

J. V. Fesko

# Beyond Calvin

Union with Christ and Justification in Early  
Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700)

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht



J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*

# Reformed Historical Theology

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*Dedicated to Dave and Bryan*

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## Abbreviations

### Commonly Referenced Works

CD	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
CNTC	Calvin's New Testament Commentaries
CO	<i>Calvini Opera</i>
CR	<i>Corpus Reformatorum</i>
DLGTT	Richard Muller, <i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HC	Heidelberg Catechism
LC	Westminster Larger Catechism
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LW	Luther's Works
NPNF	<i>Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
OS	John Calvin, <i>Opera Selecta</i>
PRRD	Richard Muller, <i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i>
SC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
SHC	Second Helvetic Confession
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
<i>Werke</i>	<i>Martin Luthers Werke</i>

### Periodicals

ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
EJ	<i>Evangelical Journal</i>
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>

JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHI	<i>Journal for the History of Ideas</i>
MAJT	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
ModTh	<i>Modern Theology</i>
PRJ	<i>Puritan Reformed Journal</i>
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBET	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
TCP	<i>The Confessional Presbyterian</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

## Preface

My initial objective was to write a history of the doctrinal relationship between union with Christ and justification in the Reformed tradition from 1517 to present day. However, the complexity and richness of the material caused me to reevaluate and conclude the present work with the end of High Orthodoxy (1700). My hope is, God willing, to continue to research and write on the history of union and justification in follow-up projects covering other areas of early modern and modern history in the Reformed tradition. This book, then, represents the first of what I hope are several more monographs on the topic.

This is a work of historical theology. I have done my best to let the primary source evidence, read in its early modern context, drive the conclusions. I use available translations of primary sources in consultation with the original language editions whenever possible. I have made minor modifications of translations at times, which is indicated in the relevant footnotes. I have also updated archaic English spelling in quotations to facilitate easier reading but have left the titles of the works unchanged for ease of reference.

In the course of writing this book I was able to present my research in a number of different academic forums both inside and outside of Westminster Seminary California (WSC). I am especially thankful to my colleagues at WSC for the opportunity to present my research at our Warfield Seminars, a colloquium where faculty present their latest research for discussion and interaction with faculty and students. I taught a good portion of this material in an elective, *Union with Christ and Justification*, in the fall semester of 2010. I presented versions of two chapters, one on Melancthon and the other on Socinus, at regional and national meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, respectively. Earlier versions of several other chapters (*Metaphysics*, *Luther*, *Vermigli*, *Arminius*, *Zanchi*, *Perkins*, *Owen*, and *Bullinger*) appeared as journal articles. Readers can consult the bibliography to see where those pieces originally appeared.

I would like to thank a number of people who helped me along the way: Ross Hodges, Nic Lazzareschi, Brent Ferry, Robert Lotzer, and Kim Riddlebarger. Thank you, Luca Baschera, for offering helpful comments on an early draft of my chapter on Zanchi. Todd Billings also read a number of chapters and passed along some of his own work on union. I also wish to thank Richard Muller and

am grateful for the interaction I had with him on a number of issues related to union and the *ordo salutis* as well as his willingness to share a couple of chapters from his forthcoming book on Calvin. I want to thank Mark Jones for reading through the whole manuscript and offering a number of helpful critical comments. I am also grateful for my colleague, Dave VanDrunen who, chapter by chapter, read through the whole manuscript and gave me numerous corrections and suggestions that helped me polish the manuscript into its present form. Greg Fox, thank you for allowing me to use your terrific digital version of Perkin's famous ocular catechism.

I want to thank Dick Gaffin. I am grateful for the interaction we have had via personal discussion and e-mail correspondence over the material presented in this work. My family and I have personal affection, respect, and regard for his work for our denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Some of my conclusions are different than Dr. Gaffin's on this subject, but there is no doubt, we are brothers, and I look forward to further interaction in the future. In the end, I hope this work brings much needed light, rather than heat, to the present discussions over union and justification in the North American Reformed ecclesiastical context.

I also want to thank Herman Selderhuis for reading my manuscript and enthusiastically offering to publish it in Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht's Reformation 500 series. Much thanks is also due to Christoph Spill, Tina Hoffmann, and the staff at V & R in seeing the book through the publication process.

