Willem van Vlastuin

# Be Renewed

## A Theology of Personal Renewal

V&R

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Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

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Emidio Campi, Irene Dingel, Elsie McKee,
Richard Muller, Risto Saarinen, and Carl Trueman

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# Preface

If we were to summarise the content of the Christian faith in twelve words, one of them would be 'catholicity.' The catholicity of the church implies that we listen to Scripture today in dialogue with the saints of all times and all places. Together with them, we can grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and know that it surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:18 – 19).

Such dialogue has indeed been undertaken in the present search for a contemporary theology of personal renewal. Many names from history will therefore be mentioned over the course of this work. Yet my reflection was sustained in conversation not only with the saints of the past, but also with Christians in the present. Since the latter contribution to the development of my thought will not be explicit in the notes, it is important to mention the relevant people in question here. I thank prof. dr. C. van der Kooi for his willingness to reflect with me on the structure of my book, and dr. P. de Vries for the precious suggestions he made out of his vast bibliographical knowledge. In 2009 I had the pleasure of speaking to prof. dr. G.G. de Kruijf at the IRTI conference in Aix en Provence, where he showed great interest for the topic. I am grateful for the fruit of the resulting exchange and for the valuable advice he provided. Dr. P.M. Wisse at the Free University of Amsterdam was so gracious as to read through the entire manuscript. His sharp analyses forced me to account for my position with care, and the final product owes much of its quality to his input. In the final phase, dr. Henk van den Belt looked through the manuscript as well. I thank him too for the constructive criticism, church historical details, theological insights, and practical applications he supplied, which I was grateful to incorporate into the text.

In addition to the aforementioned scholars, I wish to express my thanks also to the students of the Hersteld Hervormd Seminarie (VU University) for their willingness to explore the theme of this book with me during the master phase of their theological studies. Their interaction with me in the classroom significantly impacted my reflection on the issue, and on the way in which I framed that reflection. The provocative questions I received, as well as the friendship

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shown to me by my students, were most stimulating for me in my hope and prayer that the study of theology might serve the training of future ministers of the Word and the building up of God's kingdom.

Time and again I stand amazed at the patience, love, and interest which my wife Wilma, and our children Tonny, Hennie, Jan, Meindert, Marianne, and Willem have shown to me over the course of this research. In this respect, it is indeed a 'family project.' More than that, the family is also incomparable as a place to exercise the personal renewal of the Christian life. Family life provides the fruitful surroundings needed for reflection on the reality of spiritual renewal.

This reference to the Christian family implies at once a reference to Christ, to our dependence on the heavenly Father, and to the mystery of the Holy Spirit. To the triune God be all glory!

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# Introduction

## 1. Theme

Like many others, this study too has grown out of a series of lectures. When one of my students read that I was going to devote an entire semester to the issue of sanctification, he could not hide his disappointment. In his mind, this was a theme on the fringes of theology. Are there not much bigger questions than personal renewal?

On the face of it, there appear indeed to be many other, weightier questions in theology than that of the Christian life. After all, sanctification is concerned with us human beings, and any time we are compared to God the scales must necessarily tip over to his side. Yet to conceive of things in such a way is an oversimplification of the issue of sanctification. In the eyes of God, at any rate, the human race has an important place. The Son of God became man, and he reconciled humanity before God and renewed it. Our encounter with God touches every corner of our human existence, and is determinative for our acts. In other words, the theme of the Christian life or sanctification brings us to the very heart of Christian theology. In the end, critics like the one I mentioned above wake up to find themselves facing their own criticism. Every theology that fails to draw a line to the heart and life of the Christian is and remains theoretical.[1]

Experience has proved to me that people today are looking for spiritual leadership in respect to the Christian life. Each and every believer reflects in one way or another on what the life of faith should look like on a practical level. It is the exercise of the Christian life that demonstrates the power of the gospel in a most powerful – and, at times, most painful – manner. Fathers and mothers have a spiritual battle to fight at work and in the family. Their sons and daughters have their own struggles in their surroundings. Christians live in this tension day in,

1 G.G. de Kruijf 2008:5, citing Singer: 'God in de hemel, wat een boel boeken, en toch niet één die je kon vertellen hoe je moest leven!'

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day out. For believers, the questions treated in this study are existential life questions. Because they are relevant in our spiritual existence and in preaching, they also demand further theological reflection.

In this theological reflection, our aim is to understand the structures of renewal. How does the salvation won in Christ relate to the expression of this salvation in our daily life? What can we expect from the Christian life both qualitatively and quantitatively? What is the norm for Christian living? What is the relationship between the Christian life today and the future eschaton? The list could go on and on.

It is worth noting that the Reformed tradition was and still lives in tensions relating to the different perspectives on personal renewal. On one side, there is the conflict with Roman Catholic theology which confuses justification and sanctification. On the other side, we find (certain currents within) Lutheran theology which was rather suspicious of every attempt to treat sanctification as an independent theme. On top of that, the Reformed tradition itself witnesses a variety of ways in which the relationship between justification and sanctification has been expressed, and which at times involve significant existential differences in terms of the resulting spirituality. In the later tradition, these differences became the focus of reflection and were developed even further. Wesley, and in his wake the holiness movements, were convinced that the Reformed tradition had restricted the reality of holiness or sanctification too much. Antinomian currents, in contrast, were afraid that the Christian life would place itself under law again. In the nineteenth century, there was the famous conflict between Kohlbrugge and Da Costa. The twentieth century saw Bonhoeffer and his fear of 'cheap' grace. These central questions have been revived most recently in the encounter between Reformed and evangelical-charismatic theology. For that reason, they call for a contemporary, systematic reflection. The main question for this study can thus be formulated as follows: What does the great work of salvation fulfilled by Christ mean for the life of believers?

The way in which this central question has been formulated is composed of various parts. In the first place, this study stands within the context of the work of salvation fulfilled by Christ. A second context is constituted by an examination of the effects which Christ's work has for the life of believers. Thirdly, the main question presupposes that there is a relationship between Christ and the believer.

