

The Initial Experience of the Organic Union as Faith

by John Pester

Our Christian life begins when the crucified and resurrected Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, is organically joined to our human spirit through the hearing of faith. In our initial experience of faith, we receive the Spirit who brings the faith of Christ through the word of Christ into our sin-deadened human spirit, enlivening it and making it a mingled spirit of faith. From such a spirit there is an appreciative response and an acceptance of Christ, who has been dispensed into us as the Spirit through the word. Our appreciation of Christ is an organic response to hearing the gospel of the glory of Christ, and our acceptance of Christ is an organic response to receiving the content of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The organic union that issues from appreciating and accepting Christ through His word is realized in our experience as our faith, which substantiates the redemption of Christ in us based on His righteousness and thereby justifies us before God. The Christ to whom we are organically joined is the source, content, and object of our faith.

If we, as believers, have no realization, even doctrinally, of the scriptural revelation that we are joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), our understanding of faith will be associated with human convictions that rest upon mental assent. Such a “faith” will be as weak as the most convincing rhetorical argument that an unbelieving world can raise up against the knowledge of God. A life that is lived out on the basis of such a faith will wax and wane continually in its assurance of salvation; it will not be lived out through the enduring faithfulness of the Son of God (2 Tim. 2:12; Gal. 2:20). At best, negatively speaking, it will result in an ethical living that seeks to imitate the life of Jesus during the days of His flesh (Heb. 5:7). It will be a life based on sporadic works, not on faith through an organic union with Christ, and it will not be approved by God (2 Cor. 10:18).

If we, as believers, doctrinally acknowledge that we are in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:1-2; 16:3, 7, 9; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 2 Cor. 5:17) but regard this union merely as a legal contrivance based on a forensic form of justification, our understanding of faith will largely be associated with objective truths that are essential to the faith and to other doctrinal matters that are not. Such a “faith” can produce a zealous defense of the faith toward unbelievers, but it can also result in divisive disputations among believers. A life that is lived out on the basis of such a faith will become dogmatic and inflexible in its ability to receive and impart the contents of the gospel to others; it will not be lived out through Christ, who faithfully receives those who come to Him (Matt. 19:14; Rom. 15:7). At best, negatively speaking, it will result in a religious living that objectively affirms the tenets of the faith. It will be a life based on self-directed works for the Lord, not on faith through an organic union with Christ, and it will not be acknowledged by God (Matt. 7:23).

However, if we, as believers, see that the scriptural revelation of being joined to the Lord is a matter of an organic union, our understanding of faith will be associated increasingly with the living person of the Son of God, who both lives in and desires to live out of our mingled human spirit. Such a faith will be the faith of Christ becoming our faith. A life that is lived out on the basis of such a faith will manifest the divine attributes of Jesus because He is organically present in faith. And at best, positively speaking, it will result experientially in a living again of Jesus Christ on the earth through the members of His Body. It will be a life sourced in the reality of the faith of the Son of God and realized in the mingling of divinity and humanity in the human spirit regenerated by the divine Spirit, and it will be rewarded by God (1 Cor. 3:12-14).

As believers, who have been charged to walk by faith and to live righteously by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 1:17), having

been justified by faith (3:26-28), we need a clearer understanding of faith, one that is true to the scriptural revelation and one that is confirmed by our experience. In this regard, the prevailing understanding of faith in Protestant theology is incomplete (Rev. 3:2). While the truth of justification by faith alone, as opposed to the teaching of justification by works, recovered an essential truth necessary for the realization of salvation according to God's economy, it failed to adequately define the role of faith in the economy of God's salvation. In the Reformation there was a necessary turn from human works in order to effectuate genuine salvation, but there was also an incomplete articulation of how faith works in the divine operation associated with our initial salvation.¹ As a consequence, even though every genuine believer has been brought into an organic union with the Lord through the organic operation of the faith of Christ in response to hearing the word through the gospel, very few are aware of this reality, and even fewer live according to the organic operation of faith. Instead of living by the faith of the Son of God, we live by versions of faith that bear little resemblance to the divine revelation. Without a proper

righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). In His person an organic union of divinity and humanity was initially realized, and in His person a happy exchange of our sin for Him as righteousness was initially accomplished. Consequently, when we are organically joined to the Lord in our regenerated human spirit through the hearing of faith, the faith of Christ becomes our faith, and the happy exchange that occurred in the person of Christ is organically extended to include our sinful but redeemed humanity. Faith is the initial experience of our organic union with the Lord, and it is a continuing reflection of our organic union with the Lord.

Our Initial Experience of the Organic Union Being Realized as Faith

Faith is not something that we are convinced of in our mind; it is something that we receive when we are joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). When the living Christ indwells us, His faith becomes our faith. We believe because He is faithful, and He cannot deny Himself in us (2 Tim. 2:13).² In our organic union with Him, His faith becomes our faith, and our faith is His faith. The faithfulness of God is beyond question (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13) because faithfulness is part of His intrinsic essence, His intrinsic being. His Old Testament designation, *Jehovah*, which means "I AM WHO I AM" (Exo. 3:14), speaks of His eternal faithfulness, and His New Testament designation, *Jesus*, which means "Jehovah our Savior," speaks of His eternal faithfulness becoming the means for our salvation and acceptance by God.

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understanding of faith in relation to our organic union with the Lord, the opportunities that we have to allow Christ to live His life of faith in us are greatly hampered.

The faith by which we live, the faith that saves us, is the faith of Christ, and the faith of Christ becomes our faith through a hearing of faith that imparts Christ as the Spirit into our human spirit through His word. Through the hearing of faith, the faith of the Son of God is organically activated in our human spirit because Christ with all His divine attributes, including His righteousness and faithfulness, is organically joined to our human spirit. In our organic union with the Lord, His faith becomes the faith by which we believe and the faith by which we are justified. Our justification, drawing upon Luther's terminology, involves a "happy exchange" in which He bears our sinfulness and we partake of His righteousness. In contradistinction to the forensic view that this exchange involves only an outward, legal imputation of sin and righteousness, the effectiveness and the application of this happy exchange are dependent upon our organic union with Him. Christ truly became sin in order that we could become the

Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Joshua* (Num. 13:16), which means *Jehovah the Savior*, or *the salvation of Jehovah*. Hence, *Jesus* is not only a man but *Jehovah*, and not only *Jehovah* but *Jehovah* becoming our salvation. (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 1:21, note 1)

Jesus becomes our salvation when His faithfulness becomes our faith. The salvation of God has been realized through Christ's faithful accomplishment of the conditions necessary for the fulfillment of the promise of our covenanting God (Gal. 3:17): "Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf; because it is written, 'Cursed is everyone hanging on a tree'" (v. 13). And the salvation of God is applied through receiving Christ's faithfulness as our faith: "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ *Jesus*, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (v. 14). The faithfulness of Christ is applied to us through our organic union with Christ, a union that is a necessary condition for our justification and that is realized as faith through the person and work of Christ. In "Justification of Life," Kerry S.

