Union with Christ, the Reformed tradition, and Research: Reading Fesko (1)

Posted on December 3, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

I have been asked repeatedly in recent years if I intend to write in response to the publications by John Fesko, the Academic Dean of Westminster Seminary California in Escondido and a professor of theology there. One reason I have been asked if I intend to do so is rather straightforward: Fesko has written a lot on the topic of union with Christ and justification in the Reformed tradition, a topic of some recent confusion and controversy. Another reason is that these are topics on which I, too, have written, and Fesko is sharply critical of my work. Yet another reason is that some readers familiar with the texts and arguments at issue and who have tried to make their way through Fesko's books have come away bewildered at what he says. Others less familiar with the texts and arguments have concluded, based on Fesko's writings, that I must hold to some rather curious, laughable, and easily refuted notions regarding Calvin, the Reformed tradition, justification, and so forth. To date I have not published any interactions with Fesko's publications, but the reasons for not doing so are complex. Having been asked yet again about Fesko's books recently, I suppose I've been pushed past the line of uncertainty into saying at least something about them. But why the delay? As I said, it's complicated.

The most important reason for hesitation is that, despite the fact that this is published work "out there" and thus "fair game," this is more importantly the work of a brother in Christ and in the Reformed tradition no less. Dr. Fesko is not someone I am eager to critique. He and I have a great deal more in common theologically than we do not, and I have no doubt he would agree. Indeed, much of the vitality of scholarly interactions and debates within church and seminary contexts is due to how very much can be assumed at the doorway of an issue: the extent of shared territory frees us up to explore finer nuances and ideas with detail and care that would not be possible otherwise. And this is a debate over those finer nuances, at least mostly.

Another reason for hesitation has to do with the task itself. I have read, I think, everything Fesko has published on these matters. I read the journal articles and then I read them again in slightly revised form in his book, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012). Before reading these, I had read his book on Justification several times through. My problems began with my first read through his book on justification. Each time I picked up these publications I added to an open document on my computer in which I recorded my notes on the author's statements, the structure of his arguments, his use of sources, etc. But this was terribly taxing. As it seemed there was a problem of some significance on just about every page of every article and in both books, and often many on a page, my notes on each publication were swelling to a size larger than the publications themselves. Plus, this isn't the kind of *book* I am particularly interested in publishing, but a book it would have had to be had I continued on that course.

In addition, his publications appeared with rapid frequency, so I would hardly finish working through the issues in one article before the next appeared. Before long, however, I had a more significant challenge if I were going to review Fesko's work: I didn't know where it could begin, and I didn't know where it could end. Further, given how often my work is referred to, I did not want to respond in an unduly defensive manner; instead I wanted to do all I could to deal with the author's arguments on their own terms whether

he was dealing with my own work, the work of others, or purported to explain historical texts. How successful I am in this is, of course, not for me to judge, but I admit this has been a great challenge. To illustrate, and as evidence that I write here with some levity and not only solemnity, my file of notes on my computer includes a hefty amount of material under the heading, "Unicorns, Centaurs, Fesko's Garcia, and Other Mythological Creatures."

Ultimately, Fesko's works on union with Christ and justification are representative examples, in my view, of what I find myself referring to more and more frequently as "vigor without rigor." There is a lot of earnestness, confidence, and even urgency – a lot of vigor. But not a lot of rigor. Why I judge that to be the case will become more evident in the series of posts to follow. As such, Fesko's body of work, including not only his books but – perhaps especially – their warm reception in some quarters, became more compelling to me as an index of the generally troublesome state of scholarship in confessional Reformed circles (yes, with certain great exceptions) and useful primarily as a sample through which to lead prospective research students. I offer this series of notes on *Beyond Calvin* somewhat in response, then, to Fesko's arguments, but also in the hope that our work generally will improve.

If it still seems useful after I've finished working through this book (and, no, I cannot work through every page of it), I may turn to his book on justification to do the same or I may turn with a similar goal to other recent sample publications. I hope, in the end, to revise these observations into a form suitable for publication elsewhere.

One more thing should be mentioned at this point. Given that the author is quite energetic in criticizing my work, it would be appropriate to point to one part of the background to my notes. My book, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology*, was published by Paternoster in 2008. Fesko reviewed my book with another in a review article published in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's journal for church officers, *Ordained Servant*, in March, 2009. Dr. Richard Gaffin of Westminster Theological Seminary (in Philadelphia, not to be confused with the Westminster Seminary located in California where Dr. Fesko teaches) was asked to respond to this review article and his analysis was published later in the same issue. If you're not sure you read this correctly, I understand why. It is indeed the case that the editor asked Dr. Gaffin to respond to Fesko's review, even though Dr. Gaffin is not the author of the book Fesko reviewed. I was not asked to write a response.

However, it is among the curiosities of Fesko's interaction with my work that he has read it through the lens of Dr. Gaffin's own work, rather visibly and simplistically assuming one is the other. In fact, it would appear that since I dedicated my book on Calvin in part to Dr. Gaffin, Fesko read as far as the dedicatory and decided he knew what the book said. Thus Gaffin's responding to Fesko's review of my book is not quite as remarkable as it likely should be. It is, of course, a blessing to be confused with Dr. Gaffin, and I'm not one to object too heartily to undeserved praise, but at the level of material critique and interaction, Fesko's work is a reminder that it is always good practice, not to mention pretty good courtesy, to deal with the book and the author on their own terms. I'm confident he would agree on the ideal.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (2): The State of the Question, pt 1

Posted on December 4, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

You will quickly discover why I could not put this material into a traditional journal review. With my apologies for its length, I suggest you print this out, settle into a comfy chair, and read these notes in one hand while holding a glass of red in the other. (I recommend a quality Malbec.) And so we begin…

The first chapter following the preface sets up the "state of the question." Given the wide range of studies that follow in the book, the author must do something like this in order to shape his readers' expectations. He is certainly successful in this. What follows is a series of observations and occasionally responses to this introductory material.

1. The opening paragraph of the book characterizes recent interest in Luther and union with Christ, particularly by the Helsinki school, as an example of historians returning to old texts in the ill-conceived hope they might uncover some hitherto unnoticed feature of the theologian's thought (13). Fesko suggests that what has happened with Luther in that context has happened to Calvin as well, though in a more "subdued" manner. This is a rather ambitious parallel to draw, but it is unexplored. From here, Fesko hammers at the dead horse of the old *Centraldogma* theory by which scholars of an earlier generation reduced Calvin to a single dogmatic idea, an idea which allegedly controlled the whole of his theology. The old *Centraldogma* was predestination; Fesko suggests recent interest in union with Christ smacks of the same. Again we have an ambitious parallel, and one that is more material to the book's concerns, but the reader will not benefit from a careful comparative investigation of the nature and structure of those older arguments regarding predestination and more recent ones regarding union with Christ. It seems the claim is more rhetorical in design, added in order to appeal to those who "know" the old theory to be wrong-headed, perhaps even bizarrely so, and thus sets up those readers to expect the same with this new trend. Whether or not it is in fact a fair comparison is beside the rhetorical point. ("So, answer my question, when did you stop beating your wife?")

I pause here to note something else of interest to those who read in this area. Recently in the published literature, it seems something curious is starting to take place. One might wonder why it is tacitly assumed by Fesko, as by others, that Calvin does not have a "central dogma," and more specifically, why it is that the very *possibility* of a theologian self-consciously organizing his theology around a particular controlling concept is impossible. Scholars of an earlier generation opposed the theory on carefully-argued grounds. More recently, however, the argument occasionally sounds more like "*x* thought Calvin organized his theology around a single idea" *and so* we know they were wrong." Now, careful analysis of his writings demonstrates that critics of the old approach are correct in arguing that Calvin does no such thing in his theology. They were certainly wrong, I agree, but I'm interested in noting the issue of scholarship here. In recent literature, while we must now expect anything written on Calvin to include mention of the *Centraldogma* dead horse, one rarely encounters *reasons* why it is not, and even more rarely *could* not, be the case. (And my own discussion of the theory in 2008 doesn't penetrate very far into the reasons either, and I am only now noticing the phenomenon as such.) Fesko does not exactly argue along those simple lines, neither does he provide the reasons, however; having set up the idea that a "central dogma" is a dead-end, he refers to Richard Muller's work as the place the evidence can be found. Fair enough, but the rhetorical strategy (or at least effect) should not be missed.

2. Fesko then proceeds to cover Barth, Charles Partee, and Julie Canlis as examples of the error which sees union with Christ as the key to Calvin's theology. In discussing Barth, Fesko notes the several times Barth argues that Calvin did not fully develop the union idea or perceive the full scope of its wide-ranging significance. Again, since Barth is among those with whom Fesko is displeased in this book, one has to wonder if Fesko is assuming that claims that Calvin did not fully develop an idea are somehow *from the start* out of bounds. In any case, Fesko rightly points out Partee's many careless statements that over-reach on the importance of Calvin's doctrine of union, including his simplistic and negative take on Calvin's relationship to the tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy, but the chapters to come will indicate that Fesko's reasons for his discomfort with Partee are not quite so simple.

The brief notes on Barth and Partee are fairly straightforward. With the author's angle on Canlis, more of his purpose in writing comes into view. Referring to Canlis' statement that "Calvin's focus on salvation *extra nos* has primarily come to mark the Protestant tradition, rather than his equally warm and vibrant theology of participation," and by noting that Canlis (not in connection with this statement but in another place in her article, curiously located in Fesko's prose) footnotes Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Fesko transitions to a section called "The Gaffin-school on Calvin and union."

3. Simply put, and now I must call the proverbial spade a spade, Fesko's proposal of a "Gaffin-school" is the most conspicuously unhelpful feature of this introduction, and the most likely feature of the book to damage still further what remains of the intramural discussion over union with Christ, etc., in confessional Reformed circles. The reasons for this assessment are many. The section title, and the whole idea of a "Gaffin school" behind the section title, is – even for purely academic purposes – provocative and unhelpful. Fesko adopts the language of a "school" of Calvin interpretation without explaining what he means by a "school" and in full view of Gaffin's objections to their being such a thing. No matter who it is, Gaffin or Barth or Arius or Abelard, objections like this should give us pause. For the purposes of scholarship, to be meaningful as an academic convention, one would have to demonstrate (with documentation) that (1) Gaffin has proposed truly new ideas or has proposed a distinctive interpretation and/or use of those ideas in critical protest to a/the prevailing paradigm or tradition; (2) that "students" of the purported school have employed those distinctives in their own work; and (3) that there is a verifiable interpretive relationship of dependence regarding the central issue (interpretation of Calvin) in the direction from Gaffin to the "students" of the "school," which for Fesko include at least Craig Carpenter, Lane Tipton, Mark A. Garcia, and William B. Evans. Granted that this is a fairly unscientific list of *desiderata* for the existence of a "school," I surmise that one could properly identify, say, the Finnish School of Luther research using similar criteria. I suggest one cannot identify a Gaffin-school using this criteria, however.

If we take the term in its technical and academic sense, the author has not demonstrated that there is such a school. The late sociologist and historian of science, Olga Amsterdamska, argued that "school of thought" originated in nineteenth-century German linguistic debates ("Institutions and Schools of Thought: The Neogrammarians," *AJS* 91:2 (1985): 332-58). According to Amsterdamska, a "school of thought" opposes the status quo, introduces innovations, and challenges the existing authority structure of a discipline. And those who form a new school stress their independence and distinctiveness. Now, that kind of sociological take on "school of thought" may or may not be correct, and more importantly it may not be what Fesko has in mind by proposing one. But the point here is that he has proposed a rather controversial notion and he has not indicated what he means by the term. But we are only beginning to reflect on this move; there is more to say.

4. There is, after all, also the important matter of Fesko's appeal to Evans on this point. On p. 17, no. 21, Fesko's note reads as follows:

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

Observe the following regarding Fesko's note:

a. Fesko recognizes that his identification of a "Gaffin school" of Calvin interpretation may sound original, so he points to "others" who have suggested the same but only names William B. Evans. So we follow up the lead provided in Fesko's footnote and see what it is that Evans says. But in the first example of very many in the book, what we find in this text is not what Fesko claims is there. In the article page numbers that Fesko cites, Evans provides a description (Evans says it is descriptive, not an analysis) of what he calls "The Biblical-Theological Trajectory-Vos, Murray, Gaffin, et al." According to Evans, this "trajectory" includes the following features: a biblical-theological approach to soteriology, a "deep respect for the confessional tradition of Reformed theology" but not a "repristination of the past," and a "dissatisfaction with certain concepts and schemas that have been taken for granted more recently by the federal theology tradition together with a sense that they have obscured rather than illuminated certain key scriptural themes" (138-9).

b. Reading Evans' article we also note:

(i) Evans explicitly identifies a beginning of this trajectory not with Gaffin but with Geerhardus Vos at Princeton Seminary, and then Evans proceeds not from Vos to Gaffin but first to John Murray and then to Gaffin;

(ii) Evans identifies Gaffin as the one who, "more than any other, has preserved and developed the legacy of Vos," but then goes on to add other names to the list, including Sinclair Ferguson and then some of Gaffin's students: Lane Tipton, Mark A. Garcia, Philip Ryken, Evans himself, "and others."

(iii) As part of a taxonomy of his own, Evans titles this "trajectory" not as Gaffin's own but as "the Biblical-Theological Trajectory-Vos, Murray, Gaffin, et al." and, in fact, never once "credits [Gaffin] with such a role," to use Fesko's words, i.e., as having founded or as leading a "school" of Calvin interpretation.

We also note that (iv) whereas Fesko sees a Gaffin "school" of interpretation of Calvin, the trajectory that Evans is identifying *isn't about interpreting Calvin at all* but instead accents the biblical-theological method in relation to the *ordo salutis* and the priority of union with Christ as "foundational to all aspects of salvation" (140). There is nothing about a distinctive read of Calvin in Evans' description of this "trajectory" for which Gaffin is the main, but hardly the only, leader.

Also, (v) Fesko notes that "Gaffin has demurred over the idea that there is an interpretive school attributable to his reading of Calvin." If one is determined to persist in identifying such a school despite the objections of Gaffin himself, the reader has the right to expect strong evidence of such a school. I have

noted that the author's reference to Evans fails to meet a reasonable standard of evidence for the claim, but note that this failure obtains *even if one were only seeking to demonstrate that someone else thinks there is such a school*. Evans does not say there is a Gaffin-school and does not use the language of a school of thought for Gaffin.