Thanks must go to my wife, Anneke, and my two sons, Val and Rob. My beloved family, thank you for your love, encouragement, and sacrifice. Your constant support and love has sustained me throughout the process of writing this book. Thank you for putting up with me when I "zone out" and seem to be in a far away place thinking about sixteenth and seventeenth-century history.

I remember the first time I met David VanDrunen and Bryan Estelle. We were at the General Assembly for the OPC at Dordt College and I recall when they asked me if I wanted to join them for dinner at that out-of-the-way steak house. I later excitedly called my wife and told her that two characters from WSC wanted to take me out to dinner. I walked away from that meal feeling as if I had just made two good friends. I believe the last nine years has proven me correct. I am thankful for their friendship, support, and the love of Christ they have shown my family and me. They both challenge me to be a better minister—their scholarship is first-rate, their love for Christ's church is exemplary, and their service to his church is indefatigable. Therefore, I dedicate this book to you, Dave and Bryan.

# 1. State of the question

## 1.1 Introduction

### 1.1.1 Luther and union with Christ

Over the centuries theological historians have mined droves of dusty volumes in search of new discoveries. They have returned to heavily trodden ground hoping to unearth an overlooked element of a theologian's thought or a hidden doctrine. One can characterize the recent upsurge in historical studies on Martin Luther (1483–1546) and the doctrine of union with Christ in this way. Though thoroughly mined over the centuries, studies originating out of the University of Helsinki have emerged claiming that Luther's doctrine of union with Christ has been eclipsed by later Lutheranism and its infatuation with legal and forensic categories and the doctrine of justification. Luther's doctrine of union with Christ, it has been argued, is not only a broader more encompassing model of soteriology, but also a potential ecumenical bridge between the Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox communions.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.2 Calvin and union with Christ

What is good for the goose is good for the gander, or so the old cliché goes. And so it should come as no surprise that a similar, though perhaps a little more subdued, trend has emerged in the field of Calvin studies. The study of John Calvin (1509–64), the great Genevan Protestant reformer, is no longer dominated by the older studies claiming that Calvin's doctrine was driven by a *Centraldogma*, one theological principle from which his entire system of

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<sup>1</sup> See Carl E. Braaten / Robert W. Jenson, ed., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Paul Louis Metzger, "Mystical Union with Christ: An Alternative to Blood Transfusions and Legal Fictions," *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 201–14; Mark Seifrid, "Paul, Luther, and Justification in Gal 2:15–21," *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 215–30; Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 231–44; Robert W. Jenson, "Response to Seifrid, Trueman, and Metzger on Finnish Luther Research," *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 245–50.

thought could be deduced, in this case, the doctrine of predestination.<sup>2</sup> With the paradigm shift in Reformation studies more broadly, and Calvin studies more narrowly, brought about by the work of Heiko Oberman (1930–2001), David Steinmetz, Richard A. Muller, and others, historians have been driven back to the primary sources. A genuine effort to understand the Reformation (1517–65) in light of its theological and historical connections to the Middle Ages (600–1450) and the subsequent development in the post-Reformation periods of Early (1565–1630 / 40), High (1630 / 40–1700), and Late Orthodoxy (1700–90) has been undertaken. Nevertheless, even with studies by those such as Muller’s *Christ and the Decree*, which demonstrated the errors of the *Centrality* theory, there has still been an attempt to identify the center or key of Calvin’s theology.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Calvin and the centrality of union with Christ

### 1.2.1 Karl Barth

Like the Finnish school’s interpretation of Luther and union with Christ, a number of scholars over the last twenty five years or so have made similar attempts to identify union with Christ as the key or organizing principle of Calvin’s theology, which is in contrast to those who have identified its importance but have not made it the architectonic key to Calvin’s theology.<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth (1886–1968), for example, explains that according to Calvin, there are two aspects to union with Christ: sanctification (*regeneratio*) and justification (*gratuitat iustitiae acceptio*). But he goes on to note, “Calvin did not draw out the consequences of this twofold meaning of *unio*, and he obviously did not

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<sup>2</sup> Commonly cited examples of this literature include Alexander Schweizer, “Die Syntese des Determinismus und der Freiheit in der reformierten Dogmatik. Zur Vertheideigung gegen Ebrard,” *Theologische Jahrbücher* 8 (1849): 153–209; Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*, 2 vol. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966); Heinrich Heppe, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformirten Kirche Deutschlands, Schriften zur reformirten Theologie*, Band I (Elberfeld: Friederichs, 1860); idem, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), esp. 150–89. For a more expansive bibliography and interaction with these sources, see Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 63–80, 206–208 nn. 1–14.