## 2. Elaboration

The title to this monograph points to the subject of this research project. The use of the passive voice (a 'divine passive') in the main title expresses that the

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salvation brought about by the kingdom of God is already hidden in Christ, while its imperative form indicates that salvation is also effected along the road of admonition.

Several theologians have reflected during the past decades on the significance and consequences of the hidden 'already' of God's eschatological kingdom. In the 1960s it was the *Theologie der Hoffnung* ('theology of hope') of Jürgen Moltmann (1926- ) that raised great interest.[2] His eschatological theology allowed him to view the historical reality as a closed system no longer, but as a situation open to a new future by virtue of the kingdom of God. Moreover, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928- ) has emphasised that we receive salvation in this history as a pledge or advance.[3] Hendrikus Berkhof (1914 – 1995) discussed the 'completed renewal' of the world as a separate *locus* in his *Christian Faith*.[4] This theological trajectory was also followed to some extent by Arnold A. van Ruler (1908 – 1970). Gijsbertus H. ter Schegget (1927 – 2001) radically developed the effect of the eschaton for the present in his doctoral dissertation *Het beroep op de stad der toekomst* (1970; 'The appeal to the city of the future'). Significantly, the subtitle of his dissertation reads: *Ethiek van de revolutie* ('Ethics of revolution'). According to ter Schegget, the new world order could not be realised along the road of gradual development; in the first century, the message of God's eschatological kingdom had been radically critical of the existing situation. He further argued that a just society could only be achieved by way of revolution, and saw in political revolutions a sign of God's hidden work.[5]

What sets this study apart from the others is the choice to approach the topic of renewal from the perspective of our spiritual union with Christ (*unio mystica cum Christo*). In this way both the believers' union with Christ, as well as the effects of this union on them, can be addressed. We do not mean to suggest that these two are separate realities, as if the cosmic effect of the work of salvation accomplished by Christ has no effect on believers. Rather, our decision for this perspective was motivated by the consideration that the believers' union with Christ by faith must be distinguished from the cosmic effects of the eschatological salvation accomplished in Christ – a distinction which at once justifies and recommends the separate treatment of these two themes.

I have chosen to approach the topic of renewal from the perspective of our union with Christ, while recognizing that other choices would have been possible as well. In the context of renewal in the New Testament, we encounter both a

2 For the English version, see J. Moltmann 1967.
3 W. Pannenberg 1998:III,527 – 646.
4 H. Berkhof 1979:499 – 507.
5 G.H. ter Schegget 1970:32.

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Christological as well as a pneumatological perspective.[6] Both of these perspectives appear in the history of Christian doctrine, although it is characteristic of the Reformed tradition to reflect on renewal from the perspective of the Spirit.[7] Yet a study that approaches the question from the *unio mystica* allows both the Christological and the pneumatological perspectives to function. It also gives room to do justice to the Trinitarian character of theology, given that Christ was sent by the Father and anointed with the Spirit. Yet the most important motive for taking the *unio mystica* as our point of departure is the fact that it represents a central notion in the New Testament. By reflecting on renewal from the perspective of our union with Christ, we create room at once for the eschatological character of the New Testament as well as for the Trinitarian character of renewal.

The subtitle is reflective of another choice in defining the parameters for this investigation. For, the decision to address the topic of personal renewal implies that the corporate dimension of the *unio mystica*, which finds just as much support in the New Testament, has been excluded. Of course, one cannot think of believers apart from the whole of the mystical body of Christ (*corpus Christi mysticum*), which represents more than just the sum total of all believers, and there is even reason to believe that the corporative element precedes the individual.[8] And yet, the corporative aspect does not undo the fact that the body of Christ includes a personal relationship to Christ as well.

A number of theological arguments and motives can be given in support of my decision to concentrate on personal renewal in particular. In the first place, the New Testament never describes the salvation won by Christ as a general datum, which is instead always marked by a personal dimension.[9] Karl Barth (1886 – 1968) has noted correctly that the (personal) conversions reported in Scripture make up an integral part of God's revelation.[10] In the second place, the personal dimension is also intended to connect to the catholic tradition of the church. As Van Ruler has pointed out, the confession of forgiveness of sins in the

6 For the Christological perspective, cf. John 15:1 – 8; Rom 6:4 – 6; Eph 4:22 – 24; 2 Cor 5:17. And for the pneumatological perspecitve, cf. Gal 5:22; 1 Pet 1:2.

7 In the book on the Spirit, Calvin addresses how we 'receive' Christ and his benefits, *Institutes* III,i,1. HC QA 64 addresses the fruits of thankfulness from the perspective of our having been grafted into Christ. Similarly, the expression from the classic form for baptism that the Spirit imparts to us what we have in Christ is well-known, *Book of Praise*:584.

8 2 Cor 3:16, 6:16. Cf. Versteeg 1980:363 – 364; J.M. Howard 2007.

9 Luke 14:26, 22:32; Rom 8:2, 9, 23; 2 Cor 5:10, 17; Gal 2:20, 4:1, 7; Rev 14:13. Den Hertog 2007:123 – 127 has shown that the renewal of the structures does not guarantee personal renewal, and for that reason does not deserve priority.

10 Barth CD IV/2,558 – 559. Barth qualifies the attention for personal repentance by applying a theocentric rather than an egocentric approach, and distances himself from the privatisation of repentance, pp. 565 – 566. Cf. also 546 – 547, 550 – 551.

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Apostles' Creed favours the personal over the cosmic.[11] In the third place, it is possible from a biblical-theological perspective to distinguish in Christ's work of salvation between the way in which the cosmos participates in it, and the share that comes to believers individually. Of believers it can be said that they are 'in Christ', and have been crucified and raised 'with Christ.' Such expressions cannot, however, be applied in the same way to all of creation. The same is true for the firstfruits of the Spirit, which Paul connects to believers.[12] The renewal experienced by those who believe in Christ functions as a pledge for the re-creation of the entire cosmos. This implies that there is at once a distinction as well as a relationship between cosmology and soteriology. In the fourth place, the complexity involved in the issue of cosmological renewal is such that it alone already demands that it be distinguished from personal renewal.