Finally, (vi) Evans does not even have *Calvin interpretation* per se in view beyond noting that a few of the publications produced by this group include analyses of Calvin (and of other figures up to the Westminster divines and beyond such as John Owen and Thomas Boston).

c. Other than Evans, Fesko notes only "others such as" Evans, but they are not named or cited, so the reader has no one other than Evans to read in support of Fesko's claim that others have seen a "Gaffin-school" of Calvin interpretation.

5. Returning to Fesko on Gaffin, on p. 18 Fesko writes,

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

and then quotes Gaffin's words,

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

And then Fesko writes, "Gaffin's argument boils down to this: union with Christ is the source from which flow two distinct but un-prioritized benefits: justification and sanctification."

But note:

a. Without assuming the idea itself is wrong, we must note that Gaffin has not spoken flatly of union with Christ and two "un-prioritized benefits." In the quotation Fesko provides, Gaffin says Calvin responded to Rome by linking faith to sanctification without also including, in this context, a "*particular* reference to justification" which is not the same as saying there is *no* reference to justification to be considered or acknowledged.

b. Even without accounting for the clarifications Gaffin has already provided elsewhere for this statement, his words here, as quoted, clearly do not claim that there is *no* relationship between justification and sanctification. Gaffin says that, for Calvin, which order one adopts for *discussing* justification and sanctification is indifferent *theologically*. He does not say that either benefit of union is indifferent in general or in relation to the other. As far as Calvin is concerned, it does not risk anything *theologically* to

discuss sanctification before discussing justification, which of course he does in his *Institutes* as a matter of pedagogy prompted by his desire to overturn the Roman charge of licentiousness.

6. Fesko goes on to note Gaffin's criticism of the characteristic Lutheran procedure of arguing for sanctification as a fruit or consequence of justification. Please notice my language: the *characteristic* Lutheran procedure, not the *universal* Lutheran procedure in contrast to the *universal* Reformed procedure. Gaffin's own words, quoted by Fesko, read: "Unless I need to be corrected, this is more the case in the Lutheran tradition, where, in the *ordo salutis*, union is regularly sequenced following justification, as a fruit of consequence in justification" (18-19). Allow me to quote Gaffin's words once more but this time accenting the all-important qualifiers that are already in there: "Unless I need to be corrected, this is *more the case* [not "always the case"] in the Lutheran tradition, where, in the *ordo salutis*, union is *regularly* [not "always"] sequenced following justification, as a fruit of consequence in justification." I note this feature of Gaffin's actual words at this early juncture because the issue of misreading and over-reading what has been said by Gaffin, myself, and others regarding the relationship between the Reformed tradition and the Lutheran tradition is a regular and conspicuous misstep in the volume as a whole, as review of the essays to follow will note.

7. Fesko also emphasizes Gaffin's view that justification is prior to sanctification only when the latter is conceived as a process, not as a definitive act, and that this understanding has precedent not only in John Murray but also was anticipated to some degree in Calvin. Fesko is only introducing the main lines of interpretation that he will engage later, so he does not yet evaluate this idea.

8. He concludes this section with the words, "Gaffin's conclusions have been carried forth by others for both historical theological and dogmatic ends," and then introduces Carpenter and Tipton followed by myself and then Evans. The opening words of this next section read, "In many respects the law of unintended consequences has arisen with regard to Gaffin's earlier reading of Calvin, as he has produced a school of historians and theologians who have come to similar conclusions" (19).

"Unintended consequences" – this sounds like a bad thing, then. "Gaffin's earlier reading of Calvin." Hm. "Produced a school of historians and theologians." Hm again. "Who have come to similar conclusions." Presumably they've come to those conclusions because of Gaffin, then, and not because of their own work on Calvin. But first things first.

a. Let's pause over Fesko's appeal to "Gaffin's earlier reading of Calvin" which has allegedly "produced a school of historians and theologians." To note only the chronological element for now: of the publications by Gaffin that Fesko has noted, only *Resurrection and Redemption* precedes the publications by Carpenter, Tipton, and Garcia, and this book is a study of Paul, not of Calvin. And in this book on Paul, following the leads of the index reveals that most of Gaffin references to Calvin are instances of *disagreement* with Calvin's exegesis of this or that question, not appeals to Calvin as a forerunner of his own programmatic proposals. (And yet again, I must invoke Seinfeld: Not that there is anything wrong with that. But because the author is leading us to assume that something would be wrong with that, we continue…) And in his concluding chapter, where Gaffin explores the implications of his Pauline study for the traditional Reformed conception of the *ordo salutis* (which Fesko is quite concerned about), Calvin is not cited or referred to a single time. No, not once, neither in support of Gaffin's view nor in contrast to it.

But what about the "school of historians and theologians" Gaffin's work on Calvin is said to have "produced?" My own Ph.D. work on Calvin, on which Fesko will focus a lot of attention later in this book, was completed in 2003 (and assessed in 2004, and then published in 2008) *before* the earliest of Gaffin's only articles and essays on Calvin and union with Christ (published in 2003, 2006, and 2009). (And I did not see his 2003 article prior to its publication.)

b. Carpenter's 2002 article ("A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification," *WTJ* 64/2 [2002]: 363-86) mentions Gaffin only three times, and then only as a study of *Paul*, not of Calvin (Carpenter, "A Question of Union?," p. 378 n. 47; 382 n. 53 refers to Gaffin's work on the *ordo salutis*; 386 n. 61 includes Gaffin with Stephen Taylor and Timothy Trumper in the author's acknowledgements).

Notice, moreover, that Fesko errs on this point: on p. 20 n. 32, Fesko refers to Carpenter and says:

> "Carpenter indicates that Gaffin's reading of Calvin has informed his own reading and cites Gaffin's *Resurrection and Redemption* (127-43) for support ("Calvin and Trent on Justification," 378 n. 47). Gaffin, on the other hand, later cites Carpenter in support of his reading of Calvin ("Biblical Theology," 177 n. 26)."

But we must always read the sources being cited. In fact, Carpenter, in the place Fesko cites, does *not* "indicate that Gaffin's reading *of Calvin* has informed his own reading" but points instead to Gaffin's work on *Paul*. Carpenter's note in question reads, *in toto*:

> "Although Calvin does not use the term, the character of this vital, Spiritual union between the believer and the exalted Christ is decidedly eschatological. On this *as regards Pauline theology more specifically*, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), esp. 127-43; the wording of this last sentence is dependent on Gaffin's on p. 132" (italics mine).

It could not be clearer that Carpenter is citing Gaffin *as a reader of Paul*, not Gaffin as a reader of Calvin.

What Fesko notes in passing regarding Gaffin's appeal to Carpenter prompts a not insignificant question, too. Based on Gaffin's citation of Carpenter for Calvin on union with Christ and Trent, noted by Fesko, why doesn't Fesko propose a *Carpenter* school of which Gaffin is a member?

c. Turning to Tipton's essay, he certainly both develops Gaffin's work on Paul and includes discussion of Calvin's soteriology, but again, other than one footnote in which Tipton cites Gaffin's reading of Calvin on the question of "priority" and "theological" indifference (Tipton, "Justification and Union with Christ," 41 n. 35), there is little material evidence in the essay of Tipton's dependence on *Gaffin on Calvin*.

d. Finally, reading Evans' book one looks in vain for *even one* mention of Gaffin in his entire chapter on Calvin.

None of this bodes well for Fesko's claim that Gaffin's work on Calvin spiraled into being a distinct school of thought on Calvin interpretation that is recognizable in publications by Carpenter, Tipton, Garcia, Evans, et al. Scholarly argument requires more than association. To be sure, each of these writers learned a great deal from Gaffin and would agree together on some of these ideas in contention, but I

submit that many more would as well, including Calvin scholars who have no institutional or personal overlap whatsoever with Richard Gaffin, Jr. My own review of the literature indicates that Calvin scholars have long known the things now in dispute.

No, it seems far more likely that something Evans says in the "acknowledgments" section of his book is much closer to fact. He writes, "Interest in the theme of Union with Christ and its role in Reformed theology was stimulated for this writer over twenty years ago now by two professors at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia – Sinclair B. Ferguson and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr." (Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, p. xiii). (We note, incidentally, that Gaffin is not the only one listed.)

"Stimulated:" that is undoubtedly the case, and we can say more than stimulated – many have undoubtedly been instructed and inspired by Gaffin's appreciation for Calvin to return to Calvin's writings themselves with a fresh interest in the way the Reformer expounded upon union with Christ and the *duplex gratia*. To be sure, Gaffin's reading of Calvin and the readings of others in the list must be evaluated against the standard of the texts and the evidence. But "stimulating" or "inspiring" and founding a distinct "school" of Calvin interpretation are quite different things, and the evidence just doesn't support the latter.

As a last remark on this point, one should recognize the (presumably unintentional) effects of the choice to propose an entity like the "Gaffin-school." As the author has explained it, the alleged school consists of a cluster of former students and/or colleagues of Gaffin's who have reached conclusions similar to or identical with Gaffin on a range of disputed points concerning Calvin. Moreover, these school members are dependent upon Gaffin for those conclusions. What this means, then, is that despite the fact that the texts and the chronology do not support such a notion, and despite the fact that Gaffin himself has objected to the idea of the thing, the extensive criticisms in this book against the various writers associated with the "school" are ultimately criticisms of Gaffin himself. It is the unfortunate reality inherent to this ill-conceived proposal, and it is unfair both to Gaffin and to the other writers who have labored in the texts for themselves and documented their research.

The notes on the introduction will be continued in the next post.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (3): The State of the Question, pt 2

Posted on December 5, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

(Continued)

When Fesko turns from Gaffin to summarize my work and the work of Evans, Fesko notes my effort to compare Calvin's views with Luther, Melanchthon, and Osiander (21). Fesko also provides a summary of what he regards as the conclusions of my study. I'll take each point in turn.

1. "First," says Fesko, "Garcia rejects the troubled *Centraldogma* theory but nonetheless argues that union with Christ is singularly determinative for Calvin's soteriology."

I reply: Yes, and I thank Dr. Fesko for acknowledging that I do, in fact, reject the *Centraldogma* theory, although what he goes on to say later in the book suggests he doesn't really believe that I do reject it. And yes, I do argue that union with Christ is "singularly determinative" (those are actually my words, though Fesko doesn't use quotation marks here) for his *soteriology* – in other words, not his *theology as a whole* but his theology of salvation *particularly*. And when I suggest that this is the case, I go to great pains to explain what it does and does not mean.

2. "Second," Fesko continues, "he believes that significant differences lie between the Lutheran and Reformed camps on justification and union with Christ because Lutherans are more willing to equate justification with salvation, whereas Calvin sees salvation as union with Christ, which is the broader all-encompassing reality, one that embraces both the forensic and renovative dimensions of redemption."

I reply: Yes, that is correct. While I might want to word it a little differently, to point out how and why would amount to quibbling and I think we all can agree we need less of that, not more.

3. "Third," he continues, "Garcia argues that Lutheranism views justification as the source of sanctification and good works. For example, in his analysis of Melanchthon's views, he writes: 'Ultimately, this necessity is based upon a model which regards imputation or justification as the *source* of sanctification, understood in terms of cause and effect.' Garcia also contends: 'By attributing a generative quality to justification (justification produces sanctification), such a schema compromises the strictly forensic, purely declarative notion of justification that is the lifeblood of Melanchthon's (and the classical Lutheran) gospel.'"

I reply: Yes, I argue that justification as the source of sanctification and good works (which, by the way, are not synonyms) is more *characteristic* of the Lutheran than the Reformed tradition, that this is evidenced in the texts of the period in which these traditions were forming, and that the theological and historical contexts for this difference are complex but important to understand.

With respect to Melanchthon, yes, I do describe his views that way, but this is simply because Melanchthon himself does (explicitly in his Romans expositions, with which I'm interacting – and extensively quoting – at this point in my book) and I assume it is good form to believe him rather than to argue with him about what he really thinks.

And yes, I continue to believe that ascribing a generative quality or core to justification such that it causes or produces sanctification *unintentionally* compromises, *theologically,* the strictly forensic nature of the justification pronouncement.

But do note that, in the quote Fesko uses, I am assuming that a strictly forensic notion of justification is a common or shared conviction among Lutherans and Reformed, that it is precious to Melanchthon and the classical Lutheran gospel *just as it is* with Calvin and other Reformed theologians. Yes, I am saying the Reformed and Lutherans *agree* on this and on very many other things in the doctrine of justification, as I argue repeatedly in my work. In fact, what I argue in my book depends on recognizing this basic commonality in definition and concern. (Keep this in your back pocket for now.)

4. Fesko continues: "Fourth, hence the common equation of the statements, 'Justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls,' commonly attributed to Luther, with Calvin's famous, 'Justification is the hinge upon which all religion turns,' is incorrect. Luther and Calvin are saying very different things, according to Garcia."

I reply: yes, the simple equation of the sayings is incorrect or infelicitous precisely because of its unhelpful over-simplicity. But since Fesko states that I claim "Luther and Calvin are saying *very different* things," let me quote what I actually said for comparison with Fesko's reading. I wrote:

"Despite *important continuities*, then, Calvin's 'main hinge on which religion turns' *(Inst.* [1539] 3.11.1) is not *identical* with the *Lutheran* 'doctrine of the standing or falling church,' neither in nature (justification as the *de facto* sum-total of salvation) nor in function (justification as theological center or hermeneutical rule)" (*Life in Christ*, 260-61, emphases added). We note:

a. Fesko refers to Garcia on "Luther and Calvin" but Garcia distinguishes Calvin from a *Lutheran* idea, not Luther. Let me say this for the first of many times: in the English language, as well as in history and theology, "Luther" is not a simple synonym for "Lutheran/Lutheranism." When I say "Luther" I mean Luther. When I say "Lutheran" I mean figures who identify (or are accurately identified by others) with the distinctives of the Lutheran tradition, are in some way characteristic or representative of that tradition, or to the Lutheran symbols themselves, depending on the context.

b. Fesko refers to Garcia's view that Luther and Calvin mean "very different things" but in the quote Fesko uses Garcia points explicitly to "*important continuities*" in the very idea itself, and says that they are not *identical* to one another, followed by two ways (nature and function) in which they are said not to be *identical.*

Whether or not Luther came up with the saying is beside the point since I do not here claim that Luther said it or invented it. As I argue in the book, when one refers to justification as the "standing or falling" article one cannot simply assume Calvin means the exact same thing by his "hinge upon which all religion turns," especially in light of the evidence I have sought to provide in the book that precedes this concluding observation.

