformers, such as Zwingli, Bucer, or Peter Martyr Vermigli, the picture becomes

[82] *CCFCT* 2:439–40; *BSRK* 697–98.

[83] "Hanc enim ut nostrum induimus, et sane pro nostra nobis a Deo accepta fertur, ut pro sanctis, puris et innocentibus nos habeat . . . verum iustiam Christi, quae una ut perfecta est, ita sola Dei conspectum sustinere potest, pro nobis sisti oportet ac iudicio repraesentari velut sponsorem. Ipsa vero a Deo accepta fertur ac nobis imputatur, perinde ac si nostra esset." *Institutio* (1536) 1.32; OS 1:60–61.

[84] By 1541 the formula appears in the *Geneva Catechism* in the compact, precise form it would take in virtually every subsequent major confessional symbol in both the Reformed and Lutheran churches: "merely through his goodness, without any regard to our works, he is pleased to accept us freely in Jesus Christ, imputing his righteousness to us, and does not impute our sin." *CCFCT* 2:333. The *Geneva Catechism* never held more than a local provenance, though its influence can clearly be seen in some of the later texts noted above. See Robert M. Kingdon, "Catechesis in Calvin's Geneva," in *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities* (ed. John H. Van Engen; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004) 294–313.

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less sharply defined.[85] Moreover, when we consider that several of the core tenets of the Protestant doctrine were subject to negotiation (as at Regensburg) and intra-confessional debate (as in the *Osianderstreit*) well into the 1540s and 1550s, we must be cautious in describing particular features of the doctrine as essential or in regarding the final confessional formulations as the inevitable outworking of earlier insights.

Rather than relying on a harmonization of a few select figures, I have argued here that close analysis of the major confessional statements gives us a stronger basis for indexing the emergence of a consensus position, precisely because these documents speak for communities, not simply for individuals. As my analysis in the third part of this essay has aimed to demonstrate, this consensus underwent considerable development between the first and second waves of confessional activity. Not only were the formulations of the first codification more comprehensive and precise, but a subtle shift is evident in the transition from a one-stage to a two-stage model. The first-generation confessions had been content either to affirm *sola fide* against the Roman Catholic sacramental system (as in the early Reformed confessions) or simply to repeat the touchstone biblical language of faith-reckoned-for-righteousness (Gen 15:6/Rom 4:4). By the end of the third quarter of the century, however, a remarkable convergence appears between the Lutheran and Reformed confessions of the first codification, a convergence centering on a two-stage model of justification in sharp distinction from regeneration. The theological implications of this shift have yet to be fully explored, but one thing is certainly clear: The theologians of the confessional era, to a much greater extent than the original reformers, were finally driven to the realization that "the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself."[86] This realization was not the fruit of an isolated *Durchbruch,* nor even of the common rhetoric of dissent deployed by the reformers in the early years of the conflagration. Rather, clarity and consensus emerged only gradually, through a long process of reinterpretation, renegotiation, and refinement in the crucible of confessional formation.

[85] The state of research in the field precludes any firm conclusions on this point, as we are not in possession of authoritative monographs on any of these figures. Hamm acknowledges as much in his treatment of Zwingli, and it is notable that his analysis places much heavier weight on the other three. Brian Lugioyo's forthcoming monograph, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), is an important contribution to our understanding of a reformer long known to have held distinctive views on justification. Frank James has demonstrated a development in the thought of Vermigli away from an early "Bucerian" position in the 1540s towards a view more in keeping with what I have here described as the *konfessionelle Rechtfertigungslehre* in the 1550s, in Frank James III, "*De Iustificatione:* The Evolution of Peter Martyr Vermigli's Doctrine of Justification" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2000).

[86] Once again, Hanson, *Search,* xxi.

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