The theological reflection of the Protestant tradition has variously described personal renewal as *sanctificatio* (sanctification), *regeneratio* (regeneration), *renovatio* (renewal), *conversio* (conversion), and *poenitentia* (repentance, penitence). Also the concept of *imitatio* (imitation) appears at times. The most common term, however, is *sanctificatio.* While Berkhof considered it unfortunate due to its negative connotations in our present day culture and its consistently personal application in the tradition,[13] Barth actually preferred it because he saw in it the expression of a divine act.[14] This study will consistently use the term 'renewal', yet without discarding the others. The inclusion of the concept of renewal in the title of this monograph was done so as to indicate that personal renewal arises from the new state of affairs which has come about in Christ, and the resulting eschatological dimension.[15]

The subtitle of the present work begins with the words 'a theology.' The use of the indefinite article points at once to the provisional character of every exercise in theology, and also recognizes the legitimacy of other approaches. As such, it invites its readers to enter into dialogue with the present author. The word 'theology' is not meant to imply that every facet of personal renewal will be treated, or even that the aspects treated will be examined exhaustively. Instead, it expresses that this monograph will attempt to study the broader contours of personal renewal by reflecting deeply on its core notions and by making theological pronouncements on them.

11 Van Ruler 1947:102.
12 Rom 8:23.
13 Berkhof 1979:450.
14 CD IV/2,500.
15 Cf. 2 Cor 5:17.

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## 3. Method and structure

As has been noted, this monograph will examine a number of themes which will be reflected upon within the context of personal renewal. These subthemes will be examined and analysed as much as possible within a dogma-historical context, tested with the tools of biblical theology, and finally shaped into a contemporary piece of constructive systematic theology. For the purpose of dialogue with theologians from the past and present, I have chosen figures who can be expected to make a contribution to our intellectual exchange. The choice of these theologians will vary depending on the theme in question.

The reader may be struck by the consistent use of the pronoun 'we' in the present work. This 'we'-discourse does not imply that faith may be taken as a general presupposition in our life, but indicates that this study is set within the framework of faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Therefore, since I am writing and arguing on the level of faith, I also write – in line with Scripture and tradition – in the first person plural. My hope is that the 'we'-form will also serve to express the existential relevance of the questions examined here.

Following these remarks on form, we can address the structure of this monograph. Chapter one examines the views of Luther and Calvin on the relationship between justification and sanctification. This choice was motivated by several considerations. In the first place, it places the study within a historical context, as proper theological method also requires. Our questions do not come out of a theological vacuum, but stand within a long tradition of theological reflection. In the second place, the first chapter can serve to highlight the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Of course, Luther and Calvin may not be collapsed respectively with the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, but they remain important instigators for them. Although in this study I intend to examine the topic of renewal from a Reformed perspective, I am aware that this perspective may not be isolated from the Lutheran tradition either historically, or theologically, or spiritually. A third reason that makes the distinction between the Lutheran and Reformed tradition relevant is the fact that Calvin, in contrast to Luther, did choose to address the Christian life as a topic of its own. The choice to begin our examination of justification and sanctification with Luther and Calvin will demonstrate at once what is particular to the Reformed tradition, and highlight the inseparable connection existing between justification and sanctification.

Chapter two focuses on the primary biblical-theological trajectories pertaining to the notion of union with Christ. We will begin by examining the last part of the term '*unio mystica cum Christo*.' In other words, who is that Christ with whom we are united in faith? What does it mean that we are a new creation

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in Christ? These questions will be related to the eschatological dimension of the New Testament. Once the contours of the eschatological significance of Christ's death and resurrection have been sketched out, we will address the *mystica unio* or first part of the term. The main goal of this second chapter will be to address the problem of the relationship between the fulfilment of the work of salvation and its revelation. What does our union with the bodily resurrected Christ mean for believers in the here and now?

In the third chapter, we will consider the effects of the *unio mystica.* There are many passages in the New Testament that demonstrate that the believers' union with Christ leaves traces of itself in their lives. They thus appear to be qualitatively distinguished from unbelievers. Some contours of the effects of our union with Christ will be drawn in this chapter. It thus intends to show how the Christian life is shaped in practice. The themes addressed are not meant to be exhaustive but illustrative, addressing a number of key components of the Christian life.

Once the contours of the Christian life have been drawn, a fourth chapter will examine the *unio mystica cum Christo* quantitatively. This aspect is relevant in light of both Puritanism and the holiness movements. The latter proceed from the conviction that the effect of our union with Christ is much greater than the Reformed tradition has assumed. Key in this chapter will be the statement by the Heidelberg Catechism that in this life even the holiest have 'only a small beginning' of the new obedience. The message of John Wesley, as well as the structure of his theology, will be addressed in this chapter as well. In order to gain a more complete picture of the holiness movements, the thought of Keswick and Andrew Murray will also be included.

Historically, the pursuit of the holiness movements became subject to criticism from Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge. Key to his criticism was the exegesis of Romans 7:14. Chapter five will therefore examine his interpretation from a historical perspective, and test it biblical-theologically. This examination will yield important results regarding the functioning of the *unio mystica.*

The conflict between Kohlbrugge and Da Costa makes it clear that the relationship between holiness as a state and as a process requires further exploration. In this regard, there have recently been important developments in biblical theology and exegesis. These will form the subject matter of chapter six.

Another question in reflection on personal renewal concerns the relationship between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. From the perspective of the *unio mystica*, this relationship exists between Christ and believers. But is the position of Christ and believers reciprocal? And what are the consequences of either a negative or a positive response to this question? The seventh chapter will examine the key moments in the history of the Christian tradition with a view to outlining a doctrine of the 'spiritual man.'