I offer one example of why we cannot simplistically blend the two slogans together, despite our inordinate affection for slogans these days. "Religion" and the "religious life" do not necessarily mean in the early modern era what they mean in our own. It does not necessarily mean, for instance, religious thought or

theology as a system. Calvin is not here saying that justification is the hinge of the Christian Faith as such. As I will show in a forthcoming post, *religio* in Calvin's usage is frequently (including in this particular context) roughly equivalent to what we mean by "spirituality" or the "Christian life" as a spiritual and liturgical experience. "Religion" is still used this way today. Calvin certainly believes, as I do, that "religion" in this sense depends, in no uncertain terms, on the peace of conscience we enjoy in connection with justification. But this *experiential* connection, which I would not wish to minimize and still less deny, is not the same as a *theological* connection, as though justification causes sanctification theologically (which is, again, what I regard as *more characteristic* of the Lutheran tradition in its formative stage of development).

In other words, this is to affirm at least one idea Fesko is unsure I hold, viz., that for Calvin there is a sense in which we can say justification is prior to and even "causes" sanctification, and yet I affirm this only when we have sanctification in view as a progressive or ongoing (not definitive) reality, or as the religious life taken rather comprehensively. This, after all, would be the ordinary way of speaking of sanctification in Calvin's day, and it would be anachronistic to insist Calvin should be clearer if he recognizes any "definitive" aspect to sanctification which would not be "caused" by sanctification. Analysis of his writings can alone indicate whether or not he recognizes that the sanctification reality is more than progressive, that it includes as well a "definitive" dimension, to use our vocabulary.

To return to the main point, however, "religion," in these early modern terms and more importantly in Calvin's usage, "hinges" upon justification. Otherwise our pursuit of the religious life cannot but fall over the cliff of self-righteousness and exacerbate our troubled consciences.

5. Fesko continues:

> "Fifth, and lastly, Garcia believes that Calvin's views became normative for the Reformed tradition as a whole: 'Calvin is not exhaustive of Reformed theology, not even in its sixteenth-century expression. Other important Reformed thinkers from the period must be read and studied with great care.' Nevertheless," *says Fesko*, "Garcia insists: 'Still, as his place in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought certainly suggests, Calvin did function as the principal theologian and systematizer of the tradition in its infancy, often providing the necessary sophistication in theological form and structure.' So while Calvin is not the prescriptive theologian of the Reformed tradition, he is nevertheless one who is chiefly responsible for the shape and substance of its theology. The intended message is that Calvin's understanding of the *duplex gratia* and union with Christ is somewhat normative for the tradition."

I reply: Yes, I do link "Calvin's views" directly with what is true of the Reformed tradition generally, though not quite as simplistically as Fesko suggests, as though it were a simple matter of Calvin-cause-and-Reformed-effect. Importantly, by way of elaboration of what I in fact argue in the book, "Calvin's views" on union with Christ and the *duplex gratia* are elaborated and expounded in a more sophisticated manner in his writings than in others of his day and later days (thus my interaction in the book with the views of Bucer, Vermigli, and Zanchi, as well as my note regarding Obadiah Sedgwick later), but other early Reformed theologians held the same basic ideas in common with him (again, as I note in my book), and they too are part of what became the customary Reformed way of speaking and thinking on these matters. I am grateful that Fesko notes my comment that Calvin is "not exhaustive of Reformed theology,

not even in its sixteenth-century expression," but later sections of this book sober me (again) as to how seriously he has taken what I say here.

6. This requires a further observation. Yes, I do regard Calvin as uniquely important in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought, but– as I hope to demonstrate one day in an article on the subject – it is a curiosity of recent literature that this is questioned so frequently. The present book is a particularly energetic and vivid example. It would appear that the only way some writers believe we will pay attention to Vermigli, Musculus, Zanchi, et al. is if we have minimized Calvin's role first, which is at least a peculiar approach. It is an example of over-reaction to the undeniable and truly unfortunate neglect these other important theologians and figures have suffered over the years as well as to mythological distortions of Calvin's person and theology. But it is an overreaction all the same.

Since Richard Muller is frequently cited in support of the humbling of Calvin in terms of influence (and I am persuaded the references to Muller do not always understand him), consider the following from Muller:

> "A small, largely neglected, but far from negligible aspect of the relationship between the Reformed theology of the mid-sixteenth century and the Reformed orthodoxy of the seventeenth century is the understanding of Calvin's thought as it was received by later Reformed theologians. The numerous editions, translations, and synopses of the *Institutes* printed during the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries testify to its continuing use and importance to later Reformed theology" (*The Unaccommodated Calvin*, p. 62; see the entire chapter).

More can be said on Calvin editions and so forth but I will leave this to another time.

Consider, too, that of the theologians mentioned by name on the floor at the Westminster Assembly, Calvin is easily in the top three. In the "Register of Citations" in the recently published *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, the only figures who approximate Calvin in mentions on the floor (25x) are Augustine and Beza. (While it is an influence and role different in form from Calvin's, Beza's considerable stature is another example of tragic understatement in modern historiography, but we can be thankful this is being redressed by quality scholarship.) Other important figures such as Vermigli, Musculus, and Zanchi are mentioned only a few times each.

Since I am the one who compiled that Register, and since part of my work as an editor on the *Minutes and Papers* required that I read what the Divines read and were using in their deliberations, I can assure you, too, that while the mere statistics of the citations on the floor can often be misleading, they are not misleading when it comes to Calvin's exceptional role in their theological thinking. At the very least, the abundance of references to Calvin indicates that, in a context of theological controversy, late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians thought it highly advantageous for their cause to name or use Calvin. Even if one does not wish to grant the theological influence, one must still grant the unique rhetorical and sociological weight Calvin had among Reformation and Orthodox Reformed writers. Listen to enough Reformed sermons and read enough popular Reformed Christian literature and you can see this is still the case.

7. More on this matter will have to await a later section in Fesko's book, but these observations set up the same concerns one must have with what Fesko goes on to say later under the heading "Calvin as the norm" (pp. 24-6). Here, indicating that "[there] are a number of seemingly problematic conclusions that have

been drawn" from what he regards as a paradigm shift in Calvin studies (24), Fesko points to the notion of Calvin as a/the normative theologian of the Reformed tradition as symptomatic of the Gaffinian trend. He objects specifically to Gaffin's estimation of Calvin's teaching on justification as "the matured expression" of the first generation of the Reformation era and as "arguably… unsurpassed," an estimation which seems fairly innocuous and even circumspect (note Gaffin's apparently overlooked inclusion of "arguably"), but it is at least hardly original. Fesko regards this high view of Calvin's contribution and influence regarding justification as "mythology" of which "all of the aforementioned" writers are guilty (25).

8. Fesko goes on to note differences between the way Luther is viewed and used in the Lutheran tradition and the way Calvin is viewed and used in the Reformed tradition. The contrast is mostly accurate – John Calvin is not the singular fountainhead of the Reformed tradition, nor is he *necessarily* the most important theologian of the Reformation era on any given topic – but I am not aware of any writers in the purported "Gaffin-school" who have suggested otherwise. When Fesko refers to Muller's article called "Demoting Calvin" in support of the claim that Calvin was not the one-stop-shop for the Reformed tradition, I have no difficulty with this. But, again, this does not warrant a reactionary stance.

9. Next, Fesko tackles "the absence of primary sources." He states: "Another problematic element of the arguments presented above is that the bulk of the claims of difference between the Reformed and Lutheran understandings of justification and union are built upon a thin veneer of primary sources, though Garcia's study is an exception, as he investigates both Luther and Melanchthon" (26-7). While I sincerely appreciate the positive note in this sentence, Fesko does not cite any examples of this neglect of primary sources in the writings of the "Gaffin-school" or in Barth. But this is only the introduction so we should not expect this yet; citations of evidence will await treatment in his essays. What he says (following Muller again, I judge) about the dangers in using Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* should be heeded by unsuspecting students.

10. From primary sources Fesko turns next to "Whig historiography," a loaded descriptor sure to create more walls with his detractors. He claims that "much of the above-surveyed scholarship represents" a "Whig" interpretation of history (again this seems to depend on Muller), at least to some degree. This means historians are evaluating the past in light of the present, a claim that I will suggest in the course of this series of posts is wholly ironic for Fesko to make.

As "milder forms" of this errant methodology, he includes Gaffin, Tipton, and Evans by name. His essential objection in each case is that the author has "imposed" his own context ("twentieth-century theological categories" [27]) upon the sources and identified ideas or arguments in historical texts and figures as in some way relevant to today's situation, an objection which should be remembered whenever Fesko decides to use any historical figure in support of a contemporary theological argument. The author is strongly allergic to arguments that Calvin or some other historical theologian has said something that has been lost, underplayed, or eclipsed in later periods, and that it is worthy of recovery. Once again, the merits of the particular claims need to be measured against the evidence in the texts, but I am more concerned that Fesko is convinced that entertaining *the very possibility* is out of bounds and has no place in theological thinking. Perhaps Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Calvin, Beza, the Westminster divines, Warfield, Hodge, or Murray only repeated what came before them, and perhaps they have nothing to say to us theologically since they are dead and labored in contexts different from ours, so that to use them for such a purpose is invalid. Perhaps, too, there is nothing in the notion that the church

fathers or medievals might have said something about justification or the canon and authority of Scripture that was lost or misused after their day and is worth recovering, and that the Reformers and Reformed Orthodox were therefore wrong to use them in their polemics against Trent or Bellarmine and Stapleton. I cannot imagine this is what Fesko intends, especially since his book allegedly seeks to *recover* an older model *for the present* that he is persuaded has been misunderstood and misused, but this is where his historiographical objections drive us. It is one thing to argue for context-sensitive historiographical responsibility, but it is another thing to argue that merely the perceived relevance of older figures for contemporary questions smacks of anachronism.

11. Moving on to "the argument of the present essay," we read the author outline the goals for his book. He will show, first, "that Calvin's formulations on union with Christ and justification are in no way normative for the tradition. Calvin is one star in a much bigger galaxy. There is no one theological figure that serves as the lodestar as in the Lutheran tradition." And so Fesko intends to survey a wider field of figures and texts than Calvin alone. This first goal is, in my view, an example of a tendency toward overstatement that we find throughout the book: "in no way normative," "a much bigger galaxy." Our review of the studies to follow will assess his arguments for these claims.

12. Secondly, Fesko "will demonstrate that there is no one doctrine of union with Christ and no one *ordo salutis*. There are a number of different permutations and combinations that one can find in the tradition." I have no problem with this, and would argue the same myself. But I find this confident assertion ironic as well. Does this mean, then, that Fesko might acknowledge that there is, in the texts of the tradition, something approximating what Vos or Murray or Gaffin or Tipton or Evans or Carpenter have found in Calvin and others? That this way of understanding union with Christ and the benefits might have some, even if not exclusive or exhaustive, place in the Reformed tradition?

13. Thirdly, Fesko "will show that… to talk of union with Christ is to speak of the forest, and to talk of the *ordo salutis* is to speak of the trees." What Fesko means is that he will treat union and the *ordo salutis* as "one and the same" (29).

14. Fourth, Fesko

> "will validate the following claim: union with Christ has the double-benefit of justification and sanctification. But the hallmark of an early modern Reformed doctrine of union with Christ is according theological priority to justification over sanctification, or priority of the forensic over the renovative. Another way to say this is that justification is the legal basis of the believer's redemption."

This is indeed a claim asserted repeatedly throughout the book, but in connection with his third point it also draws attention to an example of category confusion: to identify union with Christ and the *ordo salutis* as "one and the same" is already potentially problematic since this posits one gift (union) as *identifiable with* all the other gifts (the *ordo salutis*, of which union is a part). In a case of something like genre confusion, it also confuses a *gift* (union) with a *structural question* pertaining to theological relationships (the *ordo salutis*). And, while the meaning of these words will await his exposition later, to go on and say that "justification is the legal basis of the believer's redemption" sounds potentially like a confusion of *historia salutis* (the historical accomplishment of redemption) with *ordo salutis* (the application of the already-accomplished redemption) in the way that some today confuse the death of Christ on the cross

with justification and his resurrection with sanctification. Fesko's statement, after all, makes one benefit of redemption (justification) the foundation for the believer's redemption itself. It suggests, at this early point, a cluster of possible category confusions that will have to be kept in view as the rest of the book is read.

After more intimations of what the author's concerns are in the published literature (I will postpone consideration of them till later in the book), the remainder of the introductory chapter outlines the subject matter of the essays that follow. I will let the outlines stand so we can move more expeditiously to the essays themselves.

At this point we have reviewed only the introduction, a survey-discussion that – with the notable exception of the problematic proposal of a "Gaffin-school of Calvin interpretation" – is largely descriptive rather than analytical. Nevertheless it has assumed the terrain of Calvin and Reformed studies looks a certain way, an assumption that I suggest informed readers simply will not grant, and this disturbs the foundation of the book from the outset. We have not yet had many opportunities to evaluate the author's use of evidence or reading of both primary and secondary sources. This will change in our turn to the first chapter of the book, "Metaphysics and Justification," a chapter which I regard as the most problematic in the book as a whole. We will need to proceed through it in subsequent posts at a rate of almost one paragraph at a time.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (4): Metaphysics and Justification, pt 1

Posted on December 6, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

The leading essay of *Beyond Calvin* is called "Metaphysics and Justification" (pp. 34-52). This is a lightly revised version of an article first published under the title, "Metaphysics and Justification in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 46 (April, 2011): 29-47. If you are interested in reading only a few posts in this series, I recommend that you read this one and the ones to follow which cover this particular essay. In my view this essay is a uniquely useful and representative sample of the way the author works with his material and structures his arguments in the book as a whole. There is one part of the essay that may be the most important issue in the book, but I beg your patience as we get to that point by way of other important observations we must make along the way.