Robichaux succinctly states the role of faith in our justification: “Unless people believe in Christ and what He has done through His death, it is not possible for them to enjoy the benefits of Christ’s righteousness. The divine requirement for justification is faith” (38). This statement certainly reflects the truth concerning the role of faith in our salvation, but in the context of the entire article something deeper is implied by the term *divine requirement*, because the divine requirement of faith is beyond our capacity to meet. Consequently, we should not read *divine requirement* as a demand by God that we must fulfill but rather as a condition that must be fulfilled before God can justify us. This condition is faith, and this faith is not ours. God is satisfied only with Christ, and when we are organically joined to Christ, His faith becomes our justifying faith. In *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, Tuomo Mannermaa speaks of this reality: “Because faith means a real union with Christ, and because in Christ the Logos is of the same essence as God the Father, therefore the believer’s participation in the essence of God is also real” (19). Our participation in the essence of Christ’s faith fulfills the divine requirement of faith, and thus, God can faithfully justify us on the basis of our organic union with Christ and His faith.

The Faith of Christ

Regarding some of the most crucial verses on the role of faith in our initial salvation, notably in chapter 3 of Romans and chapters 2 and 3 of Galatians, there has been considerable debate over whether Paul is speaking of our faith in Christ or the faith of Christ. In “Saved by Whose Faith?—The Function of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Pauline Theology,” John Dunnill says,

The question is whether the...phrases should be read as objective genitives, naming a faith of which Jesus Christ is the object (“faith in Jesus Christ”) or as subjective genitives, naming a faith of which Jesus Christ is the subject (“faith of Jesus Christ”). (4)

In *The Epistle to the Romans*, Douglas J. Moo confirms this question, stating,

Some commentators compare Rom. 3:22, concluding that Paul wants to stress both that righteousness is received by faith and is for all who believe, or (on another reading of Rom. 3:22) that Paul attributes our righteousness both to Christ’s faithfulness (“on the basis of faith”) and to our own believing. (76)

In “Does Faith Mean Faithfulness?” Simon Gathercole speaks of the implications of these different readings:

Discussion of faith as “faith in Christ,” however, immedi-

ately plunges us into one of the most hotly debated points in New Testament scholarship: the question of whether the phrase conventionally translated as “faith in Christ” (in Greek, *pistis Christou*) should actually be translated as “the faithfulness of Christ.” The cash value of this is that some of the crucial Pauline texts on justification end up having a very different feel to them. “We know that a person is justified not by works of Law, but only by faith in Christ” (Gal. 2:16) instead would become “We know that a person is justified not by works of Law but only by the faithfulness of Christ”...Linguistically, the translation could go either way, and so the position has to be decided on the basis of context and theology. (43)

Although Gathercole acknowledges that the “translation could go either way,” he opts for a reading that stresses our faith in Jesus Christ, that is, Jesus as the object of our faith. In *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone—in the Light of Recent Thought*, Philip H. Eveson stakes out this position, saying,

“Faith” characterises the justified person, not “works of

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law”. This ‘faith’ does not mean ‘faithfulness’ nor does the context [of Romans 3—4] encourage the view that ‘faith of Jesus Christ’ should be taken to mean Christ’s faith or faithfulness. Jesus is the object of faith. (18)³

In defense of this reading, Moo offers several lines of argument in support of Eveson’s view. He argues,

While the Greek word *pistis* can mean “faithfulness” (see 3:3), and Paul can trace our justification to the obedience of Christ (5:19), little in this section of Romans would lead us to expect a mention of Christ’s “active obedience” as basic to our justification. Moreover, *pistis* in Paul almost always means “faith”; very strong contextual features must be present if any other meaning is to be adopted. But these are absent in 3:22. If...*pistis* is translated “faith,” it is necessary to introduce some very dubious theology in order to speak meaningfully about “the faith exercised by Jesus Christ.” Finally, and most damaging to the hypothesis in either form, is the consistent use of *pistis* throughout 3:21—4:25 to designate the faith exercised by people in God, or Christ, as the sole means of justification. (225)

Moo's basic argument is that the context of Romans 3—4 does not support a reading of *faith* as *the faithfulness of Christ*, that “dubious” theology is needed to support such a reading, and that faith in the remainder of chapter 3 through the end of chapter 4 is clearly associated with a justified believer. Moo's assertions that there is a lack of contextual features to support the use of *the faith of Christ* or *the faithfulness of Christ* and that there is a consistent use of *pistis* in 3:21 through 4:25 to designate “the faith exercised by people in God” are two sides of the same contextual argument, namely that there is little contextual evidence for *faithfulness* while there is ample evidence for his preferred reading. These assertions are sustainable only if one begins with a bias against reading *faith* as referring to the faith of Christ or the faithfulness of Christ. In fact, the context of chapter 3 of Romans begins with a clear reference to the faithfulness of God (v. 3). The next reference to faith in the chapter is verse 22, the very verse that engendered the debate that Moo seeks to resolve. Therefore, the context is anything but settled in favor of one interpretation over the other. Following verse 22 through to the end of chapter 4, there are seventeen uses of *faith*,

faith of Jesus Christ in our justification in Romans 3:22. Rather, Paul's focus is on the faith of the crucified, resurrected, and indwelling Christ, who is presently living in every justified believer. The faith of Christ in us does not involve our emulation of an outward “pattern”; it is the living faith of the living Christ in us. There is nothing theologically dubious about Paul's statement that Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20; John 14:20; Rom. 8:10). And if He is living in us, His faith should be currently and actively operating in us as well.

In contrast to theological assertions that limit an understanding of faith to a faith that is focused on Christ as the object of faith, it is not necessary to strain an interpretation of *the faith of Jesus Christ* in Romans 3:22 to come to a different conclusion, because the grammar supports such a reading. John Dunnill summarizes the current scholarly conclusions related to the grammar in this verse:

At an earlier stage of the modern debate, much of the discussion revolved around grammatical questions, but these have largely been resolved. It is clear that, while both the objective-genitive reading and the subjective-genitive reading are possible, the objective-genitive is very poorly attested in ancient sources, whether secular or Jewish: Robinson was able to find none in the LXX, in Moulton & Milligan or in the 9th edition of Liddell and Scott. (5)

The faith of Jesus Christ, reflecting the grammar of the verse, enables a more organic, a more expansive, reading of Romans 3:22 that accounts for the role of the faith of the living Christ in our answering faith. It allows for consideration of Christ as both the subject and object of our justifying faith. In contrast, if *faith* in verse 22 is considered only as an objective response to objective facts, even divine facts, much is lost. Dunnill alludes to this:

A concept of “the faithfulness of Christ”, found in Rom 1:17 and a chain of related verses, yields a far clearer account of what Paul had to say, an account which...articulates not only the relationship of Jesus to the “faithfulness” of God but the relationship of this event to the human response of “believing”. It is commended by the good sense it makes, both of Paul's Christology and of his theology as a whole. (25)

Witness Lee provides even greater clarity about the organic implications of reading *faith* as a reference to the faith of Christ in a footnote to 3:22 in the Recovery Version of the Bible:

This faith refers to the faith of Jesus Christ in us, which has become the faith by which we believe in Him, as in v. 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; and Phil. 3:9.