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Chapter eight will relate the mystery of the *unio mystica* to the history of salvation, and the place of the law in particular. Does the law continue to be valid in light of the fulfilment of the history of salvation? What is the relationship between Christ and the law? This question will be addressed in dialogue with antinomian theologians and Messianic Jews so as to produce a concept of our own, whose consequences will be worked out in greater detail with a view to the exercise of the Christian life.

The final chapter will examine the relationship between the Christian life now and in the coming eschaton. The basic point will be to consider whether there is a relationship between the Christian life as it is still hidden in the present, and its full revelation in the future. What in our current life will be of effect for our eternal life? Here the classical notion of reward for good works will be introduced into the discussion.

This study will close with a brief look back at the route travelled, and a summary-overview of the contours for a theology of personal renewal.

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# 1. Duplex Gratia

In this first chapter, we will sketch the contours of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification. Although his theology saw influences from many different sides, for the present purposes we will contrast his concept of sanctification with Luther's view on justification and sanctification in its main trajectories alone with a view to demonstrating that Calvin's view did not just fall from the sky, although he did develop his own conception of personal renewal. This chapter is interested above all in exploring this conception of Calvin, as it comes to expression in his view on the place and function of the *unio mystica cum Christo*, the relationship between justification and sanctification, the place of sanctification, its concrete expression in the dying of the old man and the coming to life of the new, and its pneumatological dimension. The core concepts to emerge from the present historical chapter will be analysed, actualised, and worked out concretely in the chapters that follow.

## 1.1. Luther's doctrine of justification

### 1.1.1. Luther's (1483–1546) discovery

What is the salvation that we receive in Christ? The Protestant tradition's answer to this question has been influenced deeply by Martin Luther. He learned from the Word of God that we are justified for the sake of Christ, a secret which he detected above all in Paul's epistle to the Romans. In the preface to the Latin edition of his works, the Wittenberg Reformer described his existential journey to the discovery of the truth. While he had been powerfully drawn to this letter, Romans 1:17 still represented a hindrance to him. What he could not get over was its statement that the righteousness of God was revealed in the gospel. On 5 March 1545, he wrote the following words: 'For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active

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righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.'[1]

And yet, the words of the apostle Paul refused to let him go. He continued meditating on the text, as if he unconsciously suspected that it still hid deeper matters within it. In the course of his meditation, he underwent an experience in which the true meaning of this passage was finally revealed to him: 'At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scriptures showed itself to me.'

This biographical description of Luther's discovery could seem to imply that his insight came out of nowhere. Yet such an impression must be forestalled. Luther cannot be isolated from the time in which he lived, which was a time of great tensions.[2] By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the people had already been raising protests against the theological and spiritual developments in the church for hundreds of years.[3] The political and cultural developments as well made the time ripe for the dawning of a new era.

Although Luther may not be isolated from his time, he may also not simply be seen as a product of his time. Others who had been raised in the same church and with the same message could not identify themselves with the questions that Luther had been asking.[4] Luther experienced his conviction as an effect of the surpassing power of the Word. It was against his will that he experienced God's judgment.[5] It was the Holy Spirit who has introduced doubts into his mind, and led him to ask questions that he otherwise would not have asked. In this way, he gained insights from the Word of God that would otherwise have continued to remain hidden. In short, the Reformation was fuelled by the tensions of the

1 WA 54:185, translation LW 34:336 – 337.

2 H.A. Oberman 1993 spoke about Luther as man between God and the devil. Cf. also R. Marius 1999.

3 H.A. Oberman 1974:82 emphasizes that Luther is not a Melchizedek without a genealogy; see also p. 52. B. Lohse 1995:13 – 54 addressed the situation especially in theology and philosophy. R. Marius 1999 devotes his first chapter to the wider cultural situation.

4 Aalders has pointed out that Luther became occupied with the theme of God's wrath, in contrast to humanism with its attention for the here and now and the Anabaptists who sought to establish a kingdom on earth, *De grote ontsporing*, 40.

5 W. Aalders, *De grote ontsporing*, 57.

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times, but a spark had been necessary to set this fuel ablaze and to fan the flames of the Protestant faith.

### 1.1.2. Justification at the centre of theology

In light of the preceding, it is not surprising that Luther was the first in the history of Christian theology to place the doctrine of justification in the very foreground of theology: 'If the article of justification is lost, the entire Christian teaching is lost at the same time.'[6] This doctrine was *the* message of the New Testament. Accordingly, Luther referred to justification as the central doctrine, the sun, the day, the light of the church, or the lord and king governing the church's entire teaching.[7] In the conflict of his time, this was the article by which the church would rise or fall.[8]

For Luther, the doctrine of justification even became a criterion within Scripture itself.[9] In the preface to the German translation of the New Testament, he ranked the books of the Bible according to their attention to justification. 'The true essence' of the gospel could be found in John, the letters of Paul to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and in the first letter of Peter. Thus, without abandoning the canon as such, Luther still did maintain a 'canon within the canon.' The doctrine of justification represented for him the hermeneutical key that would open the entire Scriptures.

This raises many questions. One may wonder, for example, whether the centrality of the doctrine of justification did not come at the expense of Christology and reduce it to a soteriological matter.[10] And is the existence of God not much more fundamental as a question today than the grace of this God? Is justification not indicative of a typically Western approach to the Christian faith, impressed as it is with the stamp of Roman law, thereby putting enormous

6 Luther, WA 48,10. Cf. SA II.1; CA. Although it is remarkable that Luther in his debate with Erasmus identified the incarnation and suffering of Christ, together with the Trinity, as the centre of theology, the consensus among Luther scholars is that justification occupies the central place in his theology, Althaus 1962:196; Lohse 1995:274; Trueman 2006:73. Pesch 1967:154 emphasises what is new in view of the history of theology.