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (1956; Cambridge: James Clark, 2002), 120–39; François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (1953; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 233–63.

perceive its central significance.<sup>5</sup> He explains that by the definitive 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin made real advances in making union with Christ the common denominator in the application of redemption. Barth argues that when Calvin treats *de modo percipiendae gratiae* in book three, there are numerous appeals to union with Christ. But he also states, “Yet we cannot really say that the totality is projected and worked out in the light of it.” In book three, Barth believes that Calvin unpacks the basic significance of union but again stipulates: “Yet we are then astonished to find that it is not exploited very differently in what follows, but for long stretches is concealed again by lengthy deliberations of an earlier origin and resting on a very different basis.”<sup>6</sup> One suspects that Barth’s point is, due to the ad hoc nature of the compilation of the *Institutes*, Calvin’s editing was driven by doctrinal exigencies rather than a desire to write in such a manner as to have union with Christ permeate the whole of his work, not simply book three.

### 1.2.2 Charles Partee

On the other hand, while some have been circumspect about claims concerning the centrality of union for Calvin, others claim that union with Christ is *the* key to his theology. Charles Partee claims that union with Christ does not answer every mystery in Calvin’s thought, “but union with Christ is one master key that opens many doors which have been closed for a long time.”<sup>7</sup> Partee carefully parses what he means when he states that union with Christ is central, not as “*the* central dogma based on the older philosophic view of ‘essence,’ but as *a* central doctrine around which other doctrines in fact cluster based on the newer (Wittgensteinian) conceptualization of ‘family resemblances.’”<sup>8</sup> Partee identifies a number of implications that arise not only for a clearer understanding of Calvin’s theology but also for comprehending the nature of the Reformed tradition.

Concerning the nature of the Reformed tradition, Partee argues that other theologians contributed its development but that Calvin is still “the greatest systematic thinker among them” and the *Institutes* is “a single text to study and by which every exposition can be judged.”<sup>9</sup> And for this reason, Partee explains:

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<sup>5</sup> CD, IV/3.2:552.

<sup>6</sup> CD, IV/3.2: 552–53.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: WJK, 2008), xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, xvi n. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 3–4.



“So powerful was his influence that the movement,” the Reformed tradition, “is often called by his name”.<sup>10</sup> To substantiate this claim Partee relies upon, among others, the earlier opinions of Philip Schaff (1819–93), who believed that Calvin was the greatest theologian among the Reformers and one of the foremost leaders in all of Christian history.<sup>11</sup> However, Partee is willing to grant a sociological but not theological connection between Calvin and the rest of the Reformed tradition. Partee believes that the later Reformed tradition, unlike Calvin, had a “confident spirit” and “represented diminished theological insight but enhanced logical rigor”.<sup>12</sup> He claims that later Reformed theologians imitated each other more than they did Calvin.<sup>13</sup> Later Reformed theologians, for example, extended the doctrine of the covenant in legal directions, which obscured the role of union with Christ in their theology.<sup>14</sup> Given these divergences (logical rigor vs. biblical fidelity, and legal vs. relational), Partee insists that Reformed Orthodoxy represents a serious distortion of Calvin’s theology.<sup>15</sup> Partee argues: “To put the point briefly and sharply, Calvin is not a Calvinist because union with Christ is at the heart of his theology—and not theirs.”<sup>16</sup> Partee places Calvin at the foundation of the tradition and then posits the sharpest antithesis with subsequent Reformed theologians precisely over the doctrine of union with Christ.

### 1.2.3 Julie Canlis

Other historians have found an ecumenical bridge for dialog between the Reformed and Eastern Orthodox churches because of the supposed parallels between Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ and the doctrine of theosis.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, xii.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Schaff, “Calvin’s Life and Labors,” *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 4 (1875): 254–72, esp. 255–56; Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, xii–xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 14 n. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 19 n. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 26, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> See Brian G. Armstrong, “*Duplex Cognitio Dei*, Or? The Problem and Relation of Structure, Form, and Purpose in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elise Anne McKee / Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: WJK, 1989): 135–53; D. Willis-Watkins, “The Unio Mystica and the Assurance of Faith According to Calvin,” in *Calvin Erbe und Auftrag: FS für Wilhelm Heinrich Neuser zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. Willem van’t Spijker (Kampen: Kok, 1991): 77–84; Charles Partee, “Calvin’s Central Dogma Again,” *SCJ* 18/2 (1987): 191–99; Carl Mosser, “The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification,” *SJT* 55/1 (2002): 36–57.