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and if the faithfulness of Christ is assumed to be an acceptable reading of 3:22, then in all but a few cases *faith* in these seventeen instances can easily be read as faith that includes Christ as both its object and subject. These verses do not need to be read systematically as references to the faith of Christ in order to establish a credible context for reading *faith* as the faith of Christ, because no credible commentator would suggest that Christ must always be the subject of *faith* in the Bible. Lastly, Moo's assertion that “it is necessary to introduce some very dubious theology in order to speak meaningfully about ‘the faith exercised by Jesus Christ,’” is explained in a footnote as requiring us to “interpret Jesus more as the ‘pattern’ for our faith than as the object of our faith” (225). This explanation, however, presents a straw-man argument—that in order to “speak meaningfully” about *the faith of Jesus Christ*, we would have to read it as a reference to the faith that Jesus exhibited while on earth, which would make His faith only a “pattern” for us to attempt to emulate. Although Moo rightly derides such an understanding of *the faith of Jesus Christ*, the faith of the historical Jesus is not the focus of Paul's use of the phrase as it relates to the operation of the

Faith has an object, and it *issues from* its object. This object is Jesus, who is God incarnate. When man hears Him, knows Him, appreciates Him, and treasures Him, He causes faith to be generated in man, enabling man to believe in Him. Thus, He becomes the faith in man by which man believes in Him. Hence, this faith becomes the faith in Him, and it is also the faith that belongs to Him.

In God's New Testament economy, God desires that man believe in Jesus, who is God incarnate. If man does not believe in Him, he commits the unique sin before God (John 16:9). However, if man believes in Him, he is righteous to the uttermost before God, and God reckons this faith as his righteousness. At the same time, this faith brings its object, that is, this One who is God incarnate, into those who believe in Him. He is God's righteousness, and God has given Him as righteousness to those who are indwelt by Him (Jer. 23:6). All this is out of, and depends on, the faith that is in Him and of Him (Heb. 12:2). (Note 1, emphasis added)

The biblical revelation of faith in Romans 3:22 is not one that speaks of Christ as being either the subject or the object of faith to the exclusion of the other but of Christ as being both the subject and the object of faith. In the divine realm it is possible for God to be both subject and object because He cannot be hypostatically separated from the attributes of His eternal being in our experience of these attributes. For example, when we touch the love of God, we touch the God of love. Similarly, when we hear of Jesus Christ as the object of faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, who is the subject of the faith that we hear, becomes our faith through the hearing of faith. Consequently, when we are organically joined to the Lord through the hearing of faith, we experience Christ as both the object and subject of faith.

The Hearing of Faith and the Word of Christ

The *hearing of faith* in Galatians 3:2 is a remarkable expression that provides deep, experiential insight into the operation of the economy of God's salvation, which is in faith (1 Tim. 1:4). According to common understanding, faith begins with a rational thought in the mind and ends with a rational choice in our will. The phrase *the hearing of faith*, however, clearly implies that the process of our realization of faith begins outside of and apart from our mind and will, but that faith nevertheless becomes a part of us when it is received through hearing. The source of the faith that joins us to the Lord through our hearing is the God from whom we were separated due to the fall but who went through a process of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit so that He could, as the Spirit, be received by us.

The hearing of faith is the means by which we are joined to the Lord, and it is the initial experience of our organic union with the Lord.⁴

All orthodox commentators acknowledge the scriptural connection between faith and hearing and the further connection between hearing and the word of Christ in Romans 10:17: "So faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." It is a well-quoted verse—but one that is quoted most frequently for its endorsement of the preaching of the gospel as the means for salvation (vv. 9-16). The experiential process of how hearing produces faith is often not considered; it is simply assumed. The exegetical prominence that is given in verse 17 to the preaching of the gospel is illustrated in "Justification by Faith: A Truth for Our Times" by James Atkinson:

Faith, says Paul, is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). It is not something we put into the bargain; nor is it something for which you can strive. It is not credulity, neither is it a feeling. It is not a mystical intuition, neither is it a psychologically comfortable state of mind. It is not in essence assent to

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propositions. It is not the case that a man has faith and is thereby enabled to believe the Gospel. Rather it is that when this Gospel is proclaimed, faith is created and given by God in confrontation...

...When the Gospel is declared and heard, it brings faith with it. The Gospel is primary: when it is preached it awakens faith in us. (63-64)

Atkinson's emphasis on the preaching of the gospel is commendable because Paul surely speaks of an imperative need to proclaim the gospel. However, Atkinson misses the point that the goal of the proclamation that produces faith through the word of Christ is to graft those who have been reserved by God into Christ as the cultivated olive tree in order that they would become fellow partakers of the root of His fatness through faith (11:4, 17, 20). Paul's reference to grafting in chapter 11 of Romans speaks to the reality of our organic union with the Lord,⁵ which we initially experience through the hearing of faith. Without seeing this organic goal, it is possible to give lip service to the phrase *the hearing of faith* without

seeing that it also indicates a deeper, organic process that is initiated when the word of Christ is proclaimed and heard. As a consequence, commentators often refer to the hearing of faith only in order to distinguish faith from a volitional act that begins with and reflects human reason alone. With this limited utilization of the term, the connection between hearing the living word of Christ and the producing of faith is largely lost. In *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Paul Althaus illustrates this tendency. He begins his discussion of faith by deferentially pointing to the role of the gospel, saying,

Faith is not the result of human exertion; it is not man's own product but rather God's wonderful creation in him. Luther continually emphasizes that one must clearly distinguish genuine faith from self-made faith. Naturally, man, when he hears the gospel, is able to respond positively both intellectually and volitionally. He can do this "work" of giving assent. But such a faith has nothing to do with true faith. It is only a figment of the imagination, a "human fantasy" that a man can talk himself into. (47)

Without a revelation of our organic union with the Lord in our regenerated human spirit, it is difficult to distinguish the faith that we hear from a "self-made faith," based on a "human fantasy," that we convince ourselves to believe.