As a last preliminary remark, let me also add that I will endeavor to evaluate this essay against the evidence in published texts. I mention this because the author has focused his energies on my own work in this essay, and the temptation is strong to criticize his arguments at the level of what I *meant* to say or what I *really* believe. If that is what I want to do or believe I have to do, I will try to remember to tell you what I am doing: I will note the shift in my remarks explicitly because I do not think it is fair to expect others to know what someone means or thinks "behind" what he actually says in (ideally peer-reviewed) published and thus public material. (Published corrections, clarifications, or retractions are always completely valid, of course, because they belong to the literature.) Thus, I will try to interact with Fesko's treatment of my work in the same way as I will treat his handling of anyone else's work: at the level of the texts, both the author's and the historical texts under consideration. Again, if I break from this to explain myself in a way that my published words don't do sufficiently, I will signal the change and will not hold Fesko liable for failing to read my mind. (They did not offer a mind-reading class in my seminary, at least.) And now, some reflections on the first paragraph of the essay:

1. In the opening paragraph, the author notes there have been several studies in recent years on the topic of union with Christ, and indicates that he has decided to pay particular attention to my book, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (2008). He then states, "Among Garcia's many conclusions is the claim that in the wake of the justification controversy surrounding Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander, there was a decided break between Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition and the Lutheran tradition on the doctrine of justification." The author then footnotes p. 251 in *Life in Christ*. Please keep this statement handy and note the following.

a. First of all, as a matter of clarification for the reader rather than critique of the author, the syntax of Fesko's statement is somewhat unclear: do I claim there was a "decided break" between Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition and then another break between Calvin and the Lutheran tradition? The earlier version of this sentence in the *CTJ* article is a bit clearer, and I think it more likely that Fesko means I argue that Calvin and the Reformed tradition are on one side of the "decided break" and the Lutheran tradition is on the other side.

b. I would like to draw attention, however, not only to the author's claim but what he has based this claim on. He has asserted specifically that I posit a "decided break" between Calvin (in concert with the later Reformed tradition) and the Lutheran tradition on the doctrine of justification, and that I see this as occurring in the wake of the Osiandrian controversy. My work on Calvin's refutation of Osiander is among the most important arguments in my book, and the argument I make regarding the significance of that refutation is cumulative in nature, so Fesko is justly sensitive to its importance. However, as I hope to demonstrate in later posts, I am rather strongly persuaded that he does not understand *what* I have argued regarding Calvin and Osiander, *why* I have argued it, and *how it relates to the thesis* of the book as a whole.

In this first hint of the problem (and it is only a hint so far), compare Fesko's statement in this first paragraph of the essay with what I say in my book in the place he cites. Once again, here is Fesko: "Among Garcia's many conclusions is the claim that in the wake of the justification controversy surrounding Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander, there was a decided break between Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition and the Lutheran tradition on the doctrine of justification" (footnoting *Life in Christ*, p. 251). And now here is what p. 251 in my book actually says (I will quote into p. 252):

> "The reader will recognize that at this point an interesting historical-theological question emerges. If this reading of Calvin's refutation of Osiander is correct, then at least the possibility should be entertained that the Osiandrian controversy, and specifically Calvin's 1559 refutation, marks the inception of an *explicit* divergence between Lutheran and Reformed in the area of salvation. Their sharply divergent perspectives on Christ and the Supper having been established years earlier, it is arguably here, in 1559 at the height of eucharistic controversy, that the soteriological implications of their sacramental differences are for the first time identified and employed at length by an active participant. In other words, this explicit divergence in relating justification and sanctification, evident already in earlier decades as demonstrated in Chapter 3 above, arose out of the simultaneous eucharistic (Supper) and Osiandrian (justification) controversies of the 1550s, but was not related directly to these controversies until Calvin creatively merged them, using Osiander as his foil.

> [start p. 252] That said, it is of the greatest importance to observe again that the Osiandrian affair did not nullify the significant continuity that obtained, and continued to obtain in great measure during the period of Orthodoxy, between Lutheran and Reformed understandings of justification as the imputation of Christ's uniquely meritorious righteousness. But the controversy did clarify what was already evident earlier, that the Lutheran and Reformed strands of the Reformation had in fact adopted distinguishable understandings of the justification/sanctification relationship."

c. We notice, then, that I state that "an interesting historical-theological *question* emerges" from what I have documented in the Calvin-Osiander material, which is to say I am proposing it for consideration. In truth, I am more confident now than I was back then that my conclusions are sound, but in the text Fesko cites I am expressing myself tentatively. We can add my "if this reading… is correct" and "at least the possibility should be entertained" to evidence of my effort to propose for consideration.

d. In the passage above, I do not argue that there was a "decided break" in the wake of the Osiandrian controversy. I argue instead that there was a *divergence in relating justification and sanctification, evident already in earlier decades*, and that what is new is not the divergence but the *explicit* nature of it in the nature and manner of Calvin's refutation of Osiander. It is not new to the Osiandrian controversy: it was already implicit, it now becomes explicit.

e. Further, I do not argue that there was a break at the level of the doctrine of justification *simpliciter*. I speak specifically of a divergence *in relating justification and sanctification*. The difference is monumentally important. I argue here and repeatedly elsewhere that it is not the doctrine of justification as such (i.e., how we define it in, say, catechism questions) but the way justification and sanctification are *related* that is the area of divergence. Note the second paragraph I have cited above, which makes all of this quite clear.

f. Finally, please note the express concern in the passage quoted to accent ("it is of the greatest importance") the areas of significant and continued commonality between Calvin and the emerging Lutheran tradition.

2. I will have to leave more Osiander-related material to a later point. For now, we continue to a place in this opening paragraph that is only two sentences later. Here we read the author state: "Garcia argues that, for Calvin, the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification is grounded in the more fundamental category of union with Christ and therefore justification cannot be accorded any sort of priority over sanctification."

a. The reader will note the strong language here: Garcia argues that, for Calvin, justification "cannot be accorded *any sort of* priority over sanctification." Not only is this an example of over-reaching; this is simply false, and demonstrably so. The reader will recall how I affirmed a sort of priority in my last post, but this is not a new affirmation. In a 2007 piece for *Ordained Servant*, of which we can be sure Fesko is aware and which was published long before the book under review, I said the following (in response to questions about a previous article in which I reviewed another volume):

> "There has been some question too about my own understanding of the relationship of justification and sanctification, particularly about any "priority" of the former to the latter. First of all, I would guess we all find language of "priority" to be at least somewhat ambiguous. What does one mean

> by priority, even "logical" priority? Is it chronological? Causal? Of central importance? Something else? I find that proponents of the priority of justification are ordinarily unable to explain this idea without using causal language (suggesting, for instance, that sanctification "flows from" or in some sense arises from justification as its effect) and without being left with a doctrine of union with Christ that is merely formal or nominal."

However, I would alert the reader to the fact that, in my article, I affirmed one sense in which I think language of priority is helpful: experiential, and not theological. As I said in reply to a point raised in Dr. Jones's essay, "I am not aware of anyone who would deny this [i.e., the realization that one is pardoned motivates obedience to the will of God], and speaking in this way of 'motivation' is surely appropriate. But we must not confuse the existential—what can be described in terms of my experience of grace—with the theological, as Jones, Godfrey (270, on Calvin), and others in *CJPM* seem to do." This is a useful and biblical way to think about priority, and I do not find it contradicts what is said in the OPC's Justification Report. In the Report, the relevant language speaks specifically of justification as the prerequisite to sanctification *understood as a process* (p. 60 in the edition published by the CCE). Because justification is in its very nature definitive (i.e., non-progressive), its being prior to progressive sanctification is self-evident and beyond dispute. What the Report does not affirm, however, is that justification is the prerequisite to *definitive* sanctification.

b. Moreover, I do not claim any such thing in the book Fesko is using for his analysis. To see this, note that Fesko follows this sentence with another before offering documentation for his claims. This next sentence is centrally important to his essay's concern. It reads, "By contrast, [Garcia] concludes that Lutheran theologians do not ground justification and sanctification in union, but rather instead place the two in a causal relationship: justification causes sanctification, or sanctification is the effect of justification." He then footnotes the following places in *Life in Christ* as support: pp. 61ff., 104-05, 241, 260-61, 264, 267 n. 24. It is to these places in my book that we are to expect evidence in support for both of the author's claims, namely, that I do not see in Calvin "any sort of priority" for justification in relation to sanctification, and that I argue that Lutherans see justification as the cause of sanctification. Please note:

c. There is nothing on p. 61 about either of these questions. Or on p. 62. Or on p. 63. Or on p. 64. In fact I do not know how far I should read in the "61ff." to find the evidence for these claims. There is nothing in the entire section about either topic. It is a section describing (in positive terms) Luther's relationship to mysticism, his transformation of the medieval "marriage sermon" tradition in the direction of his doctrine of justification, and his rich understanding of union with Christ.

d. Pp. 104-05 do indeed discuss Melanchthon's understanding of the justification-sanctification relationship as a matter of cause-and-effect. In fact I develop my argument in pp. 103-6. This argument is based on Melanchthon's expositions of Romans, which are the immediate concern and which are quoted and evaluated in this section of my book. There is nothing here, though, that suggests that Calvin denies "any sort of priority" of justification to sanctification.

e. There is nothing on p. 241 about either of these questions.

f. There is nothing on pp. 260-61 about Calvin denying "any sort of" priority of justification to sanctification. There is important material about the second idea, though, which is the Calvin-Lutheran

relationship. I'll quote my words again for your careful comparison with what Fesko has asserted regarding my views. From p. 260:

> "Second, 'doctrine of justification' needs explanation. If agreement on the *definition* of the term 'justification' is in view, such as what might be sought at the catechetical level, then the question is easy to answer in the affirmative. Calvin's understanding of 'justification' is basically synonymous with the brief definitions found in the classic Lutheran confessions. In his theology as much as theirs justification is a forensic declaration grounded upon the uniquely meritorious righteousness of Christ imputed to a believer by faith, entailing the forgiveness of sins and a righteous standing before God. The effort, it should be said, to pit union with Christ against forensic imputation in Calvin may be seen now to be deeply mistaken.[1]
>
> If, however, "doctrine of justification" means more than a bare-essentials definition such as one finds in a confessional document – if it includes, for example, the *relationship* justification bears to other aspects of God's saving work and the *context* in which justification is to be understood, the discussion of which is naturally involved in any treatment of the theology of justification – then one must answer negatively. Unlike his Lutheran counterparts, Calvin did not ground good works in imputation or justification but in union with Christ. In contradistinction with Melanchthon, for example, Calvin argued a positive, soteric value of good works as the ordinary prerequisite for receiving eternal life. It appears that basic differences exist in their respective understandings of justifying faith: at the heart of the inseparability in Calvin's *unio Christi-duplex gratia* formulation is a justifying faith defined not only passively, as a resting on Christ alone, but actively, as an obedient faith that, resting on Christ alone, perseveres in the pursuit of holiness."

g. There is nothing on p. 264 about either of these questions. On this page I speak only of Calvin's own views. There is no mention of his denying "any sort of" priority of justification to sanctification.

h. On p. 267, n. 24, I do note an example of how a more Melanchthonian form of speaking can be located within later Reformed theology. The note reads:

> "In later Reformed theology, a more Melanchthonian (i.e., classical Lutheran) pattern of argument appears to have become standard, resulting in the frequent exposition of justification and good works as cause and effect. See, e.g., what in light of our findings is a rather remarkable statement by Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1871; rep. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), vol. 3, p. 238: 'There has never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants… It was universally admitted that good works are not necessary to our justification; that they are consequences and indirectly the fruits of justification, and therefore cannot be its ground.'"

Of course, as a footnote on the penultimate page of the book (not counting appendices), it is an observation whose validity depends on what I have argued in the 250+ pages that precede this note. There is nothing, however, about the "any sort of priority" matter.

Those are the places cited thus far in support of the author's claims. And here ends our reflections on the first paragraph of the essay. We'll turn to the following paragraph in our next post, but only briefly and as a way into the first paragraph of the main section of the essay.

[1] So William Thompson, "Viewing Justification Through Calvin's Eyes: An Ecumenical Experiment." *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 451-3. Obscuring the *distinctio* element in Calvin's construct, Thompson also incorrectly claims (p. 452) that for Calvin justification is "already intrinsic and transformative." On union and imputation, see my "Imputation and the Christology of Union with Christ: Calvin, Osiander, and the Contemporary Quest for a Reformed Model," *WTJ* 68:2 (2006): 219-51.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (5): Metaphysics and Justification, pt 2 (Causation)

Posted on December 7, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

In this post I will focus attention on what the author identifies as the objective of his essay. Throughout the book Fesko tries to make clear what he hopes to achieve in his essays, and arguably the greatest service a discerning reader can render to him is to evaluate his success over against his stated goals. Let's begin our attempt to do so with a reminder of the last two sentences of the first paragraph, which read:

> "Garcia argues that, for Calvin, the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification is grounded in the more fundamental category of union with Christ and therefore justification cannot be accorded any sort of priority over sanctification. By contrast, he concludes that Lutheran theologians do not ground justification and sanctification in union, but rather instead place the two in a causal relationship: justification causes sanctification, or sanctification is the effect of justification" (34).

In my last post I evaluated the claim that I have argued Calvin denies "any sort of priority" of justification to sanctification. I have found it wanting, not only in light of what I think but in light of what I have said (and not said) in publication. The second of the two sentences quoted above transitions the reader to the burden of the essay as a whole.

Well, not exactly.

The "any sort of" remark to the side, in those two sentences the author does accurately summarize what I have concluded in my book, although I would express the matter with slightly more nuance: to the extent categorical language can be useful, Lutheran theologians typically do not ground justification and sanctification in union with Christ but instead root sanctification in justification as effect to cause, given their understanding of justification as theologically central. Moreover, my book seeks to demonstrate there are sensible exegetical and polemical-theological reasons for why the Lutheran tradition started on this trajectory and continued on it, more or less, through the period of confessionalization. Importantly, in my argument at least, this approach among the early Lutherans is a concrete and practical phenomenon on display in how "conditional" passages in the Scriptures are handled, rather than an abstract idea functioning only at the level of bare formulation. Also, in contrast to Calvin and other early Reformed theologians, as well as the Reformed symbols, the Lutheran tradition has not regarded justification and sanctification as derivative aspects of union with Christ. And once again there are sensible exegetical and polemical-theological reasons for why the Reformed tradition started on its trajectory and continued on it, more or less, through the period of confessionalization. In other words, while I am focused on Calvin and

the theologians of his day rather than the traditions as a whole, as Fesko properly notes here I have argued a *particular* conclusion regarding the *kind* of causation-model that, in the sixteenth century, became characteristically Lutheran.