For example, a recent study by Julie Canlis argues that for Calvin, union with Christ was Calvin's central concern, not the doctrine of justification by faith. Calvin's followers, on the other hand, exchanged Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ for a chronological *ordo salutis*, one in which union with Christ is dependent upon a sequence of steps in the application of redemption, unlike Calvin who grounded all of soteriology in union with Christ.<sup>18</sup> Like the claims of the Finnish school that pits Luther's doctrine of union against later Lutheranism's forensic justification, Canlis argues: "Unfortunately, Calvin's focus on salvation *extra nos* has primarily come to mark the Protestant tradition, rather than his equally warm and vibrant theology of participation."<sup>19</sup> One to whom Canlis appeals in her reading of Calvin is Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., as one who represents a "re-appropriation of union over against a traditional *ordo salutis*."<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3 The Gaffin-school on Calvin and union

#### 1.3.1 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

Gaffin has argued over the years to one degree or another that the traditional *ordo salutis* needs to be reconfigured along redemptive-historical or biblical-theological lines.<sup>21</sup> Canlis has noted this and has expressed her approbation of Gaffin's conclusions that Calvin's understanding of the doctrine of adoption is founded upon a *historia* rather than an *ordo salutis* model.<sup>22</sup> Gaffin has argued in a number of different places that the central feature of Calvin's soteriology is not justification by faith, as it is commonly argued, but union with Christ. Gaffin argues that union with Christ is foundational, the source from which the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification flow.<sup>23</sup> Gaffin explains that sanctification flows from union; conversely, Gaffin argues that Calvin would not say that sanctification is caused by justification. Justification is not the source or

<sup>18</sup> Julie Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God," *IJST* 6/2 (2004): 172–73.

<sup>19</sup> Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander, and Participation," 176.

<sup>20</sup> Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander, and Participation," 173 n. 13. Canlis appeals to Gaffin's published doctoral dissertation, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Gaffin has demurred over the idea that there is an interpretive school attributable to his reading of Calvin (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Response to John Fesko's Review," *Ordained Servant* 18 [2009]: 106–07). However, others such as William Evans, one of Gaffin's students, credits him with such a role (William B. Evans, "Déjà vu All Over Again? The Contemporary Reformed Soteriological Controversy in Historical Perspective," *WTJ* 72 [2010]: 138–41).

<sup>22</sup> Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander, and Participation," 183 n. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. "Justification and Union with Christ," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall / Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), 253.

cause of sanctification, rather union with Christ is.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere Gaffin explains the implications of union with Christ vis-à-vis Calvin's understanding of the relationship between justification and sanctification.

He claims that for Calvin, there is no priority between justification or sanctification because both are simultaneously received through union with Christ. Gaffin expounds the superiority of Calvin's view with respect to the sixteenth century Roman Catholic view when he writes concerning the common charge of antinomianism:

Calvin destroys Rome's charge by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification, a concern for godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification. Calvin proceeds as he does, and is *free* to do so, because for him the relative 'ordo' or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically. Rather, what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority to both (spiritual, 'existential,' faith-) union with Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Gaffin's argument boils down to this: union with Christ is the source from which flow two distinct but un-prioritized benefits: justification and sanctification. In comparison with later Reformed expressions with the *ordo salutis*, Gaffin argues: "This, in a nutshell, is Calvin's *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by (Spirit-worked) faith."<sup>26</sup> All of the benefits of redemption come in union.

Gaffin's overall intent is not only to show the dominant position of union with Christ in Calvin's theology, but also to contrast it with Lutheran expressions. Gaffin contends that in contrast to Calvin's view, and more broadly the Reformed view of justification and union with Christ, Lutherans argue that union with Christ is caused by, is a fruit of, or an effect of justification.<sup>27</sup> Gaffin makes this point more explicitly elsewhere when he writes:

Here is a consideration that has sometimes been eclipsed in the Reformation tradition, where a tendency is observable to conceive of justification as a stand-alone imputative act, without particular reference to union with Christ. Unless I need to be corrected, this

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<sup>24</sup> Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," 256.