Althaus stresses the "wonderful creation" of faith in one who "hears the gospel" in order to support Luther's differentiation between "genuine faith" and "self-made faith." Elsewhere Althaus speaks more directly to the role of the word in producing faith, saying, "It is the nature of God's word both to call us to faith and to work faith in us. Faith however is characterized by its orientation to the word. God's word and faith are interrelated because of their very nature" (43). Althaus's statement is commendable and even uplifting in its support of the spiritual nature of the word that produces a spiritual response of faith. However, in a span of less than a page, he undermines his seeming agreement with Luther by speaking of faith in terms that strikingly echo a description that Luther would say has "nothing to do with true faith." Althaus says,

"Faith comes only through hearing," that is, through hearing the preaching of the gospel. For Luther then faith means accepting God's promise from the heart and taking a chance on it. Faith is an act of the will with which a man "holds to" the word of promise. (44)

Althaus's description of faith in relation to the word on page 43 is patently contradicted by his description on page 44 of how faith is realized. The former description alludes to faith as the gift of God; the latter description defines faith as something of ourselves (Eph. 2:8). The fact that Althaus fails to recognize this contradiction speaks more to the difficulty of explaining the hearing of faith apart from the realm of our organic union with the Lord than it does to any analytical deficiencies on his part. Without a revelation of our organic union with the Lord in our regenerated human spirit,⁶ it is difficult to distinguish the faith that we hear from a "self-made faith," based on a "human fantasy," that we convince ourselves to believe. The faith that Paul speaks of as coming through hearing the word of Christ, in contrast, is indeed a wonderfully creative work of God in humanity. It is a work that imparts Christ with His faith into the human spirit, mingling the divine Spirit and the human spirit as one spirit and enabling the faith of Christ to become our justifying faith. Kerry S. Robichaux describes this creative process:

It is important to realize that the faith infused into us through the gospel is not something different from Christ Himself; it is not some emanation from God into us. Rather, the Christ who is preached to us is infused into us through the word of the gospel. Faith is not merely a mental comprehension of the things preached but the apprehended reality of what is preached; it is the actual token of the things we believe. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ, and this word is not simply about Christ but that which bears Christ into us. The ability to believe that is infused into us is actually Christ as our faith. (40)

The hearing of faith, as described by Robichaux, is a genuine spiritual experience that is associated with a speaking that conveys the word of Christ as words of spirit and life (John 6:63). The speaking of those who announce the news of good things

bears the word of Christ, and the word of Christ bears faith into us...God infuses something into us for our justification, that is, the faith that justifies us. But for this we must understand the preaching to be something more than the simple delivery of gospel truths. In fact, the gospel preached is the shining out of Christ into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:4). This shining generates the ability to believe within us. (39)

In the shining of Christ into our hearts, the things of Christ and the things of man become clear. When the effectiveness of His death on the cross is openly, revealingly, portrayed to the eyes of our heart, and our need for His redemptive death is impressed upon our heart, we

spontaneously see and abhor ourselves and our sins and thus repent. Robichaux describes the moment of conversion when one sees experientially both his sinful condition and Christ's righteousness in His word, appreciatively receives Christ as faith, and acceptingly believes into Him who justifies in and through the life that is imparted through the hearing of faith:

As we hear of His righteous death, we are attracted by who He is and, through the preaching, He is infused into us. He alone is justifiable before God, and we are as nothing before God's justice. Our believing in Him, initiated through the preaching and helped by His infusion within us, is indeed righteous because it is the first and only response within us that matches the real state of affairs with regard to the righteousness of God. By believing in who we really are, who He is, and what He has done, for the first time in our lives there is a righteous and justifiable response within us, albeit sourced and maintained by the Christ infused into us. Through the preaching, we are brought into union with Him, and Christ as righteousness is shared with us through faith. This faith, that is, our believing initiated by and helped by Him, can be and is justified by God. The faith of Jesus Christ, the faith that is infused into us, is the faith that God accounts as righteousness for our justification. (40)

Witness Lee succinctly speaks of the process of the hearing of faith, saying,

The believers are infused with the preciousness of Christ through the gospel preached to them. This Christ becomes in them the faith by which they believe and the capacity to believe through their appreciation of Him. This faith creates an organic union in which they and Christ are one. (Recovery Version, Gal. 2:16, note 1)

This organic union is effectual for our justification because the righteous Christ with His communicable faith is present in the faith that is communicated through the hearing of faith.⁷ This organic union is also the realm in which we are justified by faith; that is, it is the realm in which our sins become His, and His righteousness becomes ours.

The Hearing of Faith, Justification, and the Happy Exchange

The hearing of faith is central in Luther's understanding of our justification by faith, which is a process that he associates with the term *happy exchange*.⁸ The central verse associated with this happy exchange is 2 Corinthians 5:21: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The happy exchange involves Christ's assumption of our sin and our assumption of His righteousness. In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Luther speaks of this exchange in relation to faith and to our union with Christ. He says,

Faith connects you so intimately with Christ, that He and you become as it were one person. As such you may boldly say: "I am now one with Christ. Therefore Christ's righteousness, victory, and life are mine." On the other hand, Christ may say: "I am that big sinner. His sins and his death are mine, because he is joined to me, and I to him." (n. pag.)

The Protestant theologians who followed Luther gradually changed his thought that faith connects Christ to our sins and us to His righteousness, victory, and life because we are "one with Christ," to one in which faith is confined to a limited legal frame of operation. The transformation has been so thorough that Luther's words are no longer "characteristic of the Lutheranism subsequent to Luther," as Mannermaa suggests (*Christ* 7). Instead,

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juridical and legal notions of faith and justification abound and are touted as orthodox explications of Luther. Eveson confidently speaks in this way, saying,

The Bible not only presents us with the fact that sinners are justified by God's grace and the results and implications of that *legal position*, it also tells us how sinners are able to be in this happy situation of *being declared righteous* by God. (13, emphasis added)

In *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness*, Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington write of justification in the context of a legal transaction between God and sinful humanity:

Just as our sins were *charged* to him so that he justly paid their penalty, so Christ's perfect obedience, which culminated in his obedience unto death on the cross, is *credited* to all who trust in him—once again because of our *legal union* with him. (24, emphasis added)

According to this statement, our sins were charged to an

account that we could not pay, but when Christ paid our debt through His death on the cross, our account was credited with a payment of righteousness. Thus, in the eyes of God, who is presented as a judicial Arbiter, we are no longer debtors to God, because the righteousness associated with Christ's death has been credited to our account as payment.

Since everything in this exchange is presented objectively and legally, Bridges and Bevington acknowledge that "some people ask how it can be just for God to punish an innocent man, Jesus, for the sins of other people"; "the answer" that they provide is one that "is clearly taught in Scripture" and "is found in the believer's *legal union* with Christ; that is, because Christ was our representative in his life and death, it was just of God to punish him for our sins" (24, emphasis added). The union that Bridges and Bevington speak of is legal, not organic. The language of union is employed, but the reality of union in life is utterly missing.⁹ This is even more apparent in a subsequent passage, which says,

Luther's happy exchange is judicially effective because it was organically applied in the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ through His incarnation, human living, death and resurrection.