So when we read the author's next sentence (which opens the second paragraph), in which the author refers to the difficulty of "investigating the viability of *such a claim*" (my emphasis) within the scope of his essay, and when we read in the same paragraph that he will "focus upon the narrow question of the doctrine of justification and metaphysics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology with particular attention to its relationship to sanctification and union with Christ" (35), the reader expects that the "claim" is what we just read: my argument for a certain kind of causation model for justification and sanctification in relation to union in the work of Calvin and his Lutheran counterparts. Further, in light of the author's appropriate and helpful warning against readings of the Reformation that naively perceive it as a "recovery of the gospel" which "preclude[s] any talk of metaphysics" (35), we also expect that we are in for a treat of a study of the fascinating and highly important question of developments in metaphysics and notions of causation in the early modern period.

Surprisingly, however, this is not the claim Fesko attacks in his essay. Our expectation of an informed and scholarly analysis of Reformation and post-Reformation metaphysics also will not be met. Instead, the burden of this essay is, as he says in the first sentence of a later paragraph titled "Thesis," to "demonstrate that *causal language was common among Reformed theologians* of the Reformation (1517-65) and Early Orthodox (1565-1630/40) periods. *Cause and effect language is not the exclusive mark of Lutheran theology*" (emphases mine). He goes on to say he will also demonstrate that Reformed explanations of justification and sanctification which use causal language "can" be found and explain "why such language occurs." Again, to be clear, he writes: "In order to prove the thesis of this chapter, *that causal language appears in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology and is not a phenomenon exclusive to Lutheranism*…" (36, emphasis mine), the author will survey Calvin's use of causal language and then survey other Reformed works before offering an explanation of why "metaphysics" was used in the explanation of doctrine and why it eventually vanished.

This is something we must pause over, but as a momentary aside, the author's summary of Calvin in the subsequent two paragraphs (37-8), and specifically what he does to Calvin's words is, in my reading, the most noteworthy and representative passage in the book. It is also the point where the situation before us, in terms of both theology and scholarship, transitions from being merely curious or pedantic or frustrating or troublesome to something rather more grave and solemn. We will look at this passage in our next post. In this post, we note only the causation "claim" and offer the following reflections on the author's project:

1. The author demonstrates unequivocally that this issue of *documenting the presence of causal language in Reformed and Lutheran theologians* is in fact the burden of his essay, and that he regards this as a *corrective* of my "claim." The problem, however, is – simply put – I have never suggested that causal language is the unique property of the Lutheran tradition and theologians, or that Reformed theologians don't use the language of causality, or that Calvin does not use causal language, or any such thing. I am the only target in the essay so far, but I have never said the things that will be controverted in this vigorously argued essay, not in the book under review or anywhere else. Ever. Note the following statements from the author in which he identifies his target:

> "At this point Calvin's use of metaphysics presents counter-evidence to *Garcia's claim that causal language is the exclusive property of the Lutheran tradition*" (38, emphasis mine).

Except that I have never claimed this, nor does the author here footnote any place in my publications where I have.

Again:

> "Part of the problem with Garcia's claims is that he examines a narrow cross-section of theologians, largely Calvin, Luther, and Melanchthon and then makes sweeping conclusions about two entire theological traditions without presenting more evidence. To this end, when we expand our study to explore other Reformed witnesses, it will become evident that causal language was present in the Reformed tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (39).

Leaving aside for today the erroneous assertions of the first sentence, the ostensibly grand demonstration anticipated by the second sentence is wholly beside the point. I'm not aware of anyone, including myself, who denies that "causal language was present in the Reformed tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth century." Honestly, even after what I have seen people willing to dare to say in publication, who would deny such a thing? At the very least, none of the sources Fesko has cited in the essay so far, which are almost exclusively references to my work, so much as suggest anything remotely like this. For the reader, it is more than a little deflating to realize so early on in an essay that great energy is being spent attacking a phantom.

2. I will deal with other examples of this in the essay as we make our way through it in posts to come. There is a second difficulty with the author's project in this essay to note, however. It is one thing to make a mistake when speculating what a writer might say or think, but for his part Fesko has to assert himself in the face of an abundance of evidence to the contrary. This is not the first or last time he is willing to jump this hurdle, but it is important to recognize it when it is happening. Note what we find in the book to which Fesko refers as evidence of his claims:

a. In ch. 2 of *Life in Christ*, p. 79, I note Bucer's use of a causality scheme for justification.

b. In ch. 3, I again note Bucer's use of causality (2x on p. 102).

c. More significantly for ch. 3, I refer in positive terms to Calvin's use of the language of causation no less than 39 times on pp. 111-147. In fact, I titled a section of this chapter "Aristotle's Causes in Calvin's Model" (pp. 117-19) because I discuss exactly what that title suggests, viz., Calvin's *use* of Aristotelian causation. Furthermore, the most important part of the chapter is called "Causation, Good Works, and Spirit-Replication" (pp. 145-6). Finally, I quote Calvin extensively in places where he uses causation language (e.g., p. 147).

d. In ch. 4, I refer to Calvin on causation a further six times, and I mention it eight more times in the conclusion of the book where I again quote Calvin on causation and provide a summary of what I have argued regarding his distinctive use of the causation scheme (see pp. 262-3).

e. That concluding summary reflects the burden of my discussion of Calvin on Romans in ch. 3, which is in fact to analyze *what kind of* causation model Calvin is working with. My investigation is prompted by Calvin's own words, such as these (but not restricted to these):

> "These do not prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes. But how does this come about? Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, *according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works. What goes before in the order of dispensation he calls the cause of what comes after*. In this way he sometimes derives eternal life from works, not intending it to be ascribed to them; but because he justifies those whom he has chosen in order at last to glorify them, *he makes the prior grace, which is a step to what follows, as it were the cause*. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he does not enjoin us to take refuge in works but keeps us solely to the contemplation of his mercy.[1]"

Despite all this, we recall what Fesko said in his essay: "At this point Calvin's use of metaphysics presents counter-evidence to Garcia's claim that causal language is the exclusive property of the Lutheran tradition."

I do argue in *Life in Christ* that Calvin's use of causation is different from the use found among his Lutheran counterparts, but it is patently clear that this is a difference in the *kind* of causation, not a denial that Calvin *used* it, or a claim that *only* Lutherans used it, etc. Passages like this one in Calvin are part of the reason I have explored his use of causation language.

f. The only thing I can come up with is that the author has rather badly misread his sources. He has somehow concluded I do not believe that Calvin uses causation language, and that other Reformed theologians do not use it either, and then he decided to write an essay to contradict it. But I have not suggested either notion. Nor do I ever suggest, in this book or elsewhere, that *there are no Reformed theologians* who speak of justification as the cause of sanctification, so that it is necessary to document *simply that there are Reformed theologians who have so spoken* as though it contradicts my claims. This is, again, the burden of Fesko's essay: to show that Reformed theologians use the language of causality and that some Reformed theologians speak of justification as the cause of sanctification. Very well, but this is uncontested. (More on the Calvin material will await the next post.)

3. On a final note for today, for those who are interested in early modern and especially theological uses of Aristotle's causes, I would like to recommend a close reading of the texts of the period in light of some recent analyses of the question that are quite helpful. I think particularly of Walter Ott's vigorous study, *Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy* (OUP, 2009) and, for the period in view, the fine work of Willem J. van Asselt: *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, edited with Eef Dekker (Baker Academic, 2001) and *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, written with T. T. J. Pleizier, P. L. Rouwendal, and M. Wisse (RHB, 2011). I believe you will find them quite useful.

In our next post, I will ask us to observe the author's transformation of a crucial text in Calvin's *Institutes.*

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[1] Calvin, *Inst*. (1539) 3.14.21; OS 4.238-9 (LCC 20.787): "Istis nihil obstat quominus opera Dominus, tanquam *causas inferiores* amplectatur; sed unde id? nempe quos sua misericordia, aeternae vitae

haereditati *destinavit, eos ordinaria sua dispensatione per bona opera inducit in eius possessionem. Quod in ordine dispensationis praecedit, posterioris causam nominat*. Hac ratione ab operibus interdum vitam aeternam deducit; non quod illis referenda sit accepta: sed quia quos elegit, iustificat ut demum glorificet, *priorem gratiam, quae gradus est ad sequentem, causam quodammodo facit*. At quoties assignanda est vera causa, non ad opera iubet confugere, sed in sola misericordiae cogitatione nos retinet."

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (6): Metaphysics and Justification, pt 3 (Changing Calvin)

Posted on December 11, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

With all the talk of the (predictable) return of antinomianism (on which, don't miss the helpful study by Mark Jones, *Antinomianism*), even to Reformed circles, I expect today's post will be of particular interest. One might even title this entry as "One Reason Why Calvin Wouldn't Be Invited to Your Local Reformed Conference on Salvation – And Why He Should Be the Plenary Speaker." In any case, this is an especially complex but urgently important phenomenon for a range of reasons I won't go into presently, but I mention it because today's post provides an example of a problem we discover more generally in recent literature: (1) discomfort with the language and theology of Scripture regarding the connection between obedience and eternal life translates into (2) discomfort with Reformed historical figures who don't share said discomfort, which in turn translates into (3) highly selective appeals to those figures and even the distortion of their writings.

I gasped the first few times I read the passage we are looking at today. I gasped because I saw immediately what the author had done to the words of Calvin, realized immediately why he had done so, knew what he would have had to ignore to get there, and feared what further damage this would do to the way Calvin is read by others.

Fesko's quote from Calvin appears exactly as follows (38):

> "These do not prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes. But how does this come about? Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works. What goes before in the order of dispensation he calls the cause of what comes after. In this way he sometimes derives eternal life from works, not intending it to be ascribed to them; but because he justifies those whom he has chosen in order at last to glorify them, he makes the prior grace [justification], which is a step to that which follows, as it were the cause. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he does not enjoin us to take refuge in works but keeps us solely to the contemplation of his mercy."

The most important feature of this quotation is not so much what Calvin says but what Fesko says in the name of Calvin: note that the word "justification" is in brackets. This is because Fesko has added it to Calvin's quote, believing that Calvin is here speaking of justification as "the prior grace which is a step to that which follows." Immediately after this passage, Fesko says the following:

> "Calvin is willing to assign good works the role of an inferior cause of salvation, but properly understood and within the context of his explanation it is ultimately a consequence of God's decision to save the sinner. But what is important to note is that Calvin calls justification a cause of good works… Calvin's use of metaphysical distinctions here not only shows how the various aspects of redemption relate to one another, but is the way he gives justification priority over sanctification. At this point Calvin's use of metaphysics presents counter-evidence to Garcia's claim that causal language is the exclusive property of the Lutheran tradition."

Some observations:

1. Regarding Fesko's last sentence, I trust that the material covered in our last post is more than sufficient to set aside the author's unfounded assertions that I claim causal language is the "exclusive property of the Lutheran tradition."

2. The first sentence in Fesko's statement is accurate. But because "good works as inferior cause of salvation" evidently sounds in his ears at least potentially problematic, his conjunction is "but" rather than "and," and he goes on say what he thinks is really "important to note" about what Calvin says. But this is where things go south quickly: he claims Calvin here "calls justification a cause of good works."

What makes this section of the book problematic, even uniquely and solemnly problematic, is that the author has not only misunderstood but also transformed Calvin. Misidentifying the antecedent in Calvin's statement, he inserts "justification" in order to have Calvin say what he wants him to say. Doing so would of course ostensibly support the validity of the author's thesis here and throughout the book, namely, that justification is the cause of sanctification theologically. But he has taken this step despite a host of red flags both in Calvin's text as well as in the book (*Life in Christ*) that he is allegedly refuting.

In support, please note the following:

a. When we remove the author's editorial change (his addition of "justification") to Calvin's quote and then read it again the way Calvin actually wrote it, it is clear that the "prior grace" of which Calvin is speaking is not justification but good works, which is the topic of the section and the question he is addressing. Reading the quote from the beginning makes this transparent: With an eye to the language of Rom. 2:6-7 (see later below) Calvin is affirming that good works are inferior (secondary) causes of eternal life, and the rhetorical question he is seeking to answer concerns how that can be so.

His answer, in outline form, is that (a) God has destined that he will bring his children to possess eternal life by way of a certain order or pattern; (b) this pattern is found in the story of Christ himself (cf. Rom. 8:17): humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory, obedience to eternal life; (c) this pattern, grounded as it is in the story of Christ himself, anchors our hope and expectation that eternal life will be the "end" of our course of obedience, not as a matter of meritorious causation but because God has determined to bring us to glory by way of that Christ-path; (d) for which reason "steps" in that path, including the good works in view in Romans, are "causes" of what follows inasmuch as this is how God has shaped our life in Christ; (e) the Spirit is the Agent of this work of "replicating" in us what is true of Christ; and (f) this pattern in the life of the Church is the content and form of our union with Christ by that Spirit. This is what union with Christ looks like at the level of Christian experience. The "prior grace" Calvin has in view is the reality of good works, and this is a "step" to what follows, ultimately eternal life. It's because Calvin is

more than aware of distortions of this relationship along the lines of meritorious causation – and yet refuses to give up the language of real causation simply because it is distorted – that he uses the language of "as it were:" "he makes the prior grace, which is a step to that which follows, *as it were* the cause."

3. Calvin's statement is from the period ending with 1539/1540. This is when the first revision of his *Institutes* was published. But this particular statement must be read alongside the first edition of his commentary on Romans, which he was working on at the same time. Putting his 1539/1540 commentary on Romans 2:6-7 alongside this 1539 addition to his *Institutes* shows he has the same subject matter in mind:

1540 *Romans*	1539 *Institutes*
This sentence, however, is not as difficult as it is generally assumed. By punishing the wickedness of the reprobate with just vengeance, the Lord will repay them what they deserve; and again because He sanctifies those whom He has previously resolved to glorify, He will also crown their good works, but not on account of any merit. This cannot, however, be proved from the present verse, which, while it declares what reward good works are to have, does not state their value, [*added 1556*:] or the price that is due to them. [*added 1551*:] It is foolish to assume that a thing has merit because it is rewarded.	The statement that God will render to every man according to his works is explained with little difficulty. For the expression indicates an order of sequence rather than the cause. But, beyond any doubt, it is by these stages of his mercy that the Lord completes our salvation when he calls those chosen to himself; those called he justifies; those justified he glorifies. That is to say, he receives his own into life by his mercy alone. Yet, since he leads them into possession of it through the pursuit (*studium*) of good works in order to fulfill his own work in them according to the order that he has laid down, it is no wonder if they are said to be crowned according to their own works, by which they are doubtless prepared to receive the crown of immortality.