<sup>25</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 176–77.

<sup>26</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology," 172.

<sup>27</sup> Gaffin, "Biblical Theology," 173. Gaffin appeals to two Lutheran works to support his contention: J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 320, 381; F. A. O. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vol. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951–53), 2.410, 434 n. 65, 3.8 n. 9, 398; and Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg; 1961), 481–82.

is more the case in the Lutheran tradition, where, in the *ordo salutis*, union is regularly sequenced following justification, as a fruit of consequence of justification. The Reformed tradition has recognized better and more clearly that, as answer 69 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* puts it, justification is among the realities that ‘manifest’ that union.<sup>28</sup>

More recently, however, Gaffin has refined his presentation of Calvin’s understanding of union, justification, and sanctification.

Gaffin has recently clarified his understanding regarding the relationship between justification and sanctification by arguing that Calvin rightly believes that justification is logically prior to *progressive* sanctification, the on going process of conformity to the image of Christ. Gaffin writes, “Justification is prior to sanctification in the sense that the latter, as a life-long and imperfect process, follows the former as complete and perfect from the inception of the Christian life.”<sup>29</sup> Gaffin then goes on to explain that in Calvin justification is simultaneous with *definitive* sanctification, a doctrine inherited from John Murray (1898–1975), but anticipated in Calvin.<sup>30</sup> So, then, one can say that Gaffin argues that Calvin believes that union with Christ is the more fundamental category with justification being logically prior only to *progressive* sanctification, not *definitive* sanctification. Gaffin’s conclusions have been carried forth by others for both historical theological and dogmatic ends.

### 1.3.2 Craig Carpenter and Lane Tipton

In many respects the law of unintended consequences has arisen with regard to Gaffin’s earlier reading of Calvin, as he has produced a school of historians and theologians who have come to similar conclusions. Craig Carpenter, a former student of Gaffin’s, argues that the all-determinative question between Calvin and the Council of Trent’s pronouncements on justification is not merely the question of infused versus imputed righteousness but how and when a person

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<sup>28</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 50. One should note that Gaffin reproduces the exact same footnote as found in “Biblical Theology,” 173 n. 19 to support his claim here in the work cited in this footnote.

<sup>29</sup> Gaffin, “Response,” 106–07; for the initial review that prompted Gaffin’s response see, J. V. Fesko, “A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article,” *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009): 98–104.

<sup>30</sup> Gaffin, “Response,” 111–12; idem, “Calvin’s Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the *Institutes*,” *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009): 72, 73–74; cf. John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 277–93.

is united to Christ.<sup>31</sup> Like Gaffin, Carpenter argues: “Calvin’s *ordo salutis* does not require the logical or temporal priority of a forensic act to a renovative act.”<sup>32</sup> Making similar claims is another former student and now colleague of Gaffin’s, Lane G. Tipton. Tipton argues that the Reformed view conceives of union with Christ and imputation as distinct but nonetheless simultaneous realities, whereas Lutherans hold that they are distinct and separable. Calvin, argues Tipton, offers “a classic formulation.”<sup>33</sup> Like Gaffin, Tipton cites J. T. Mueller (fl. 1950s) and Francis Pieper (1852–1931) as examples with which to contrast the Reformed view and argues that the Lutheran view holds that justification causes union with Christ and sanctification.<sup>34</sup> However, in addition to the same Lutheran references to which Gaffin appeals, Tipton also draws upon the analysis of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949). Tipton quotes a passage from Vos, who analyzes the differences between Reformed and Lutheran soteriologies.<sup>35</sup> Vos explains that by faith, Christians become members of the covenant of grace and receive all of the benefits that are in Christ; in other words, believers are in union with him. Vos claims that with the Lutheran view, “The Holy Spirit first generates faith in the sinner who temporarily still remains outside of union with Christ; then justification follows faith and only then, in turn, does the mystical union with the Mediator take place.” By contrast, argues Vos, the Reformed view is the opposite: “One is first united to Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, by a mystical union, which finds its conscious recognition by faith. By this union with Christ all that is in Christ is simultaneously given.”<sup>36</sup> Vos draws these conclusions from the work of Lutheran theologian Matthias Schneckenburger (1804–48) to substantiate his claim.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Craig B. Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” *WTJ* 64/2 (2002): 369.