Once they are *in* Christ, sinners *become* the righteousness of God, because God credits (imputes) Christ's perfect righteousness to them. In the eyes of God, these sinners have fulfilled the requirement of the law because the Sinless One fulfilled the law on their behalf by his perfect life and obedient death on the cross. (41)

If our union with the Lord is merely an objective, legal union, then the person of Christ is separated from the person of the believer, and there is no real union in life. According to Mannermaa, this is antithetical to Luther's teaching of union:

In contrast to Luther, justification and the indwelling of God in the believer are conceptually separated from each other in the Formula of Concord. Justification is only the forgiveness of sins. The indwelling of God follows in a logical sense after justification. One must ask here whether what Luther considers damning for the believer to think is exactly what the formula of Concord calls sound doctrine: in the locus of justification the divine person of Christ is separated from the person of the

believer, because justification is only a forensic imputation and does not presuppose the divine presence of Christ in faith. ("Justification" 38-39)

Since a forensic imputation involves a conceptual separation between justification and God's indwelling a believer through and as faith, the effectiveness of a legal union is debatable because it also separates the divine person of Christ from the person of a believer. If we have no access to or participation in His righteousness, and He has no access to or participation in our sins, there truly is no exchange, making the legal artifice of union ineffective in our experience and one that is cold rather than felicitous and happy.

The Happy Exchange Occurring in the Organic Union

Luther's happy exchange is judicially effective because it was organically applied in the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ through His incarnation, human living, death and resurrection. And the judicial effectiveness of this union, which was compounded into Him through the process of His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, is applied to those who receive Him through His faith, thereby enlarging the realm of God's organic union with humanity to include the redeemed and regenerated believers. The happy exchange occurred initially in the person of Christ and now continually occurs in the person of the corporate Christ.¹⁰ In regard to the happy exchange occurring in the person of Christ, Mannermaa says,

In his human nature, according to Luther, Christ *really* bears the sins of all human beings; in his divine nature, he is eternal righteousness and life. Christ wins the battle between sin and righteousness, and this takes place within his own person. Faith, in turn, means participation in the person of Christ. When a human being is united with God, he or she becomes a participant not only in the human but also in the divine nature of Christ. At the same time, a kind of "communication of attributes" occurs: the attributes of the essence of God—such as righteousness, life, power, etc.—are communicated to the Christian. (Christ 8)


In His incarnation and human living, Christ bore the sin of the world; in His death He bore not only this sin but also all the sins of humanity in His humanity by virtue of His divinity; and in His resurrection His divine righteousness was imparted into redeemed and regenerated humanity. With His God-appeasing death and His God-approved resurrection, there was an exchange of righteousness for sin and sin for righteousness, which was

incorporated into His being and then manifested in us when He lives His justified life in us, having come into us through the hearing of faith.

According to Luther, justification is not merely a new ethical or juridical relation between God and a human being. When a human being believes in Christ, Christ is present, in the very fullness of his divine and human nature, in that faith itself. Luther understands the presence of Christ in such a concrete way that, according to his view, Christ and the Christian become “one person.” In this “happy exchange,” the human being becomes a partaker of God’s attributes. (*Christ* 87-88)

Mannermaa also says, “Faith communicates the divine attributes to the human being, because Christ himself, who is a divine person, is present in faith” (*Christ* 22). Faith not only communicates the divine attributes to a human being but also communicates the properties of a sinner to Christ, namely his sin and sins, so that both can be taken away by virtue of their organic union. When His righteousness becomes ours in our organic union with Him, which we experience as faith, and when our sins become His in our organic union with Him, which we experience as faith, there is a justifying acceptance of us. As Robichaux succinctly states, “In this sense, God justifies our organic union with Christ” (41).

Experiencing the Organic Union as Justifying Faith

As believers, we are truly justified by faith alone, but our justifying faith is realized in, through, and as our organic union with the Lord. This justifying faith comes to us through the hearing of faith, which imparts the faith of Christ into us because Christ is present in His faith. Realizing His reality and preciousness and our sinfulness in the shining of the gospel of the glory of Christ into our hearts, we both believe and accept His gracious favor and His marvelous gift of Himself. In our acceptance there is a mingling of the divine Spirit with our regenerated human spirit, which two spirits become one in our organic union with the Lord. In this union the righteousness of Christ becomes ours, and our propitiated sins become His. And in this happy exchange, this organic union as faith, the justifying God justifies us because of our faith, because of our organic union with the Lord. 

Notes

¹Recent scholarly examinations of Luther’s statements regarding faith have resulted in new interpretations of his understanding, ones that are decidedly more organic but that do not forsake judicial aspects. The work of one of these scholars, Tuomo Mannermaa, is included in this article. See note 7.

²In 2 Timothy 2:13 Paul, speaking of our experience of faith, says, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” Both the living faith of Christ and our experience of this living faith are revealed in this verse. In regard to the truth, the faithfulness of Christ does not refer to the faithfulness of the historical Jesus but to the faithfulness of the resurrected and living Christ in our experience; that is, in the midst of our faithlessness, our seeming denials of Him, His faith in Himself remains. He is faithful because He can acknowledge only the truthfulness of His eternal being. Since He cannot deny Himself, His faithfulness is ever available to us in our experience. We should take comfort from the realization that even when our experience of our organic union with the Lord seems tenuous and is challenged by doubts, He remains not only faithful to Himself but also faithful to Himself in us. Because He cannot deny Himself in us and because He is joined as one spirit to every genuine believer, no genuine believer can ever utterly and forever abandon his faith, which is also the faith of Christ. At some point in our human circumstances we may, like Peter, deny the Lord, but the Lord will always come and remind us of Himself. We may loudly proclaim to others that we do not know Him, but He will only quietly and gently in us say, “I know you.” His

Even when our experience of our organic union with the Lord seems tenuous and is challenged by doubts, He remains not only faithful to Himself but also faithful to Himself in us.

reminding will occur in the deepest part of our being—our mingled human spirit. And when we eventually acknowledge, like Peter, that we indeed still love Him, we will realize that our faithful Lord was always with us because He never left us.

³Of all the authors cited in this article, Eveson is the strongest in his claim that *the faith of Christ* can refer only to a believer’s faith in Christ. After asserting that “‘faith’ does not mean ‘faithfulness’ nor does the context encourage the view that ‘faith of Jesus Christ’ should be taken to mean Christ’s faith or faithfulness” (18), he includes a reference to a chapter endnote, which says, “For a thorough refutation of the view that ‘the faith of Christ’ means ‘the faithfulness of Christ’ cf. J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Part One, Eerdmans, 1960, Appendix B, pp. 363-374” (24-25).