7 Luther, WA 48,10; 40.I,354; 40.I,607 – 608; 40.I,441. Cf. WA 33,211; 39.I:205; B. Lohse 1995: 274 – 275.

8 WA 40.III: 351, 34 – 35: 'Stante enim hac doctrina stat Ecclesia, ruente autem ruit ipsa quoque'; WA 40.III:352,1 – 3: 'Quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclessia, ruente ruit Ecclesia', later geworden tot: ' articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.'

9 Cf. W.J. Kooiman 1977:85 – 90.

10 K. Barth CD IV-2,515 – 516, 519 – 520 relativised this way of centralising the doctrine of justification. According to W.J. Ouweneel 2007:229, other themes are similarly relevant.

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pressure on the catholicity of the church? After all, the imputative dimension of justification is what caused the greatest schism in the church after 1054.

In the Protestant tradition, the above questions have on the whole not occasioned a downplaying or relativisation of the *locus* of justification. Instead they are often understood as an attack on the true faith, built as it is around the personal forgiveness of sins as it comes to expression in the structure of the Apostles' Creed. If the creed is considered to be no more than the sum total of twelve loose articles, the forgiveness of sins is indeed reduced to nothing more than just one of twelve articles. But if you proceed from the assumption that the twelve articles represent a whole and are organically related to each other, it becomes significant that our confession concerning Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is related immediately to the forgiveness of sins.

On the basis of this assumption, we can conclude that the doctrine of justification really does belong to the very heart of the Christian faith. It relates not only to soteriology and Christology, but also to the doctrine of God. It is from within the reality of justification that we come to know the one true God. The doctrine of God is determinative for the doctrine of justification.

This is also the reason why the Reformers fought so hard: the Reformation concerned God himself, and our relationship to him. And the relationship between God and humanity is all about Christ. Although the *solus Christus* ('Christ alone') appeared to be a general point of departure in Reformation times, Luther also focussed on Christology. *Solus Christus* was not to be replaced by *solus Deus* ('God alone'). He demonstrated this forcefully at the Marburg Colloquy.[11] When Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531) defended his spiritualising view on the Lord's Supper by charging that Luther ought not to insist so much on the humanity and flesh of Christ and should lift up the eyes of his heart to Christ's divinity instead, Luther responded that he knew no God except the one who became man.[12] This occasioned him to make the following paradoxical statements: 'But he could not sit on the scale unless he had become a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death.'[13]

11 Cf. W.J. Kooiman 1954:165 – 166.

12 Luther writes that we cannot find God anywhere except in the lap of the young woman, and on the cross, WA 28,136. This was related to the element of substitution: Christ is my sin, WA 40.I,435.

13 WA 50,590, translation LW 41:104. Cf. WA 23,157; 28,136 (God is crucified). In Reformed theology, divine and human attributes are applied to the person of Christ; divine attributes are not attributed to his human nature, so that there is a qualified *communicatio idiomatum* ('communication of properties'), cf. Acts 20:28 with the marginal note in the Authorized Dutch Version; 1 Cor 2:8; *Institutes* II.xii.2 and II.xiv.1,3. Calvin called Mary the 'mother of God', *Institutes* II,xiv.4. For Calvin the *communicatio idiomatum* is the point of departure for his exegesis of 1 Cor 15:28; the same is true of Augustine, *De Trinitate* I,10 – 13.

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In Luther's eyes, it was not some theological game but a question of comfort. His only comfort was that God had fully identified himself with our human existence. In order to depict Christ's identification with lost human beings, Luther used the image of a prince who marries a pauper girl.[14] We would be proud to say that an important prince has become our own brother-in-law. But in Luther's mind, the comfort of the gospel was of an entirely different order. Christ Jesus did not become our brother-in-law, or even our brother, but he has become me myself: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.'[15]

As we look back on the *solas* of the Reformation today, we realise that they cannot be isolated from each other but function as an explanation of the *solus Christus*. The *sola gratia* ('by grace alone') was a criticism of every imagined merit or contribution on the part of free will. Luther's *Bondage of the Will* satirised all imagined human ability before the face of the living God. There is nothing here in which God and humanity work together. Grace will never become a human possession because we do not possess God.

The *solo Verbo* ('through the Word alone') emphasised that grace comes to us through the Word. God's speech is creative speech. The God who calls things into being out of nothing and raises the dead to life declares the godless to be righteous. God's justifying judgment does not deceive because his words and acts are one.

Faith is the human response to God's word. The principle of *sola fide* ('by faith alone') allowed Luther to maintain a delicate balance in all of this. This *sola* excludes man in his response. In faith we voluntarily surrender all freedom and allow God to be God. The 'yes' of faith is not a free choice between 'yes' and 'no', but it is the power of the Word which commands us in our heart. Faith is thus diametrically opposed to self-realisation. Nothing is more proper to faith than the denial of one's self. Faith is the most radical way to confirm that salvation is *extra nos* ('outside of us'). Paradoxically, this at once makes salvation to be *in nobis* ('inside of us').[16]

14 Christmas day sermon in 1529, WA 29,643. Luther can also say that Christ became Martin, Peter, and Paul, and thus also committed our sins, WA 32,4. We rejoice at the birth of Christ as if we ourselves were born of Mary's womb and thereby lose our own birth, WA 10.1.1,72 – 73.

15 Gal 2:20. In his explanation of this verse, Luther observes: 'Indeed, the life through which I live is thus Christ himself.'