<sup>32</sup> Carpenter, “Calvin and Trent on Justification,” 381. Carpenter indicates that Gaffin’s reading of Calvin has informed his own reading and cites Gaffin’s *Resurrection and Redemption* (127–43) for support (“Calvin and Trent on Justification,” 378 n. 47). Gaffin, on the other hand, later cites Carpenter in support of his reading of Calvin (“Biblical Theology,” 177 n. 26).

<sup>33</sup> Lane G. Tipton, “Union with Christ and Justification,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us In Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 39.

<sup>34</sup> Tipton, “Union with Christ,” 42–43.

<sup>35</sup> Tipton, “Union with Christ and Justification,” 44.

<sup>36</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980), 256.

<sup>37</sup> Schneckenburger writes that for Lutherans, “Faith is certainly the subjective means of union with Christ, but is not itself already the realization of this union. That it is a work of the Holy Spirit does not yet make its subjective laying hold of Christ that possessing of Christ by which mystical union takes place . . . This real union, however, occurs by the divine act of justification . . . by which Christ himself, the personal, divine-human Redeemer, is implanted in me as a real life-principle. This union with

## 1.3.3 Mark A. Garcia

Carpenter and Tipton are not alone in their claims, as two additional former students of Gaffin, Mark A. Garcia and William B. Evans have offered their own larger contributions to the ongoing discussion with published versions of their doctoral dissertations. Garcia's dissertation focuses upon Calvin and coordinates the *duplex gratia* with the doctrine of union with Christ. Like Gaffin, Garcia argues that for Calvin, the foundation for his understanding of the *duplex gratia* is union with Christ.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Gaffin, however, Garcia makes a greater effort to situate Calvin in his historical context. Garcia compares Calvin's views with three key Lutheran theologians, Luther, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), and Andreas Osiander (1498–1552), though Luther and Melancthon appear as supporting cast, as the bulk of Garcia's analysis focuses upon Calvin's debate with Osiander. The conclusions to Garcia's study can be summarized as follows. First, Garcia rejects the troubled *Centraldogma* theory but nonetheless argues that union with Christ is singularly determinative for Calvin's soteriology.<sup>39</sup> Second, he believes that significant differences lie between the Lutheran and Reformed camps on justification and union with Christ because Lutherans are more willing to equate justification with salvation, whereas Calvin sees salvation as union with Christ, which is the broader all-encompassing reality, one that embraces both the forensic and renovative dimensions of redemption.<sup>40</sup> Third, Garcia argues that Lutheranism views justification as the source of sanctification and good works. For example, in his analysis of Melancthon's views, he writes: "Ultimately, this necessity is based upon a model which regards imputation or justification as the *source* of sanctification, understood in terms of cause and effect."<sup>41</sup> Garcia also contends: "By attributing a generative quality to justification (justification produces sanctification), such a schema compromises the

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Christ, which takes place by justification and which includes regeneration unto adoption as a child of God, is something much more sublime than that other, purely subjective moral union of faith. . . It must also be kept in view that the work of the Holy Spirit by which justifying faith is worked in the contrite heart, is not at the same time a work of Christ himself, that, on the contrary, Christ is poised purely as an object before this faith produced by the Holy Spirit" (Matthias Schneckenburger, *Vergleichende Darstellung des Luterhischen und Reformirten Legrbegriffs*, vol. 1 [Stuttgart: 1855], 203–04).

<sup>38</sup> Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology*. Studies in Christian History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 2–3.

<sup>39</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 126–27, 241.

<sup>41</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 104 n. 41.

strictly forensic, purely declarative notion of justification that is the lifeblood of Melancthon's (and the classical Lutheran) gospel."<sup>42</sup>

Fourth, hence the common equation of the statements, "Justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls," commonly attributed to Luther, with Calvin's famous, "Justification is the hinge upon which all religion turns," is incorrect. Luther and Calvin are saying very different things, according to Garcia.<sup>43</sup> Fifth, and lastly, Garcia believes that Calvin's views became normative for the Reformed tradition as a whole: "Calvin is not exhaustive of Reformed theology, not even in its sixteenth-century expression. Other important Reformed thinkers from the period must be read and studied with great care." Nevertheless, Garcia insists: "Still, as his place in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought certainly suggests, Calvin did function as the principal theologian and systematizer of the tradition in its infancy, often providing the necessary sophistication in theological form and structure."<sup>44</sup> So while Calvin is not the prescriptive theologian of the Reformed tradition, he is nevertheless one who is chiefly responsible for the shape and substance of its theology. The intended message is that Calvin's understanding of the *duplex gratia* and union with Christ is somewhat normative for the tradition.