In the referenced appendix John Murray examines two verses primarily: Romans 1:17, which says, “The righteousness of God is revealed in it out of faith to faith, as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall have life and live by faith,’” and 3:22, which says, “Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no distinction.” Murray’s appendix, in large, is a response to Thomas F. Torrance,

who argues that these verses more readily support the view challenged by Eveson and Murray. In his book Murray also refers readers to this appendix, stating, “The reader is again referred to the appendix on this subject (pp. 363 ff.)” (111). Immediately before his reference to this appendix, Murray offers a concluding statement on what he regards as the proper reading of these verses:

It would be alien to the whole teaching of the apostle to suppose that what he has in mind is a faith that is patterned after the faith which Jesus himself exemplified, far less that we are justified by Jesus’ own faith, that is to say, by the faith which he exercised. Although the notion that the faithfulness of Christ is in view would not be contrary to the analogy of Scripture in general, yet there is not good warrant for this interpretation here [Rom. 3:22] any more than in 1:17. (111)

These two sentences are remarkable in their contrast. In the first sentence, Murray, boldly asserts that reading these verses as references to the faith of Christ “would be alien to the whole teaching of the apostle.” This statement alone will immediately cause most readers to be cautious of any teaching to the con-

but also involving or at least suggesting the answering faithfulness of man.” (363, quoting Torrance, “One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith”)

By referring to *faith* in Romans 1:17 as a “polarized expression,” Torrance is offering only a descriptive term for the fact that the faith of Jesus produces a response of faith in man; that is, that *faith*, as denoted in this verse, points to a situation involving opposite and contrastive elements, the faith that begins in Christ and the faith that comes from man, with the chasm between the polar opposites of God in Christ and man in sin being mediated by the faith of Christ that becomes the faith by which believing humanity is justified. Murray acknowledges that the faith of Jesus and the faith of humanity are implied in this verse, saying,

Moreover, there need be no question but the correlativity of God’s faithfulness and our “answering faithfulness”, to use Torrance’s expression, obtains in the matter of justification, and, if πίστις should sometimes be a “polarized expression” denoting both ingredients, there would be nothing intrinsically objectionable to such a supposition. Our faith is indeed the answer to God’s faithfulness and to the faithfulness of Christ. (365)

Following this acknowledgment, Murray, however, argues that the faith directed toward Christ

cannot *consist* in any respect in the faithfulness of Christ himself. *This* faithfulness resides entirely in Christ as the one to whom faith is directed and it is confusion to inject into the faith itself the faithfulness which belongs to the person to whom the faith is directed and in whom it rests. Therefore, once it is demonstrated that the faith of the believer is reflected on in the passages concerned, that means that the faithfulness of Christ

is not *included* in the faith that is reflected on. In other words, it is one thing to say that our faith always involves a *polarized situation*; it is another thing altogether to say that *faith* is a polarized *expression*. It is this confusion that the argument has sought to expose. (373)

Murray’s critique is revealing at many levels, in terms of both its shortsighted theological presuppositions and its flawed critical analysis. From a theological standpoint his argument rests upon a complete denial of our union with the Lord, that is, that the faith of a person cannot in any way be connected with the faith of Christ: “It is confusion to inject into the faith itself the faithfulness which belongs to the person to whom the faith is directed” (373). Although the faith of Christ may be the impetus for our faith, Murray implies that our answering faith must be something entirely from ourselves; it cannot be mingled with the faith of Christ, because this would make Christ both the subject and the object of faith. Confining his theology to the strictures of grammatical rules, Murray’s insistence upon a separation of subject and object in the matter of faith runs counter to the reality of the perichoretic relationships within the Godhead and in the Body of Christ. When the Son abides in the Father and the Father abides in the Son and when the Son

An insistence upon a separation of subject and object in the matter of faith runs counter to the reality of the perichoretic relationships within the Godhead and in the Body of Christ.

trary, thus privileging the reception of Murray’s argument. But in the second sentence, he acknowledges that “the faithfulness of Christ” is, in fact, not so alien as to be “contrary to the analogy of Scripture in general.” His conclusion that “there is not good warrant for this interpretation” is but a personal opinion based on his Reformed understanding of the teaching of the apostle. Ultimately, he fails to present a convincing argument in the main body of his commentary or in his appendix that *faith* in Romans 1:17 and 3:22 should not be read in association with the faith of Christ. This is because the same ambiguity that is present in his concluding statement is present in Appendix B.

In Appendix B, Murray begins by framing Torrance’s argument that *from faith* in Romans 1:17 refers to the faith of Christ and that *to faith* in the same verse means an answering faith in man, that is, that the faith of Christ is the faith with which man responds to the gospel and is justified. Murray continues,

Torrance maintains, however, that “in most of these passages *pistis Iesou Christou* does not refer only either to the faithfulness of Christ or to the answering faithfulness of man, but is essentially a polarized expression denoting the faithfulness of Christ as its main ingredient

abides in us and we abide in Him, Christ is both the subject and the object of this mystical abiding. Faith, which initiates this abiding through the creation of an organic union, should in turn, reasonably, even theologically, be expected to reflect this perichoretic reality.

From a standpoint of critical analysis, Murray also misreads Torrance's use of the term *polarized expression* in relation to the use of *faith* in Romans 1:17 and then proceeds to find fault with Torrance based on his misreading. When he states, "It is one thing to say that our faith always involves a *polarized situation*; it is another thing altogether to say that *faith* is a *polarized expression*" (373), he seemingly expands Torrance's application of *polarized expression* to *faith* in Romans 1:17 to include every other reference to faith in the New Testament. Torrance, however, never intended to broadly extend his use of this term to every other instance of the use of *faith*, because there are clear references to faith in the New Testament in which Christ and His work are solely referenced as objects, as the things that we believe (1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:24; 13:5; Gal. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:19). Torrance clearly qualifies his application of the term *polarized expression* to a limited subset of verses that speak of the faith of Christ by prefacing his comment on Romans 1:17 with the phrase *in most of these passages*.

Without an understanding of faith that takes into consideration the union that is established and maintained by faith, the teaching that faith involves the faith or faithfulness of Christ would certainly seem "alien" to a Reformed theologian such as Murray, because such a reading would require a broader organic understanding of faith. However, it would not be alien to the actual teaching of the apostle.

A strict Reformed reading of these verses, however, creates interpretative difficulties related to the apostle's teaching. This is seen most clearly in what appears to be an unexplainable redundancy in Romans 3:22. According to Murray, the faith of Jesus Christ in verse 22 should be properly understood as faith that is "focused upon him in the specific character that is his as Saviour, Redeemer, and Lord" (111)—a faith in Jesus Christ. Since faith in Jesus Christ is implied in verse 22, Murray says, "We may wonder why there is the addition, 'unto all who believe'. It is admitted that it is difficult to arrive at certainty respecting the precise thought intended" (111). It is difficult only because a shortsighted understanding of faith is utilized to define the scope of faith. If faith in Jesus is the intent of the expression in verse 22, then Paul seems to be saying that the righteousness of God is manifested through one's faith in Christ to all the ones who have faith in Christ. The presence of this redundancy creates interpretative difficulties for arriving at any precise meaning or reason for its inclusion in the verse. In Appendix B, Murray interestingly acknowledges that reading *faith* in this verse as a reference to the faithfulness of Christ would resolve this exegetical difficulty:

If, in Rom. 3:22, διὰ πίστεως is taken of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ this could readily be seen to be consistent with the general teaching of Paul respecting the

place which the obedience or righteousness of Christ occupies in our justification. In addition, this interpretation would resolve the difficulty of the apparently unnecessary duplication if "faith" is regarded in both instances in both passages as referring to our faith in Christ, the difficulty which has given so much trouble to commentators and on which diversity of interpretation has arisen. (364-365)

It is ironic that an understanding of faith that is "seen to be consistent with the general teaching of Paul" in Appendix B is described as "alien to the whole teaching of the apostle" in the body of Murray's commentary (111). These statements cannot both stand. Interestingly, the interpretation most preferred by Murray, as a Reformed theologian, is the one least sustainable in terms of the text and in terms of resolving rather than introducing further interpretive problems. As a "thorough refutation of the view that 'the faith of Christ' means 'the faithfulness of Christ'" (Eveson 24), Appendix B falls quite short.