16 W. van 't Spijker 1991 addresses the relationship between the *extra nos* and *in nobis*.

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### 1.1.3. Imputed and effective righteousness

According to Carl R. Trueman, what allowed the early Luther to understand righteousness proleptically was its eschatological perfection.[17] Early on in his career he conceived of our righteousness in terms of transformation rather than imputation. However, Thomistic ontology became increasingly problematic for him because it did not sufficiently express the distinction between God and man. Therefore, following Gabriel Biel, he began to emphasise the qualitative difference between God and humanity increasingly.[18] Beginning in 1519, he gave priority to the imputative aspect of righteousness. God's judgment on our life, or our position before God, became of primary and constitutive importance for Luther with a view to the moral transformation that occurs within us.[19]

Of course, this development does not mean that Luther's doctrine of justification is to be understood strictly in imputative terms.[20] For him, the righteousness of God was not an abstract doctrine, but the living Christ.[21] We further find attention in Luther for the believer's communion with Christ (*unio cum Christo*).[22] For him, this *unio* has both an imputative as well as an effective side to it. In this way, Luther could emphasise Christ's role as an example.[23]

Luther was not so much opposed to good works, as that he fiercely attacked the position that held works to contribute to the forgiveness of sins. Good works are necessary, even if they are not the cause of salvation.[24] In light of this, we are not surprising to find Luther speaking about good works in a very positive manner. In his commentary on Galatians 3:10 he wrote: 'Therefore "to do" is first to believe and so, through faith, to keep the Law. For we must first receive the Holy Spirit; illumined and renewed by Him, we begin to keep the Law, to love God and our neighbor. […] Therefore, clearly and properly defined, "to do" is

17 Cf. C.R. Trueman 2006:77.
18 In the face of God we are nothing, WA 39.I,86.
19 Justification precedes the works of love, WA 17.II,166.
20 Contra W. Cunningham 1960 II,13.
21 Cf. W.J. Kooiman 1977:49 – 50. In Finnish Luther-scholarship the spiritual union with Christ is heavily emphasised at the cost of *imputatio*, cf. T. Mannermaa 2005. For a discussion on this development, see M. Klaassen 2013, chapter 2. Klaassen argues that a balance must be maintained between the *unio* and the *imputatio*, with the latter retaining its priority.
22 A well known image used by Luther is that of the community of property of bride and groom, WA 2,145 – 146; 40.I, 285. Christ is present in faith, WA 40.I,229. Elsewhere Luther can say that Christ brings us into himself, WA 8,111. He can even say that believers are changed into 'a god', WA 40.I, 390. The justification and in-dwelling of Christ are moreover closely tied to each other, Flogaus 1997:311 and Lehmkühler 2004:256.
23 WA 7,4,22, 10/1.1,11,2, 10/1.2,18,13, 17/2,102,5 and 303,5, 18,115,1 and 196,36 and 312,27, etc. B. Lohse 1995 and A. Beutel 2005 did not devote a separate treatment to sanctification in their overviews of Luther's theology.
24 In 'De Iustificatione' (1536), WA 39.I,96,1 – 9. Cf. G.C. Berkouwer 1952a:29 – 38.

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simply to believe in Jesus Christ, and when the Holy Spirit has been received through faith in Christ, to do the things that are in the Law. […] First there must be a tree, then the fruit. For apples do not make a tree, but a tree makes apples. So faith first makes the person, who afterwards performs works. To keep the Law without faith, therefore, is to make apples without a tree, out of wood or mud, which is not to make apples but to make mere phantasies. But once the tree has been planted, that is, once there is the person or doer who comes into being through faith in Christ, then works follow.'[25]

Provided that good works were put in their proper context, Luther could speak unconcernedly about both 'justifying' (active) and 'being justified' (passive).[26] Christians are already beginning to be justified now, and will be fully justified on the last day.[27] And, conversely, Luther was ready to connect our sanctification to the forgiveness of sins: 'Just as the Son obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc., so the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.'[28] In Luther, the concepts of justification and sanctification are thus not strictly distinguished from each other. In one place he even explicitly says that the Spirit's work in the human heart is an aspect of justification.[29] Elsewhere he calls the imputed righteousness of Christ our *Hauptheiligung* ('foremost sanctification').

25 WA 40.1,400 – 402. Love confirms faith, WA 39 I,114,28 – 30. Love is the greatest, but faith is the most powerful grace because the source comes first. Faith is the source, and the works that flow out of it are the water, WA 10.2, 433 – 434. See A. de Reuver 1992, 253 – 266 for an overview of Luther's position. Berkouwer 1952a:72 also identifies a process of healing in Luther's theology. Cf. W. Joest 1967.

26 Cf. P.A. Lillback 2007, esp. 72 – 78. Luther resisted the perfectionism of the fanatics: 'Where do the fanatics want to go now? May the merciful God keep me from a Christian church in which all are holy! I want to belong to a church in which we find the weak people, as well as those who persecute them. Satan is a cunning rogue in that he wants to impress upon us through the preaching of the fanatics that the preaching of the gospel is of no use unless we are holy. In this way, human holiness stands opposed to all of Scripture. Our righteousness is Christ! Although I myself am not yet as these troublesome spirits would have me be … what is there that is lacking in Christ? They demand a righteousness and holiness that is deemed to be a holiness by the world, and do not want any false brethren', WA 27,537 – 538.

27 WA 39 I 83,16 f. Cf. WA 2,494,1 f, WA 39 I,98,10 f, WA 56,272,2 – 273,2 (on Rom 4:7). Luther attacked the antinomianism of Agricola.

28 In his explanation in the Great Catechism of the article on the Holy Spirit in the Apostles' Creed; Kolb 2000:434.

29 Cf. P.A. Lillback 2007:76: 'These are the two parts of justification (…) the latter is the bestowal of the Spirit with his gifts, who illuminates against the pollution of the spirit and the flesh.'

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The same ambivalence is found in the writings of Philipp Melanchthon (1497 – 1560). While he does speak about justification within a forensic context,[30] he insists that forgiveness never occurs without renewal, even though this does not turn renewal into the ground for forgiveness. We receive forgiveness out of God's mercy for the sake of Christ alone. This duality would seem to imply that a strict distinction ought to be maintained between the forensic and effective character of justification, yet such a strict distinction is absent in Melanchthon's thought. Just like Luther he can say that justification has been begun, but is not yet complete.[31] In the same way, he connects justification to regeneration in the *Apology* (1531).[32] This illustrates that in the Lutheran tradition the concept of 'justification' was not strictly used in a legal or forensic sense.