4. Clearly Calvin has the question of good works as cause in view, not justification as cause. Consider now what obstacles the author had to jump over in order to misrepresent Calvin in this case.

a. Not only the opening and closing sentences of the Calvin quote he uses, but even the opening words of the author's own paragraph ("Calvin is willing to assign good works the role of an inferior cause of salvation") should have signaled to him that he is mistaken. All three sentences make clear Calvin is referring to *good works* in his reference to a "prior grace" that is a cause of what follows, not justification, since he is explaining how eternal life follows good works sequentially as effect to (secondary) cause. But Fesko is so eager to explain the notion away that he misconstrues Calvin's argument.

b. The editor's heading for this section in Calvin's *Institutes,* in the edition Fesko is citing, is titled, "Sense in which *good works* are sometimes spoken of as a reason for divine benefits" (LCC XX: 787, emphasis mine). This is not Calvin's section heading, but the fact that it's there should have at least alerted the author to good works, not justification, as the antecedent in Calvin's argument. To this we can add the fact that all the preceding sections in this part of the *Institutes* are also headed by the topic of works and their value, making it clear that's the topic and problem under consideration.

c. This section of the *Institutes* is a final, summative statement on the real, soteric value of *good works* for the Christian, as the next page (788) makes clear. It also transitions the reader into Calvin's rejection of the notion of human merit *(Inst.* 3.15).

d. The book the author claims to be critiquing along these lines, *Life in Christ*, should have alerted him to the true subject matter in Calvin's statement. *Life in Christ* includes an extensive analysis of this passage in Calvin's *Institutes*, as well as the Romans commentary passage, and all of this in the context not of justification as the cause of sanctification but of the challenge of this kind of "conditional language" *(if* obedience, *then* eternal life) as it was navigated not only by Calvin but by Melanchthon and others. Even though the author is disagreeing with this analysis, the whole analysis works with a contextual reading of what Calvin is speaking of. It seems safe to conclude once again either that he did not read the book he is criticizing or that he has at least failed to read it with care.

e. It is noteworthy that the author chooses "justification" as the term he will insert into Calvin's statement. It reflects the justification-centrism that characterizes the book as a whole. It reminds us, moreover, of the author's warnings against "Whig historiography" in his introduction.

f. The most regrettable feature of this misuse of Calvin is not only the way the author has led the reader down the wrong path, but the way it keeps the reader from considering the truly important and fascinating question of how the early Reformed theologians worked carefully with the text of Scripture – using Aristotelian causation as a tool but transforming it to conform to biblical teaching – in order to affirm clearly certain ideas that had been abused by their opponents. In other words, they did not go the route of saying that it is no longer safe to use biblical language because that language could be distorted. Instead, they insisted that the language of Scripture belongs to the Church.

Calvin's eschatological transformation of the Aristotelian causation model is key in this, and finds interesting parallels in the work of Vermigli (see his commentary) and, rather remarkably, John Owen, who wrote:

> "Now, the connection and coherence of things being manifold, as of cause and effect, of way and means and the end, this between mortification and life is not of cause and effect properly and strictly, – for 'eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ,' Rom. vi.23, – but of means and end. God hath appointed this means for the attaining that end, which he has freely promised. Means, though necessary, have a fair subordination to an end of free promise. A gift, and procuring cause in him to whom it is given, are inconsistent. The intendment, then, of this proposition as conditional is, that there is a certain infallible connection and coherence between true moritification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that end; if you do mortify, you shall live. And herein lies the main motive unto and enforcement of the duty prescribed" *(Works*, v. 6, p. 6).

In light of all this, the construction of law-and-gospel which sees sanctification as the reflex of justification, which teaches that gratitude is the only rationale for the good works of sanctification, and which filters conditional language out of view as law-not-gospel cannot survive a close reading of the texts of the tradition like these. To be sure, that construct is hardly absent from Reformed writers, but it is manifestly not anything like the unanimous and insistent witness of Reformed writers. Reformed theologians like Calvin, Vermigli, Owen, and others, including the Westminster Standards, do not hesitate

to recognize the positive relationship of good works and eternal life. We often see good works described as the real *existential* fruit of justification but not always or necessarily as the *theological* fruit of justification (remember "faith" is not a synonym for "justification"), and we discover good works commended not *only* along the lines of gratitude but also, like Calvin, as the "way" to eternal life:

> "*These good works*, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, *that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life*" (WCF 16.2, emphases added).

> "Q. 32. *How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?* A. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, *and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation*" (WLC 32, emphasis added).

For more material on this and related questions, see the fine study by David C. Fink, "Divided by Faith: The Protestant Doctrine of Justification and the Confessionalization of Biblical Exegesis," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2010. Of course, I also have to suggest that you consider reading chapter 3 of *Life in Christ*. Much of what I have said here depends on that lengthy examination of how conditional language was both the specific challenge faced by Reformation-minded theologians, and how Calvin did in fact adopt a distinct (and, in my view, generally compelling) approach to it.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (7): An Addendum on Transforming Texts

Posted on December 11, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

As an addendum to my last post, in which I pointed to Fesko's transformation of Calvin's text, I point now to a similar phenomenon in an earlier publication but in a very similar context. I do so in order to accent the programmatic nature of this way of handling texts, and to illustrate the real problem of a justification-centrism which can see almost nothing but aspects of justification in biblical texts which speak positively of obedience, works, perseverance, and eternal life. While in this example Fesko doesn't change the actual text of the author, his reading of it is controlled by the same justification-centrism concern that shapes his reading of Calvin. In this earlier instance, found in his book on justification, Fesko transforms the argument not of an older Reformed theologian but of a respected contemporary writer, G. K. Beale, but it is the same hermeneutical issue with the same theological result.

The biblical text in question this time is Rev. 19:8. The passage, starting with v. 6, reads as follows (ESV):

> "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out: Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has

> come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."

Note that the text states explicitly that the "fine linen" is "the righteous deeds of the saints." In his book, *Justification*, Fesko still finds imputation in this, and he cites Beale in support. First, Fesko's explanation:

> "We must realize that the righteous deeds of the saints originate with God, not with the believer. Moreover, that the deeds are given to the saints is evident in both Isaiah 61:10 and Revelation 19:8. When we correlate these data with Revelation 20:11-15 and the book of life of the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 20:12; 13:8), what emerges is that it is the obedience, or righteousness, of Christ that is **imputed** that is the ground of judgment for the believer. We see the same wedding-garment imagery connected with the work of Christ in Paul [Eph. 5:25-27 quoted here-MG]. The bride of Christ, then, is clothed in **righteousness which by imputation** is the righteous deeds of the saints" (327, emphases mine).

At the end of the quotation from Eph. 5, Fesko footnotes "Beale, *Revelation*, 942," and it seems likely that Beale is his support for connecting Isaiah to Revelation 19 as well, though this is not indicated. Now we turn, then, to Beale's commentary on Revelation, to which Fesko appeals in support. Beale's discussion of the "wedding clothes" covers pp. 934-44. Here are some of Beale's remarks:

> "If Mounce's line of thought is on the right track, then it would be better to view vv 7-8 as indicating that a transformed life of good works (though certainly not perfection) is not only 'the proper response' to justification but a necessary external response or 'badge' required before entrance to the wedding of the Lamb is granted. Theologically, this would mean that justification is the causal necessary condition for entrance into the eternal kingdom, but good works are a noncausal necessary condition. In this regard, cf. also Rom. 2:6-8; 2 Cor. 11:2″ (935).

> "Without exception receiving white clothes elsewhere in the Apocalypse precisely conveys the idea of *purity resulting from a test of persevering faith* (see on 3:5-6). Therefore, the white clothes here should be equated not with the 'righteous deeds' of perseverance, as in the view described above, but with the reward or result of such deeds. In this light the final clause of v 8 could be interpretatively paraphrased as 'the fine linen is *the reward for (or result of)* the righteous deeds of the saints.' Another viable translation would be 'the linen is *the deeds putting right [acquitting, vindicating] the saints*' (taking 'of the saints' as objective genitive rather than subjective genitive ['righteous deeds performed by the saints']). Yet another viable rendering would be 'just judgments on behalf of the saints.'

> "The white robes, then, might represent two inextricably related realities: (1) human faithfulness and good works (as a necessary evidence of right standing with God) and (2) vindication or acquittal accomplished by God's judgments against the enemy on behalf of his people… The context and usage of *dikaoma* support a meaning of 'vindication' or 'acquittal' resulting from divine judgments on behalf of the saints… Nevertheless, that Rev. 19:8b also envisions 'righteous acts by the saints' must not be lost sight of" (937-8, emphases are Beale's)."

Then, in his conclusion to the section, Beale summarizes his findings which are, in short, that the phrase in question "connotes both righteous acts performed by saints *and* their vindicated condition resulting

from their faithful acts or, more likely, from God's righteous acts of judgment against their oppressors" (941, emphasis Beale's). He continues to say that "the dual notion of *righteous acts by saints* and God's *righteous acts for saints* is suggested by at least seven observations," (emphases Beale's) which he then lists. The seventh of these is apparently the place Fesko intends to cite in support of his imputation-reading of the passage. Fesko's statement again, immediately after citing Eph. 5 and footnoting Beale: "The bride of Christ, then, is clothed in **righteousness which by imputation** is the righteous deeds of the saints" (327, emphasis mine).

And now, again, Beale's words:

> "Likewise, Eph. 5:25 affirms that it is *Christ* who sanctifies and cleanses his bride, the church, so that *she* will be 'holy and blameless' at the end of time…"(942, emphases Beale's).

However, whereas Fesko appeals to Beale in favor of imputation, Beale's exposition does not go in that direction. Instead, Beale's next remarks are:

> "Consequently, the saints are clothed with pure linen as a symbol of God's righteous vindication of them because, though they were persecuted, they were righteous on earth. The full meaning of the pure garments is that God's righteous vindication involves judging the enemy, which shows that the saints' faith and works have been right all along. The dual sense of 'pure linen' in 19:8 suits admirably the rhetorical purpose of the entire Apocalypse, which includes exhortations to believers to stop soiling their garments (3:4-5) and not to be 'found naked' (3:18; 16:15). This underscores the aspect of human accountability, which is highlighted by 19:7b: 'his bride has prepared herself.' … From the human side, the good works focus on the saints' witness to their faith in Christ, which is supported by the focus on witness in v 10 and by the direct linkage in 3:4-5 of white clothing with the notion of witness (cf. likewise 3:14 with 3:18)" (942, emphasis Beale's).

Beal's "dual" notion (of *righteous acts by saints* and God's *righteous acts for saints*) is completely absent from Fesko's one-sided and distorted reading, as is the clear idea in Beale that, while a gift of God in Christ, the good works are still the believers', and not by imputation. But the reader is led to think that Beale's highly regarded work on Revelation supports Fesko's conclusion, despite not only what Revelation says but also what Beale wrote. Thus, again we see a selective and misuse of sources in order to argue for a justification-centrism that might circumvent a place in Scripture in which good works are not merely the fruit or consequence of justification and are not merely expressions of gratitude. In this case, considerable effort is spent, not only in the use of Beale but in this section of Fesko's book as a whole, to make Rev. 19:8, "the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints," say something more like "the fine linen is the righteous deeds of Christ imputed to the saints."

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (8): Metaphysics and Justification, pt 4 (From Calvin to Other Reformed Witnesses)

Posted on December 16, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

We press forward in our review of this opening essay of the book by noting Fesko's transition from the section on Calvin to a section titled "Other Reformed Witnesses." Our reading of the essay has been painfully slow because of the need to clear the table of errors at just about every turn in order to get at the substantive issues beneath them. As we progress, though, I will note fewer and fewer of the repeating errors in order to make better headway. Firstly, then, we consider the concluding remarks in the author's Calvin section.

1. The author continues what I have suggested is a solemnly erroneous handling of Calvin's words regarding good works as inferior (secondary) causes of eternal life by stating, "Calvin's use of metaphysical distinctions here not only shows how the various aspects of redemption relate to one another, but is the way he gives justification priority over sanctification." And then Fesko supplies the following footnoted comment for this statement:

> "In Garcia's analysis of this passage [Calvin's *Institutes*, 3.14.21 - MAG] he argues that Calvin can use causation language, but that it can only be understood in the context of *replication*, the idea that believer's [sic] imitate or replicate the conduct of Christ through the power of the Spirit, a concept quite different from Thomas a'Kempis' *imitatio Christi*. Hence, causation language must be read in the context of *replication*: 'Calvin regards what comes prior in God's appointed *ordo* as 'causing' what follows, thus making it possible to insist that Christian obedience, as it comes before the reception of the inheritance of eternal life, yields this reward. Hence, in Calvin's replication principle, the sequential contextualizes the non-meritorious causal' (*Life in Christ*, 144-45). While this observation may explain the function of good works as 'inferior causes,' it still does not adequately address the priority Calvin gives to justification by placing justification first in the sequence" (38, n. 16)

Some thoughts:

a. We have already discovered that Fesko sees justification in the Calvin quote only because he has inserted it there. But it is also noteworthy that here Fesko acknowledges that I do in fact argue that Calvin "can" use causation language. This does not sit easily, however, with his claim in the very next sentence of his essay that I "claim that causal language is the exclusive property of the Lutheran tradition" (38).

b. Fesko's curious zeal to mitigate my positive language regarding Calvin and causation is focused on my explanation that Calvin's model of Spirit-"replication" (my term, not Calvin's) contextualizes his use of traditional causation language here. (On my proposal for a model of replication, see ch. 3 in *Life in Christ* and the "in this way" portion of Calvin's argument in *Inst.* 3.14.21.) According to Fesko in this footnote, I believe causation language in Calvin can "only" be seen in a context of replication. However, Fesko does not account for the patent counter-evidence for his claim, namely, the *other* times I see Calvin using causation, including in the context of justification, without my suggesting he is employing his replication model. On Fesko's reading there should not be any examples of my doing so, and it is a standard test of a

thesis to ensure one accounts for all extant and possible evidence to the contrary. In this case the counter-evidence is not difficult to locate. Again I can refer to the same chapter in *Life in Christ* (which Fesko cites) where I point to Calvin doing exactly this in chapter 3 of his Romans commentary. On p. 118, I state explicitly in a summary of Calvin's argument:

> "Second, and consequently, only Christ can transfer to us the righteousness necessary for justification. Thus the righteousness of faith is the righteousness of Christ. These two points are summarized using the Aristotelian causes: the efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) is God's mercy, the substance (*materia*) is Christ, and the instrumental cause (*instrumentum*) is the Word with faith."