⁴This article is based largely on the Paul's word in Galatians 3:2 concerning receiving the Spirit through the hearing of faith. When Christ was openly portrayed crucified to the Galatians

Christ is both the subject and the object of His mystical abiding in us. Faith, which initiates this abiding through the creation of an organic union, should reasonably, even theologically, be expected to reflect this perichoretic reality.

through the word of Christ as described by Paul's speaking in verse 1, the Spirit was received by them, and the Spirit imparted the faithful and justifying Christ into their human spirit, regenerating it in their initial salvation. Paul continues, however, in verse 5 to further develop the role of faith, using the same phrase, *the hearing of faith*, in a parallel construction to verse 2: "He therefore who bountifully supplies to you the Spirit and does works of power among you, does He do it out of the works of law or out of *the hearing of faith*?" (emphasis added). This speaks of the importance of faith in not only establishing our initial organic union with the Lord but also in our continuing experience of the organic union. This is an important point in our individual and corporate experience of Christ, but time and space allow only a brief mention of this point.

Just as the divine life, the spiritual life in our spirit, is received by the exercise of faith, "the divine life, the spiritual life in our spirit, is lived by the exercise of faith, which is stimulated by the presence of the life-giving Spirit" (Lee, Recovery Version, 2:20, note 5). We receive life initially and live by this life continually in the realm of faith, in the realm of our organic union with the Lord (3:11; Rom. 1:17; cf. Hab. 2:4; Heb. 10:38). In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Martin Luther comments on

Paul's reference to the life that he lived in the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20), saying,

Paul has a peculiar style, a celestial way of speaking. "I live," he says, "I live not; I am dead, I am not dead; I am a sinner, I am not a sinner; I have the Law, I have no Law." When we look at ourselves we find plenty of sin. But when we look at Christ, we have no sin. Whenever we separate the person of Christ from our own person, we live under the Law and not in Christ; we are condemned by the Law, dead before God. (41)

Luther's emphasis on an ongoing experience of our union with Christ is implied in the statement *whenever we separate the person of Christ from our own person, we live under the Law and not in Christ*, and our ongoing living in the faith of the Son of God is indicated by *we live*. The hearing of faith, which bountifully supplies the Spirit, involves an ongoing experience of the organic union that was initiated when we first heard the word and received faith. This organic union, this faith, grants us access into the grace in which we stand and function as members of the Body of Christ (Rom. 5:2; 12:3-4). Apart from faith, that is, apart from the organic union, everything we do is sin (14:23),

If we accept the unscriptural characterization of man as having only a body and soul/spirit, a true understanding of our union with the Lord will be lost, along with the true experience of faith that accompanies this union.

and as Luther notes, consequently, condemned by the law. If, however, we walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), holding our organic Head, an ever-growing faith will be manifested as the growth of God (Col. 2:19; 2 Thes. 1:3). This growth involves the spread of the organic union from our spirit to our soul as Christ makes His home in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17). In the progress of our faith, there will be joy (Phil. 1:25), and others will find us in Christ (3:9), having been established in the organic union that is our faith (Col. 2:7).

⁵Paul's extended discussion in chapter 11 of grafting illustrates the organic nature of Luther's happy exchange, because this grafting involves an organic joining in which the life of the wild olive branch is joined to the cultivated olive tree through the cutting of Christ's crucifixion. In this joining, the life of the cultivated olive tree flows into the wild olive branches through Christ's resurrection (Eph. 2:15; 1 Pet. 1:3). In this divine grafting, the properties of the branches of the wild olive tree (the sins of sinful humanity) are mediated through Christ's cutting and our cutting (Rom. 6:5-8; Col. 2:20), which join us to the cultivated olive tree, and the properties of the cultivated olive tree with its holy root (the righteousness of the righteous Christ, Rom. 11:16) are joined to the wild olive branches in our organic

partaking of the root of His fatness (v. 17). This exchange is more than a legal exchange; it is an organic exchange that cannot occur apart from the person of Christ. Rather, it occurs in the person of Christ based on both His faithful work on the cross and His faith, which joins us to His efficacious work (v. 20).

⁶The union between Christ and the believers is spiritual, even mystical, but it is also a practical reality attested to by the entire scope of the divine revelation, a reality that is initiated when the God-created human spirit is born of the divine Spirit through the hearing of faith (Zech. 12:1; John 3:6). The failure to see the biblical revelation that man is a tripartite being, having a spirit and a soul and a body (1 Thes. 5:23), is one of the root causes of our difficulty in seeing the organic aspects of our union with the Lord. When we are joined to the Lord, we are joined to Him in our regenerated human spirit. This is simple and clear: "The Spirit Himself," whom we have received, "witnesses with *our spirit* that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16, emphasis added). However, many theologians advance the view that *spirit* and *soul* in relation to humanity are terms that refer to the same human organ and that the different terms are needed only to denote whether the actions of this organ are directed toward heavenly things (*spirit*) or earthly things (*soul*). When

humanity is viewed as being dichotomous by nature, that is, soul/spirit and body, the operation of faith will be associated, almost by default, with the functions of the soul—the mind, emotion, and will. Consequently, a "gospel" will be preached to stir the emotions or to convince the mind in order to impel unbelievers to exercise their will to choose to believe. If we accept the unscriptural characterization of man as having only a body and soul/spirit, a true understanding of our union with the Lord will be lost, along with the true experience of faith that accompanies our union with the Lord as one spirit.

In effect, our union with the Lord will be a union in our soul. In *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness*, Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington speak of just such a union, a union that mistakenly focuses on the soul: "Just as the union of soul and body sustains natural life, the union of the sinner's soul with the broken and resurrected Christ sustains spiritual, eternal life. The crucified and living Christ lives in me. This is the meaning of the living union between Christ and us" (160).