There was no difference over against the medieval church in regard to effective righteousness, as both medieval theologians and the Protestants could say that effective righteousness forms a part of our justification. Accordingly, numerous attempts were made to reach a compromise in the religious colloquies of the sixteenth century,[33] including Hagenau and Worms in 1540. The next year these discussions were continued in Regensburg. In the end, an agreement on justification was reached by the parallel location of inherent righteousness alongside imputed righteousness.[34]

The Italian theologian Girolamo Seripando (1493 – 1563) attempted on several occasions to have the results achieved at Regensburg included in the decisions of the Council of Trent.[35] He pleaded explicitly for a twofold righteousness. An important motive for him was his awareness that inherent righteousness was insufficient for putting the conscience at rest before the righteousness and holiness of God. In his mind, believers have to place their trust in the perfect righteousness of Christ instead.

In the end, this aspect was not included in the canons of the Council of Trent when it made a clear decision not to distinguish between the believer's imputed and inherent righteousness.[36] Seripando's attempts thus ended in failure, and the

30 Cf. LC 6.2; a letter from Melanchthon to Brenz, WA Br. 6,98 – 101. One difference between Luther and Melanchthon is that the concept of *unio mystica* recedes into the background with the latter, cf. M. Klaassen 2013, chapter 3.3.2. Melanchthon conceives of renewal from the perspective of the in-dwelling of the Spirit rather than our union with Christ.

31 So P.A. Lillback 2007:67: 'For here our justification is only begun; we have not yet completed it.' B. Lohse 1995:278 argues that Melanchthon's doctrine of justification is exclusively forensic.

32 Cf. Lillback 2007:68 – 71 for more arguments. Lillback's appeal to CA 4 is somewhat puzzling in light of the original text.

33 For more on the colloquies, see A.N.S. Lane 2006, esp. 119 – 130.

34 For the definitive text, see A.N.S. Lane 2002:233 – 237.

35 See A.N.S. Lane 2006:130 – 145 for an insightful account of Trent.

36 CDDCT, 6th session, par. 7.

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council condemned anyone who spoke of an imputed righteousness in addition to inherent righteousness.[37] According to Trent, there is only one righteousness, namely, the righteousness that we receive through the grace of God and in Christ as a love in our heart to serve God.[38] Faith was understood as the beginning of justification, rather than the only way in which we receive this justification.[39] In the eyes of the council, the church would be playing with fire if it were to teach that we are saved by faith alone.

These decisions had significant ramifications for the history of doctrine. By speaking out against the imputative aspect of justification, Trent declared one development of this doctrine to be normative. While the early church had indeed never spoken of justification exclusively in terms of imputation, it still cannot be denied that this aspect can be traced back to it.[40] In that sense, the Reformation was indeed not a break with the early church, but rather harkened back to it.[41] While Trent rejected the imputative dimension as unacceptable, in the eyes of the Reformation one ought never to surrender it.

## 1.2. Duplex gratia in Calvin (1509 – 1564)

In the above, we saw how a development took place with Luther in the increasing importance he attributed to our imputed righteousness, yet without our effective righteousness disappearing from the scene altogether. In this section we will

37 CDDCT, 6th session, par. 9, 11; Canon 9 pronounces an anathema on the *Sola Fide*. Canon 11 condemns the teaching that works are excluded from justification; grace is not just the favour of God.

38 CDDCT, 6th session, canon 10.

39 CDDCT, 6th session, par. 8.

40 The view of G. de Ru 1966:119 by which he holds there to be greater similarities than differences between Luther and Augustine on justification seems to be more the expression of a wish than a reality. This is not meant to deny, however, that many elements of the doctrine of justification can be found in the early church. The epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, 9 speaks about the justification of the 'lawless and godless', a 'wonderful exchange', and the hiding of the sins of many in the one who is righteous while the righteousness of that One has justified many sinners. Irenaeus emphasised by way of Ps 32 that sins are not imputed but justification is, AH IV.XVI.2. Justin Martyr used the phrase 'to be considered righteous', *Dialogue with Trypho*, 47. In Gregory of Nazianz we find the notions of representation and expiation, *Oratio* 4.5 and 20. Chrysostom speaks about a 'royal pardon', NPNF1 XI:378 – 379, about a justification from one moment to the next, XI:386 – 387, and contrasts salvation by to salvation by works, XIII:286. Needham 2006 has extensively documented the forensic and imputative aspect of justification in the early church. The key concepts of the doctrine of justification were known in the early church, 42 – 53. The same conclusion is reached by D.H. Williams 2005:131 – 144.

41 In the years 1527 – 1565, no less than 23 anthologies were collected with quotations from patristic writers who support the doctrine of justification, A.N.S. Lane 1993.

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examine the structures of justification and sanctification in the thought of Calvin as the proper subject of this chapter.

### 1.2.1. Sanctification as a separate *locus*

At Regensburg, John Calvin was prepared to speak of a justification by works[42] – this in order to be able to justice to works and to speak about a reward for our works. Remarkably, Calvin could even say in this context that our renewal is a cause of our justification.[43]

But it was not Calvin's ecclesiastical savvy alone that led him to make such radical statements, for he was also motivated by a theological concern. For, in his mind it was impossible that the promises which God had given with the law should serve no purpose.[44] As Calvin noted, we receive the blessing of God when we live according to his commandments, and a life of piety is pleasing to him.[45] Theologically this means that the law has not been destroyed by the gospel, but reaches its fulfilment in it.