Moreover, in my footnote in this paragraph I list other scholars who have discussed the history and development of Aristotelian causation, the use of the Aristotelian causes *in Calvin*, and the uses of Aristotle in the Reformation period (p. 118, n. 73). This extends my evidence on this point from a previous post.

c. Thus, put simply, the fact that I do see causation language elsewhere in Calvin, and not "only" in a replication model, empties Fesko's claim of any substance.

2. Secondly, the two sentences which make up Fesko's next paragraph, in which he begins a discussion of "Other Reformed Witnesses," read as follows:

> "Part of the problem with Garcia's claims is that he examines a narrow cross-section of theologians, largely Calvin, Luther, and Melanchthon and then makes sweeping conclusions about two entire theological traditions without presenting more evidence. To this end, when we expand our study to explore other Reformed witnesses, it will become evident that causal language was present in the Reformed tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth century."

And now some observations:

a. Before saying anything about other Reformed writers, it should be remembered that my monograph was a study of *Calvin,* not the whole of the Reformed tradition, and I assume it is still acceptable to write a study of Calvin even if he is not the one-stop-shop of Reformed theology. However, since Fesko is particularly concerned that I have, in his ironically sweeping way, made "sweeping conclusions about two entire theological traditions," I would note that my analysis of Calvin *and his contemporaries* investigated the messy exegetical, theological, and polemical elements which played the pivotal roles in the *gradual* divergence of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. I made conclusions about two traditions from the perspective of the trajectories embraced at the point of their origins *as two distinct theological, if not yet confessional, traditions*. More specifically, my work has pointed to the theological issues that established (or perhaps more likely *reflected* already latent) distinguishable and complex trajectories which did continue beyond the period of the Reformation, but it was not designed to cover the subsequent history in anything like a comprehensive way. My suggestive pointers to what would come later depend on the reader's knowledge of those texts and continued trajectories, particularly in the period of confessionalization.

Certainly, the at-first subtle divergence of these trajectories was not sudden, nor was it over one disagreement or event, nor was it complete as though they had nothing important in common. But these

two traditions did diverge, and this divergence was demonstrably rooted in nuanced differences over how to understand the mode of Christ's eucharistic presence and the manner of our union with him. It was, at its core, a difference in the Christological framework for eucharistic presence and communion, and *thus* has everything to do with soteriological union with Christ, as they themselves repeatedly insisted in their polemical writings.

We should believe them when they say so as doggedly and as often as they do. As my book as a whole argues, if we think *eucharistic* presence or union with Christ is a question "curtained off" from questions of *saving* union with Christ, it's because we're assuming a model of salvation which has little in common with both Reformed and Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century. If our own model puts these questions in different boxes, a model which is foreign to theirs, we cannot hope to understand why they moved back and forth between salvation and sacrament so seamlessly and argued a point in one theological setting with a view to its relevance to both settings. This is the real Whig historiography. Just ask Luther or Zwingli what their debate was "really" about, and then ask Westphal and Calvin. Read the exchanges between Calvin and Westphal. Those who point to ideas like predestination or the Supper as the only "real" differences between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions lack familiarity with the texts and the patterns of argument in the sixteenth century. Fesko's (and a few others') inability to make sense of what I argue regarding Calvin's 1559 refutation of Osiander reflects just this (very modern) inability. But more on that later on, d.v.

b. It would be defensible, I think, if I had focused largely and perhaps even exclusively on Calvin in my monongraph *on Calvin*, at least if I had done so responsibly. But despite this most recent claim in Fesko's essay, I did not examine only "a narrow cross-section of theologians, largely Calvin, Luther, and Melanchthon" (39). My chapter-length discussion of various late-medieval and Reformation trajectories on the ideas at issue includes material on late-medieval taxonomies of union (Altenstaig's 1517 *Lexicon Theologicum*) and the vocabulary of Eastern theologians and western spiritualists, medieval marriage sermons, a lot of (positive, incidentally) material on union with Christ in Luther's theological development (gladly leaning on the fine work of Heiko Oberman for this), Martin Bucer's model of a threefold justification, Peter Martyr Vermigli's location of justification within the context of regeneration, Melanchthon, and the sadly overlooked contextual importance of the Regensburg Colloquy. In my analysis of Calvin's Romans commentary, I examined not only Calvin and Melancththon but also the Roman apologist John Eck, Grimani, Guillaud, Cajetan, Erasmus, Lefebvre, Bucer, and Vermigli. In the subsequent chapters I also look at Bullinger, Westphal, Lombard, Aquinas, Osiander (at great length), Brenz, Flacius, J. Andreae, and the Formula of Concord. I leave it to the reader to evaluate Fesko's claim in light of this tabulation.

c. Once again, please note that I am not arguing anything like "while I only referred to *x* I did read *y*" or "I was aware of and thinking of *z*." No one can read an author's mind; we only have their published work to evaluate. So I am referring only to what is objectively verifiable in the text that Fesko purports to criticize. In other words, I am evaluating the author's use of *Life in Christ* in the same way readers should evaluate his read of any other publication noted in his book. And again the author has, in my view, manifestly rendered an ill-founded judgment which misleads the reader. If a general guide is helpful, my analysis of Calvin in relation to Bucer, Vermigli, and Osiander (plus some minor figures) easily account for most – perhaps almost all – of the main argument in *Life in Christ* (chapters 2-5 plus appendixes), and this does not include Luther and Melanchthon whom Fesko does acknowledge I have examined. Indeed,

on examination there is little in the book that looks only at Calvin; most of the book reads him in conversation with his most influential contemporaries.

d. Finally, we note the final words of the author in this paragraph introducing a new section: "… when we expand our study to explore other Reformed witnesses, it will become evident that causal language was present in the Reformed tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth century." With this reminder of the author's goal in this essay, the reader is also reminded that the essay as a whole is an exercise in regrettable "shadow boxing:" it is trying vigorously to disprove a claim no one has made, certainly not the alleged interlocutors noted in the essay.

We will turn next to the author's brief summaries of Vermigli, Zanchi, and others.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (9): Metaphysics and Justification, pt. 5 (Vermigli, Consequent Necessity)

Posted on December 16, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

On pp. 39-40, Fesko summarizes Peter Martyr Vermigli along the lines of the essay's thesis. Noting appropriately that Calvin was "not alone in the work of reform" (39), Fesko mentions Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Farel, Bullinger and then introduces Vermigli as Calvin's "co-laborer." Even though he is apparently aiming again at the somewhat – though not entirely – illusory target of Calvin-only-ism, the reminder is a helpful one. Fesko will focus on Vermigli in ch. 9 of this book, so we will reserve some judgments for when we come to that chapter.

Fesko recognizes that Vermigli sees union with Christ as the "source" of good works, but goes on to qualify what importance this has to his thesis: "However, like Calvin, he too could use causal language" (39). But, again, neither I nor anyone I am aware of has suggested otherwise, neither for Vermigli nor for Calvin. But let's move on to something potentially more productive for the debate as a whole.

Fesko goes on to quote Vermigli's words in defense of good works. Let's follow this closely. Vermigli says, using the translation by Frank James, "Because we do not reject good works, we say that they ought to be held in a place of honor, since a very close connection obtains with the immediate consequences of justification." Fesko follows this quote with the words: "Note here that Vermigli considers good works the consequence of justification." Yes, a consequence, but what kind of consequence? Since Fesko has just seen Vermigli identify union with Christ as a/the source of good works, how should we understand good works as a consequence of justification? This is an important question and exploring it may go a long way to bringing about *rapprochement* among those who disagree, so I would encourage us to think carefully through this.

Does Vermigli mean that justification as such *produces* good works or does he mean that the *reality* of justification – the fact that a person *is* justified or *does* "have" justification – requires, *as a consequence of necessity* (a possible use of the language which Fesko acknowledges in a footnote here), that other graces *must* also be present, such as good works? Let's remember the sixteenth century context for saying things like Vermigli says here. In his historical context, since Vermigli is explicitly concerned to argue for the value of good works, we can expect that their value would be in question only if justification "by

faith alone" (properly understood) is also being defended, in which case Vermigli's language is not only sufficiently clear but quite similar to Calvin's. What Vermigli is saying, on such a reading, is that *given union with Christ* (which Vermigli sees as the source of good works), there is no such thing as having Christ for one benefit *but not for others*. If one has Christ for justification, one has him for the good works of sanctification as well – and we can add for adoption, and glorification, etc. This was Calvin's insistence in connection with 1 Cor. 1:30 throughout his ministry.

In fact, outside of the historical context of the Reformers' responses to Rome, there is – do I dare to use this language? – a "theological indifference" about which grace of the *ordo salutis* one places in either of the two slots in the argument here. Simply stated, given the Christ and the Spirit of a Reformed understanding of union with Christ, the reality of *any* one blessing, including justification, entails the reality of other blessings as a consequent necessity. Theoretically, if sanctification were the grace in need of clear defense and justification (properly understood) were taken for granted, the terms could be reversed in the argument: "if there really is sanctification in Christ, there is justification in Christ too, since there is only one Christ and both are in him." But since justification by faith in Christ alone is the distinct note being sounded by the Reformers over against their detractors, justification is the "reality" front and center in their theology, and since good works are *allegedly* marginalized or even unnecessary *if one affirms justification as the Reformers did*, then, for them, the good works of sanctification are predictably a (or the) consequent necessity of justification in view.

A little later Fesko notes Vermigli's statement regarding good works as the fruit of justification. "To be sure," says Vermigli in the quotation, "[good works] follow justification as fruits, which spring up and sprout from a true faith." In this section, Vermigli continues, quoting Augustine's epistle to Honorius, "Good works derive from the fact that we are justified, and not that we are justified because of prior good works" (quoted by Fesko on pp. 40-41). A few comments, then:

a. Fesko has appropriately pointed us to an example of a Reformed theologian speaking of the good works of sanctification as the "fruit of justification." I have not denied there are such examples or that Reformed theologians speak this way (with the language or at least structure of causation) in certain contexts. Perhaps I have not been as clear that I do not deny that Reformed theologians within the tradition have long spoken this way, in which case I happily take the opportunity to say so again. However, this is not the same as saying it is the only acceptable way of speaking within the Reformed tradition, or that it requires a host of other theological ideas such as good works as purely works of gratitude for justification.

b. The question still holds, however, and rather centrally: what is *meant* by "fruit of justification." So far in our posts I have already strongly affirmed one way in which this is not only legitimate but important: at the level of experience of grace or the Christian life (the life of "religion" in early modern rhetoric), the peace of conscience enjoyed in justification is crucially a presupposition of truly good works of sanctification. The alternative is to put them in reverse order and suggest that we work for our *wholly-future* justification, which is empty of the good news of the Gospel. (This is also Vermigli's evident concern in his quote from Augustine (mentioned above) to the effect that we are not justified "because of," i.e., on the meritorious grounds of, prior good works, but we pursue good works on the presupposition of a justification securely in place.) Thus, one possibility for Vermigli's words (and the many other examples like it among other theologians) is that they are accenting this important truth: what we call "progressive" sanctification, as a life of good works expressive of that sanctification-reality, comes "after" and on the presupposition of a secure justification.

c. Another way to understand the "fruit" language is along the lines of what I have suggested above in this post, namely, to posit that the good works of sanctification are, for the Reformed, *consequentially* necessary *given the reality of justification in Christ*. The reason for this consequent necessity is *not*, however, due to the distinct infrastructure or make-up of justification *per se* (other than that it is an aspect of union with Christ) but *of Christ himself*, so that the reality of any grace in Christ entails, *of necessity*, the reality of the other graces too. "Christ has been made for us wisdom by God, and justification, and sanctification, and redemption," says the Apostle (1 Cor. 1:30). There is only one Christ for all the blessings of redemption, not a separate Christ for each benefit, which is why union with Christ is so determinative for the structure of soteriology. The alternative, to use Calvin's words for this notion, is to "tear Christ into pieces," something of which he accused both his Roman objectors and his Lutheran counterparts. This, then, is another possibility, and a theological rather than only experiential one. I suggest reflection on this way of articulating the relationships could bring a lot of people closer together in the current debate.

d. Yet another possibility is the one Fesko proposes, except that he has assumed rather than demonstrated that this is the *only* possible way of understanding Vermigli. He has not demonstrated, then, that these other two possibilities cannot apply. If Fesko is correct about the theological significance of Vermigli's language here, then that is fine too, for it would only confirm that there are some Reformed theologians who have spoken thus. But he has not done more than appeal to the fact of the causation language to prove his case, and one needs a lot more than the presence of causation (and "fruit") language or argument.

However, as a parting remark for now and one designed to bring into view more than Fesko puts before us, Vermigli says more than what Fesko singles out here. Especially in light of what Fesko has just recently dismissed in this essay regarding Calvin's "replication" model, I note particularly what Vermigli says regarding the connection of good works to eternal life in his own exposition of Romans. It is a passage I noted in *Life in Christ* (pp. 108-9, n. 53), which I quote:

> "Peter Martyr Vermigli, in his 1558 commentary, would argue along similar lines: 'But works are not of our selves, for they are called the gifts of God, which he works in us. Wherefore Augustine very wisely says: That God doth crown his gifts in us. Now if our works be due unto him (which thing we cannot deny) then undoubtedly the nature of merit is utterly taken away.' More notable still is the parallel between aspects of Calvin's replication principle and the way Vermigli relates works to the reward of eschatological life: 'Eternal life is sometimes in the holy scriptures called a reward: But then is it not that reward, which Paul writeth to be given according to debt: but is all one as if it should be called a recompensation. Gods will and pleasure was, that there should be this connection, that after good works should follow blessedness: but yet not as the effect followeth the cause, but as a thing joyned with them by the appointment of God' (*In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos commentarii doctissimi*… [Basel, 1558], 40a).

At the least, Vermigli's own model of causation, including the way in which he understands the good works of sanctification to be the "fruit" of justification, is not, *in his own thinking*, incompatible with affirming a positive connection of good works with eternal life. Neither is he reticent to transform traditional causation theory to deny causation in one sense in order to affirm it in what we might call, as with Calvin, a more apparently voluntarist sense: the connection of good works to eternal life comes down not to how things relate in the theoretically-abstract but to God's (historical and

Christological) *appointment* of how things would be. His argument does not suggest, then, that law-gospel model which sees those good works as *only* expressions of gratitude for justification.