⁷An important contribution to a proper understanding of faith has been made by Tuomo Mannermaa in his reexamination of Luther's works in the light of his statement that Christ is present in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). In *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, he says,

Luther's notion of faith cannot be understood correctly if Christ is regarded merely as an object of faith in the same way as any item can be an object of human knowledge. Rather, the object of faith is a person who is present, and therefore he is, in fact, also the "subject." Luther says that Christ is the object of faith, but not merely the object; rather, "Christ is present in the faith itself" (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). (26)

Mannermaa suggests that if Christ is not present in faith for Luther, then his understanding of faith would assume the same characteristics propounded by the scholastic teachings that he criticized: In “Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective,” Mannermaa says,

According to the scholastic doctrine,...faith was only an uncertain knowledge, a kind of supposition...According to Luther, faith is not such a “dead quality” in the soul, but rather contains the divine reality (*forma*), which is Christ himself, who is present in faith. (36)

Witness Lee echoes Luther’s thought that Christ is present in faith in a portion from *Life-study of Galatians*, a commentary that is more homiletical than theological in nature, but which contains and develops Luther’s insight concerning faith. Lee says,

Faith is our appreciation of what the Lord is and of what He has done for us. We have also pointed out that genuine faith is Christ Himself infused into us to become our ability to believe in Him. After the Lord has been infused into us, He spontaneously becomes our faith. On the one hand, this faith is *of* Christ; on the other hand, it is *in* Christ. However, it is too simple merely to say that this faith is Christ. We need to say that it is Christ revealed to us and infused into us. (90-91)

Lee points out that “genuine faith is Christ Himself,” but not a Christ apart from us, but rather a Christ “revealed to us and infused into us.” When the theological implications of the presence of Christ being in us as faith are considered, it becomes clear, as it is to Mannermaa, that Christ’s presence in faith involves a believer’s participation in Christ. Such a participation speaks of our union with Christ through faith and our ongoing participation in the divine nature, which makes our justification continually and eternally effective through His life (Rom. 5:10). Mannermaa says,

It is a central idea of Luther’s theology that in faith human beings *really* participate in the person of Christ, and in the divine life and victory that come with him. Or, to say it the other way round: Christ gives his person to us through faith. “Faith” means participation in Christ, in whom there is no sin, death, or curse. (*Christ* 16)

The faith by which we believe is the faith of Christ, and Christ is present in this faith because Christ cannot be separated from His divine attributes. Thus, when we receive the faith of Christ, we receive the Christ of faith but not only the Christ of faith. We receive Him with all His divine attributes and human virtues in His deified humanity (Rom. 1:3-4).

The presence of Christ in faith is real, and he is present in it with all his essential attributes, such as righteousness, blessing, life, power, peace, and so forth. Thus, the notion of Christ as a “gift” means that the believing subject becomes a participant in the “divine nature.” (*Christ* 19)

As a participant in the divine nature, a believer is engaged through faith in the process of becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.

⁸Protestant theologians acknowledge that Luther did not present his teaching of the happy exchange, which some also refer to as the “great exchange,” in a systematic way. He spoke of it homiletically and much less forensically than later proponents of his teachings, who codified the thought contained in 2 Corinthians 5:21 into the much more rigid doctrine of forensic imputation. Mannermaa, in his reexamination of Luther’s direct statements, rather than those of his subsequent interpreters, says, “The one-sidedly forensic interpretation turned out to be characteristic of the Lutheranism subsequent to Luther” (*Christ* 7). A credible reason for this shift away from Luther’s view of exchange through union with the person of Christ to an exchange involving external forensic imputation is provided by Robichaux, who says,

Lutheran theologians define the location of justifying righteousness as external to the believer. They do this because they wish to underscore the notion that justification is an action on God’s part based upon Christ’s death and not upon anything found in the believer. (30)

When the theological implications of the presence of Christ being in us as faith are considered, it becomes clear, as it is to Mannermaa, that Christ’s presence in faith involves a believer’s participation in Christ.

I suspect that the concern over distinguishing God’s action from “anything found in the believer” originated in a concern over conflating the operation of genuine faith with a human “work” of faith. If faith is regarded only as a rational human response, then the truth of justification by faith alone can easily morph into justification by human faith and thus be challenged as being also a “work.” In order to distinguish a “work” of faith with a justifying faith in God that comes through hearing the gospel, the means for God’s justification of us as sinners was assigned to His external forensic imputation of our sins to Christ and of Christ’s righteousness to us. Thus, if it could be shown that God’s acceptance of us is related to a judicial work of acceptance on His part, but that it is somehow associated with hearing and believing the contents of the gospel, then the “truth” of justification by faith alone could be safeguarded from a challenge that justification is the issue of a human work of faith. Robichaux concludes,

A fairer portrayal of his [Luther’s] notions must include his understanding that righteousness is indeed partaken of by the believing sinner and not only imputed to him or her. For Luther, righteousness was both an imputed quality and a quality shared with Christ through union with Him. (31)

⁹There are, however, Protestant theologians who incline toward deeper and more organic understandings of our union with Christ. In *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*, Constantine R. Campbell provides a detailed study of the concept of union with Christ, including the understandings put forth by an array of Protestant theologians from the days of the early Reformation to the present. In part, because of the narrow notions that are currently ascribed to the word *union*, he seeks to expand, at the conclusion of his study, the definitional parameters of the word in order to include a fuller range of its meaning as used by Paul in his letters and as revealed to Paul in his experience on the road to Damascus, when he heard the Lord say, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute” (Acts 9:5; cf. 22:8; 26:15). Campbell says,

Union with Christ is defined as *union, participation, identification, incorporation*—terms that together do justice to the widespread variety and nuance of Paul’s language, theology, and ethical thought about our relatedness to Christ. *Union* conveys faith union with Christ, mutual indwelling, trinitarian, and nuptial notions. *Participation* refers to the partaking in the events of Christ’s narrative. *Identification* encapsulates believers’

The spirit of faith that every believer possesses is a corporate spirit of faith that expresses not only the organic union between Christ and a believer, but also the organic union that is the defining characteristic of the corporate Christ.

location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship. *Incorporation* gathers up the corporate dimensions of membership in Christ’s body. (420)

¹⁰In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul speaks of the prominence of faith in relation to the existence and operation of the organic union in our mingled human spirit and of the prominence of the word in the hearing of faith: “Having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, ‘I believed, therefore, I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak.” The spirit of faith that every believer possesses is not just an individual spirit of faith; it is a corporate spirit of faith that expresses not only the organic union between Christ and a believer but also the organic union that is the defining characteristic of the corporate Christ—the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head. This truth is contained in the word *same* and the phrase *we also believe*. The believers believe and speak as one because their speaking comes out of the same spirit of faith. Elsewhere, in Galatians 6:10, Paul speaks of the corporate aspect of faith, saying, “So then, as we have the opportunity, let us do what is good toward all, but especially toward those of the household of the faith.” Regarding this corporate aspect of faith, Witness Lee says,

The household of the faith refers to the children of promise (4:28), all who are sons of God through faith in Christ (3:26). All the believers in Christ together constitute a universal household, the great family of God. This is through faith in Christ, not through the works of law. This household, as the new man (Col. 3:10-11), is composed of all the members of Christ, with Christ as their constituent. (Recovery Version, Gal. 6:10, note 2)

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