Yet there was also another theological aspect to which Calvin wanted to do justice, namely, the reciprocity of the covenant. While there is no doubt that it is God who takes the initiative in the covenant, within the context of a functioning covenant we find a real relationship which is determined by a life according to that covenant.[46] In this sense the covenant can be said to function on the condition of obedience alone. Or, to put it another way, the condition of obedience forms part and parcel of every promise.[47]

It is within this context that Calvin speaks of a 'twofold justification.'[48] There is the justification of our person, and the justification of our works. The order between them cannot be reversed. It is within the context of the justification of our person alone that we can speak of the justification of our works.[49] In this sense works can indeed be called a cause of justification. Yet Calvin does not

42 In a letter to Farel from 11 May 1541, CO XI,215 – 216, Calvin expressed his agreemet with Regensburg. In a letter to Viret he showed greater reservation, CO XI,261 – 263. In his later theological reflection, Calvin continues to speak about a justification by works, C.P. Venema 2007:163 – 177. Calvin's ecumenical sensibilities were directed above all to the Protestant camp, but he evidently did not exclude Rome, cf. W. Nijenhuis 1959; J.M. Stolk 2004.

43 *Institutes* III.xiv.21.

44 *Institutes* III.xvii.3.

45 *Institutes* III.xvii.5.

46 CO XXIII,235 (comm. Gen 17:20). The image of marriage makes the element of mutual love very concrete, *Institutes* II.viii.18; CO XLVII,71 (comm. John 3:29). Cf. C.P. Venema 2007:185 – 187.

47 CO L,83 (comm. 2 Cor 7:1).

48 Cf. A.N.S. Lane 2002:46 – 60; 2004a; 2004b; 2006.

49 *Institutes* III.xiv.8, 13, 16; III.xv.3v; III.xvii.3 – 10; III.xviii.5.

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intend the word *causa* to be understood here in a meritorious sense, but as an *inferior causa*, a cause taken in an inferior or even improper sense. Renewal is thus absolutely necessary in order to share in forgiveness, and it is impossible for us to receive the grace of justification without exercising the grace of sanctification. Against this background, works can be called a condition for justification.

Calvin chose his words very carefully. He does full justice to human participation in grace, but his careful choice of words clearly indicates that the grace of God has priority. Obedience to God is never a ground for the grace of God, because even our best works require atonement. For that reason, the reward for our works does not depend on their intrinsic value but is a gift of grace.[50]

The subtle structures of Calvin's theology help us to understand his thought. In the first edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin treated justification and sanctification at the end of the first chapter on the law, with faith forming the subject of chapter two. This structure serves to emphasise that we come to know the mystery of justification when we are convicted by the law. As such, the renewal of our lives as well is placed in the light of the law.

After passing through several intermediate editions, the definitive edition of the *Institutes* witnesses an entirely different structure. It now becomes clear that renewal does not spring from the law, but comes from Christ. The third book of the *Institutes* on the Holy Spirit fully stands within the context of our salvation in Christ. Its second chapter addresses the faith through which we have union with Christ. In contrast to Luther, Calvin thus does address faith separately in this final edition of the *Institutes*. It is in this context that the life of the Christian on earth is addressed. With this, Calvin witnesses that what we call 'sanctification' in systematic theology is not an achievement on the part of believers, but comes from grace. Even our sanctification is Christologically determined. The real subject of renewal is Christ, who renews us by his Spirit.

Calvin was able to achieve two things by virtue of the above. First, he could emphasise the grace-character of sanctification. Yet he at the same time could create room for sanctification in its own right. This is why Calvin, in contrast to Luther, spoke of a *duplex gratia* or 'twofold grace', namely, justification and sanctification.

50 There is reward for works, III.xv.3; III.xviii.1 – 4. This reward is not out of merit, III.xv.1 – 4; III.xi.20; III.xiv.12; III.xv.3; III.xvii.3, 8, 15; III.xviii.6. There is not a single work of the believer that is not worthy of condemnation, III.xiv.10.

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### 1.2.2. *Mortificatio* and *vivificatio*

Another observation on the structures in Calvin's theology concerns the bipartite division we find within the context of our life of faith in Christ. The discussion of the Christian life properly speaking is preceded by a discussion of repentance.[51] While Luther, Martin Bucer (1491 – 1551), and Melanchthon had located repentance before faith, Calvin made a rigorous decision to place repentance within the context of soteriology.[52] In this way repentance would not end up taking on a life of its own, and was not located prior to the Christian life properly speaking as a condition, but extends throughout that life from beginning to end.

Just as there was change in the place where Calvin discussed faith, so too there was change in the way he described repentance. In 1536 Calvin still defined *poenitentia* as *mortificatio* ('mortification' or 'dying off'), yet later on he gave it an entirely positive description when he began to use the term *regeneratio* ('regeneration') instead.[53] Calvin describes repentance as a true conversion of our life to God which arises from an upright and solemn fear of God, and which consists in the killing of our flesh and the old man on the one hand, and in a being made alive by the Spirit on the other.[54]

Several aspects of this description are remarkable. Its core is determined by the notion of *conversio.* This is a total transformation of the inner man, which reveals itself in the exercise of our daily life. This transformation begins in the affection of the heart, and reveals itself in good works. Good works are for that reason not conversion in the proper sense, but the fruit of that conversion.

Repentance comes from a *sincero serioque Dei timore* ('upright and solemn fear of God'), and without this fear we do not become aware of God's abhorrence of sin. These are elements that we recognise from the Lutheran tradition. There is not only a movement away from sin, but also a movement toward remorse, pain, and fear because of sin. In his treatment of repentance, Calvin emphasises that we ought to be incited to look inside of us by the thought of God's judgment, and that the way to Christ is opened only to miserable and broken sinners.[55] His chapter on repentance also addresses such imposing themes as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the false repentance of Ahab and others.[56]

51 *Institutes* III.iii—v.
52 M. den Dulk 1987:23 – 36 has highlighted this development.
53 Calvin uses numerous synonyms, cf. C.P. Venema 2007:111. Venema 2007:111 – 131 gives a fitting summary of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification.
54 *Institutes* III.iii.5.
55 *Institutes* III.iii.7 and 20.
56 *Institutes* III.iii.23, 25.

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