#### 1.3.4 William B. Evans

Evans makes many similar points as Garcia in his own full-length study; however, Evans casts a broader net. Garcia focuses primarily upon Calvin whereas Evans begins with Calvin and then covers Reformed Orthodoxy, New England theologians such as Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), and Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), Mercersburg theologian John W. Nevin (183–86), Old Princeton theologians Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and A. A.

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<sup>42</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 105. Garcia makes this claim several times in his study (*Life in Christ*, 264) but also goes as far as to claim that Charles Hodge's (1797–1878) doctrine of justification is Lutheran rather than Reformed: "In later Reformed theology, a more Melancthonian (i.e., classical Lutheran) pattern of argument appears to have become standard, resulting in the frequent exposition of justification and good works as cause and effect. See, e.g., what in light of our finds is a rather remarkable statement by Charles Hodge . . . "There as never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants . . . It was universally admitted that good works are not necessary to our justification; that they are consequences and indirectly the fruits of justification, and therefore cannot be its ground" (*Life in Christ*, 267 n. 24).

<sup>43</sup> *Life in Christ*, 260–61. It should be noted, though the statement is often attributed to Luther, Alister McGrath has traced the statement back to Johannes Alsted (1588–1638), a Reformed theologian (see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* [Cambridge: CUP, 2005], vii n. 1).

<sup>44</sup> Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 259–60.

Hodge (1823–86), and concludes his study with a survey of Louis Berkhof (1873–1957). Unlike Garcia, Evans notes a greater degree of diversity on the issue of the Reformed tradition’s understanding of union with Christ as it relates to the *duplex gratia* of Calvin. Evans argues that though Reformed theologians have generally placed applied soteriology under the overarching rubric of union with Christ, there are “fundamental and pervasive disagreements among prominent representatives of the tradition regarding the substance and implications of the theme.”<sup>45</sup>

Evans starts with Calvin and argues that both he and Luther believed that justification had a certain priority. Unlike Garcia, Evans believes that Luther’s article upon which the church stands or falls is the same as Calvin’s hinge upon which all religion turns.<sup>46</sup> However, Evans contends that the more fundamental controlling factor is union with Christ. He believes for Calvin that union with Christ has causal priority: both justification and sanctification come through union and is the instrumental basis for both justification and sanctification, the two inseparable but distinct blessings. Like Garcia, he explains that by having this structure, Calvin avoids the problem of making sanctification depend upon justification or of making sanctification a mere response to justification.<sup>47</sup> The problem, as Evans sees it, is that after Calvin, his formulation all but perished. Reformed Orthodox theologians, intent on guarding the priority of justification, developed the *ordo salutis* where justification and sanctification were related in a logical sequence and union with Christ was modified to accommodate this *ordo*. In fact, later theologians resorted to creating two types of union: federal and spiritual.<sup>48</sup> Among the other declensions in Reformed orthodoxy was the employment of the medieval theological term *habitus*. Evans appeals to Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and Jerome Zanchi (1516–90) as examples of this trend.<sup>49</sup> However, in addition to the perceived declension in Reformed Orthodoxy, Evans also sees the same differences between Calvin and Lutheranism on the relationship between union and justification that other Gaffin students find, namely that justification causes union.<sup>50</sup>

Evans closes his study by expressing the dogmatic relevance for his historical

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<sup>45</sup> William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*. Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene: Paternoster and Wipf & Stock, 2008), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 38–39.

<sup>48</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 39–40.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 55 n. 43. One should note that Evans cites two of the same sources as Gaffin, Schmid’s *Doctrinal Theology of the Lutheran Church*, and Vos, “The Reformed Doctrine of the Covenants” 255–57.



theological research. First, he expresses his agreement with Gaffin's understanding of union with Christ. Second, he calls for a return to the theology of Calvin in contrast to that of Reformed Orthodoxy. Evans states the "soteriology of Calvin offers a significant and positive alternative to the bipolar approach of *ordo salutis* federal theology."<sup>51</sup> He goes on to write:

A decisive break with the *ordo salutis* thinking that has vitiated Reformed thought since the early seventeenth-century is clearly implied here. This historical record shows that as long as justification is viewed as taking place at a specific point in time . . . it is nearly impossible to find a meaningful relationship between justification and the economy of faith . . . Only when the traditional *ordo salutis* is eschewed can a truly forensic and synthetic doctrine of justification that is at the same time relational and dynamic be articulated.<sup>52</sup>

Though Evans is aware of earlier studies that pit Calvin and against the Calvinists, and characterizes such as "Calvin is sometimes viewed as Paradise, with Reformed scholastic orthodoxy as the Fall," it is difficult to see how he does not arrive at this precise conclusion.<sup>53</sup> For Evans, Calvin is good and Reformed Orthodoxy is bad; Calvin is for union and Reformed Orthodoxy is for the *ordo*.

## 1.4 Analysis of the recent claims

### 1.4.1 Calvin as the norm

Looking at the present state of affairs, it appears as though there has been a recent paradigm shift in Calvin studies, a shift from acknowledging the importance of union with Christ in Calvin's theology to one where it is viewed as the architectonic principle either of his theology or soteriology. This shift has not gone unnoticed.<sup>54</sup> There are a number of seemingly problematic conclusions that have

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<sup>51</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 262.

<sup>52</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 264–65.

<sup>53</sup> Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> See Cornelis Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 136 n. 9; Thomas L. Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretations," *JETS* 50/2 (2007): 311–28; idem, "Theological Spectacles and a Paradigm of Centrality: a Reply to Marcus Johnson," *JETS* 51/3 (2008): 559–72; J. Todd Billings, "United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification," *HTR* 98/3 (2005): 315–34; idem, "John Calvin's Soteriology: on the Multifaceted 'Sum' of the Gospel," *IJST* 11/4 (2009): 428–47.

been drawn. First, surely union with Christ is an important and even fundamental element of Calvin's soteriology. Recent studies have rightly affirmed such a conclusion.<sup>55</sup> However, to remove the priority of justification by faith is historically problematic. Second, despite the paradigm shift in Reformation studies over the last twenty-five years, it seems as though Calvin is still held as the normative theologian of the Reformed tradition. Gaffin, for example, claims that Calvin's treatment of justification in book three is the matured expression from the "first generation of the Protestant Reformation." He goes on to write: "One does not overstate to say that it has few peers and arguably is unsurpassed among numerous other excellent treatments that have appeared subsequently, particularly in the tradition of confessional Reformed orthodoxy, for which Calvin has proven to be such an important fountainhead figure."<sup>56</sup> Gaffin never identifies any of the other treatments that are excellent but fall short of Calvin's mark.

All of the aforementioned estimations of Calvin's influence and place in the Reformed tradition are part of an ever-growing contemporary mythology. For example, some scholars have elevated Calvin to the status of icon. Karl Barth, for example, contends:

The historical Calvin is not a fixed, finished, dead entity imprisoned in the years 1509–1564 and unable to leave them. The 59 volumes of the *Corpus Reformatorum* that contain his works are not secretly his coffin. In Calvin studies we cannot keep Calvin to what he once said as though he had nothing more or new to say today! His work did not simply occur then; it still occurs today. In what he once said he still speaks, saying what he once wanted to say. We may not speak merely of Calvin's historical impact; Calvin himself has an ongoing history into which we insert ourselves when we deal with him.<sup>57</sup>

Calvin is something to be experienced, not simply studied. On a similar note, recent Calvin biographer Bruce Gordon begins his work by writing: "John Calvin was the greatest Protestant reformer of the sixteenth century, brilliant, visionary and iconic."<sup>58</sup> Claims that elevate Calvin to this status originate in the twentieth and twenty-first century, not from Calvin's own sixteenth century. For this, and a number of other reasons, these claims are problematic.

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<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers In Union with Christ* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Randal Zachman, "Communion cum Christo" in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 365–71.

<sup>56</sup> Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," 248.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (1922; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 6–7.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), vii.

# Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Historical investigation of union with Christ and justification have been dominated by the figure of John Calvin. Calvin's influence, however, has been exaggerated in our own day when many other theologians within the Early Modern Reformed Tradition contributed to the development of these doctrines. J. V. Fesko, therefore, goes beyond Calvin and explores union with Christ and justification in the Reformation, Early Orthodox, and High Orthodox periods of the Reformed Tradition.

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