Lastly, Fesko goes on to argue in this section that Vermigli's use of Aristotelian causality is not an unfortunate carryover from his education in Thomism but is common to the theologians of the Reformation. Since I don't have a problem with Vermigli or Calvin or others using Aristotelian causality, we can leave this to the side.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (10), Metaphysics and Justification, pt. 6 (Zanchi)

Posted on December 18, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

Fesko turns next to Zanchi as the first representative of the period of "Early Orthodoxy" (41-44). Fesko notes some helpful studies on Zanchi in a footnote and appropriately mentions his often overlooked but real importance as a window into a period of transition. However, we detect more of the author's characteristic over-reaction when he blames "the towering figure of Calvin" for the neglect. The way Fesko speaks, I wonder how there can be a fairly healthy body of scholarship on *any* other sixteenth-century figure – even Luther or Zwingli – given the alleged monopoly of Calvin's tower, not just in the 19th century but apparently even into the present. Perhaps Fesko believes the shadow created by the Calvin tower has guaranteed it is always winter in Reformation and post-Reformation studies, but never Christmas? But I digress. A few remarks on the Zanchi section, then:

1. Having noted there are thankfully some studies out there on Zanchi, the author then states: "Some have been *dismissive of his contributions*, albeit based entirely on secondary sources" (41, italics mine), and then footnotes only one example: William Evans, *Imputation and Impartation*, 49-50. We are confused from the start since we have been led to expect "some" but find only one listed, but perhaps if we go to Evans we will find him referring to others. Alas, we do not. Moreover, we also do not find in Evans the "dismissal" of Zanchi of which Fesko accuses him. Instead, over these two pages we read Evans outlining Zanchi's role in the development within Reformed theology of the language used for relating divine and human activity in salvation. Evans, in this section, correctly notes that the earlier Reformation theologians, both Lutheran and Reformed, had definitively established a positive relationship of divine monergism and real human involvement in salvation, but these basic convictions quickly resulted in controversies in both traditions. The controversies were more pronounced within Lutheranism, but Reformed theologians too quickly began to try to expound on the divine-human relationship in salvation in order to fend off destructive misunderstandings.

One facet of this development is Zanchi's (and others') employment of the Thomistic conceptual structure and vocabulary for the psychology of faith. Note that I say Thomistic "conceptual structure and vocabulary," which is what Evans focuses on, and that this is not the same as suggesting they imbibed Thomism *as a whole* or even *per se*. Instead, this process is reflective of the high comfort level Reformed theologians enjoyed with the deployment of various scholastic distinctions and forms of argument in order to better explicate shared theological convictions.

Fesko has claimed Evans "dismisses" Zanchi, but when we turn to Evans himself we read him introducing Zanchi as one who endeavored, with his teacher Vermigli, "more fully to explain the relationship between the divine and the human, the change which grace effects in the human person, and at the same time to guarantee the gratuity of justification" (Evans, 49). Evans also stresses "the *importance* of the development" of the increasing use of *habitus* language in Zanchi as something that "*should not be underestimated*" (emphases mine). And then refers specifically to Zanchi as *"crucial* to this development," a development Evans regards as inevitable given the need to explain faith and grace more fully (Evans, 49, emphasis mine). We do not find anything like a dismissal of Zanchi here. Perhaps Fesko disagrees with what Evans notes regarding Zanchi's role in a period of transition, but disagreement with an author does not easily translate into an argument that the other person has dismissed his subject.

2. Fesko then moves to a commendation of Zanchi as a theologian of union with Christ and, regrettably, he again adopts the procedure of elevating Zanchi by demoting Calvin:

> "While union with Christ appears somewhat incidentally in Vermigli and appears more strongly in Calvin, union features more prominently in Zanchi. In fact, unlike Calvin, it is fair to say that the doctrine of union with Christ took on a greater significance for Zanchi's soteriology. Calvin's employment of the doctrine of union with Christ pales in comparison to Zanchi's use of the same…" (41-2).

Please note:

a. There are essays on both Zanchi and Vermigli to come later in the book so we must defer more substantial remarks till that point. But it must be stated here that to suggest union with Christ "appears somewhat incidentally in Vermigli" can only be said by someone who has not read much in Vermigli, who perhaps has read Vermigli only in English translation, and who has perhaps forgotten that he will later in this book devote an entire essay to Vermigli on union with Christ.

b. Comparing (or contrasting) the relative significance of union with Christ for Calvin and Zanchi in this way is tendentious at best. To claim, too, as Fesko does, that Zanchi's doctrine of union with Christ "helps *contextualize Calvin's* doctrine" (43, italics mine), is simply extraordinary in the contexts of both history and theology. To be sure, Zanchi uses the union idea with extraordinary frequency, but "significance" must mean more than "union word count," and the suggestion that Zanchi's theology of union with Christ is *as* significant as, or even *more* significant than, Calvin's theology of union with Christ is a remarkable historical proposal. For those familiar with the literature it borders on the absurd and begs for proof. But it is not a proposal defended or documented in this essay. We will see if it is warranted in light of the essay on Zanchi to come.

c. Regarding the oddity of depending on what I call "union word count," we find the same methodology in the author's remark that "Zanchi's devotion of an entire locus on union with Christ is unparalleled in Calvin" (42). Besides the fact that *Institutes* 3.1.1 – the introductory chapter on "the way we receive the grace of Christ" which focuses on the Spirit of union with Christ – does this very thing (and thus "unparalleled" becomes another example of overstatement), since when is it sound methodology to scan a table of contents (there is no "locus" on it) in order to discern theological function or importance? And yet this is not the only example out there: I have encountered the suggestion that the Westminster Standards do not have an important role for union with Christ *because there isn't a distinct chapter on it*.

Perhaps not having a chapter called "union with Christ" is instead evidence of the contrary, namely, that it is so widely important that it permeates many chapters and is not reduced to one. (I suggest you try this out.) At the least, this is a specious approach for a scholarly argument and seriously damages what remains of the author's credibility in dealing with the issues and the texts.

d. Fesko proceeds to note that Zanchi "can also talk about justification and sanctification employing causal language" (42-3), and a bit later states that Zanchi's statements "show that Zanchi saw no conflict between union with Christ and causality language" (43), yet again indicating he continues to attack the phantom authors who allegedly argue otherwise. Significantly, he then quotes Zanchi as follows:

> "As the vine branches or olive branches do not bring forth fruit from themselves, but only by the power of the vine or live tree in which they are engrafted, so we likewise do not of ourselves do good works, but by virtue of Christ's Spirit, into whom we are incorporated, and from whom we draw even that life, by which we live, Christ himself working in us by his Spirit "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "For without me," he says, "you can do nothing" (43, quoting from Zanchi, *De Religione*, 21.3 (I.362-63)."

It's a beautiful statement by Zanchi, but Fesko needs to qualify what we are reading so he goes on to say immediately: "Now in the very next section Zanchi then goes on to write: 'Good works are not the cause, but the effects of our union with Christ, and our justification, and our life.' Zanchi identifies both union with Christ and justification as the cause of good works…" (43). I am tempted to enter now into a lengthy corrective, but I'll just point out what seems rather obvious: at the very most, this quote suggests Zanchi sees good works as the "effects" *not only* of union with Christ and justification *but also of "our life"* – does this not lead us naturally to ask *in what way* are good works the effects of each of these realities? Presumably they are not effects in entirely the same way but in different respects, so what are those differences? We are given only the quotation followed by the selective assertion, not an explanation of how it conforms to the author's specific thesis.

e. As another example from this section, we read the author on Zanchi and the "two kinds of righteousness," imputed and imparted. He writes, "Couched in the doctrine of union with Christ, Zanchi explains that righteousness is given to the believer by two different ways: imputation and real communication" and then quotes Zanchi as follows:

> "These two means of communicating other good things, and especially the justice and righteousness of Christ, are so joined and linked together in themselves, as it were the cause and the effect, that they are not severed asunder, nor ought to be severed by us, no more then [sic] the sun beam can be severed from the sun, or the sun from the beam" (43, quoting Zanchi, *Spiritual Marriage*, 134)."

After which the author states: "Here Zanchi employs an analogy very similar to Calvin (the sun and its rays), and possibly even gleaned from him, but yet is not averse to saying that imputed righteousness is the cause of imparted righteousness – they are linked as cause and effect" (43-4). But are they so linked? Perhaps so, but in light of the context of union with Christ for this statement, which the author has just noted, isn't it more likely, or at least possible, that the "sun" is Christ or union with Christ rather than imputed righteousness? Since the author sees the possibility of a Calvin source for the "sun and rays" image (which traces back, I note, to Melanchthon as well), I note that we should hear Calvin's voice in

the "sever" image as well, since Calvin uses that image very frequently but in order to argue that justification and sanctification are inseparably given *in union with Christ, not imputation,* so that to contemplate one without the other is to "sever Christ" or to "tear Christ into pieces" (see, at length, *Life in Christ,* pp. 228-41).

So to assess the author's claim we must turn dutifully to Zanchi's text, using the very same edition the author quotes (the 1592 English translation). This is what we find (pardon the length but the wider context is the point, I'm afraid) – the section in which Zanchi's statement is found is headed with "Nowe touching those benefits which concerne the spirituall life, the communicating of them is thus," under which we read as follows:

> "(1) God has set and established all good things in Christ alone the Mediatour, so that unlesse they be communicated, and come from Christ as from the fountaine, none can be made partaker of them. (2) To this have almost all the Scriptures relation, which teach that salvation is to be sought in Christ alone, 1 John 5… Coloss. 1. … Again, 1 John 1. … and infinite other such like places. By which is sufficiently prooved, that in the Sonne of God alone, made man, are all the treasures of heavenly and divine good things; as the Apostle in plain words testifieth. Coloss. 2.3. (3) These treasures are truly communicated to them alone, who are so united to Christ, that they are made one bodie and one flesh with him. (4) For the Apostle saith, that Christ is the Saviour of this bodie, that is, of the Church, which is his bodie and flesh, and of all the faithfull, who are one flesh with Christ, and bones of his bones. (5) But this union and incorporation cannot be made but by his Spirite, and by our faith, as the Scriptures everywhere teach. (6) Therefore this communication of the treasures of Christ, doth truly belong and appertaine to the whole Church, the true and onely spouse of Christ, and to every faithfull man therein which hath the Spirite of Christ" (132-4).

And then we have the lines quoted by Fesko: "(7) But this communication is of two sorts: either by imputation, or by reall communicating," etc., lines which, if Fesko had quoted them more extensively, would come shortly to include these as well:

> "(12) For the latter part [of Psalm 32, quoted] noteth inherent righteousness, the former noteth imputative righteousness; and he hath joyned both together, that we may not thinke that the one may be severed from the other. (13) For it falleth out so also oftentimes in mariage matters. To whom soever it shal happen to be made the spouse and wife of some King, to her are usually given espousals, rich gifts, and princely ornaments to weare, whereby she may be discerned from other women, and may also be knowne apparently to be the wife of such a King."

And then, in Zanchi's transition from imputation to "real communication" (sanctification and its good works), we read,

> "And thus much of the former means, whereby all the treasures of Christ, and especially his righteousness is communicated to us, to wit, by imputation. But of the latter means whereby the benefits of Christ are communicated, that is, by reall communication, there are almost infinite testimonies in the scriptures, so that it needeth no long proofe…" (139).

It would appear that, in context, while his language is sometimes ambiguous, it is union with Christ rather than imputation which functions as the true "sun-source" of the "treasures of Christ," and especially the

twin treasures of imputation and renovation. Indeed, his procedure sounds almost like an echo of Calvin's own in Book 3 of his *Institutes*: union with Christ by the Spirit, and then the two principal benefits, except that Zanchi discusses imputation first and renovation second.

f. Lastly for now, and at a more general level, it is clear the author is parading the importance of union with Christ in Zanchi in order to redress what he perceives to be a blinding neglect or oversight in the literature. I am grateful he wishes to point us to Zanchi on union with Christ, and I agree more attention to Zanchi on this question would be interesting and useful. But I cannot help but smile as I read the author arguing in this way about Zanchi, Calvin, and Calvin-myopia, not least because (1) he is evidently offering a corrective to my own alleged neglect of Zanchi on union in favor of Calvin, and (2) in the book he is zealously critiquing, I wrote the following:

> "Though his is easily the more familiar, Calvin's theology is not the sixteenth-century Reformed theology most impacted by the doctrine of union with Christ. This distinction should belong to Jerome (Girolamo) Zanchi (1516-1590) whose treatise *De spirituali inter Christum et ecclesiam, singulosque fideles, coniugio* (Herborn, 1591, drawn from his exposition of Ephesians) applies a marital-type union idea to a wide range of theological questions. This text was translated as *An Excellent and Learned Treatise, of the spirituall marriage betvveene Christ and the Church, and every faithfull man. Written in Latine by that famous and worthie member of Christ his Church H. Zanchius: and translated into English* (Cambridge: Printed by John Legate, printer to the University of Cambridge, 1592). The marital-union *possessio* and *proprietas* model associated with Luther above is also present in Zanchi, *Spirituall Mariage*, 43. Cf. also the discussion in Zanchi's 1585, *De religione christiana fides*, esp. Ch. XII, recently published as *De religione Christiana fides – Confession of Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 125; Leiden: Brill, 2007)" (*Life in Christ*, p. 78, n. 98).

I will need to repeat this quotation from my book when I come to the later essay on Zanchi, but for now I leave it to the reader to compare Evans and Garcia with the author's interaction with the historical texts he uses and the texts and arguments he criticizes.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (11), Metaphysics and Justification, pt. 7 (Other Reformed Witnesses)

Posted on December 19, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

After Zanchi, Fesko turns to brief remarks on Trelcatius (d. 1607), Bucanus (d. 1603), Alsted (d. 1638), the Leiden Synopsis, Ames (d. 1633), Wollebius (d. 1629), Junius (d. 1602), and Polyander (d. 1646). (*Before going any further, do read these authors if you ever have the opportunity. It's part of a sound and substantial education in Reformed theology.*) My remarks this time are brief, but I submit them in order to draw attention to a rather crucial qualification in the essay that, again, may go a long way in aiding the cause of greater harmony among those who disagree. But first, a few notes on this section (pp. 44-6):

1. Following up on the survey of Zanchi, Fesko quotes Trelcatius on imputed righteousness working inherent righteousness in some sense.

a. The quote reads, "The nearest cause indeed of a righteous work, is inherent righteousness; but the chief and principal cause is the Spirit of Christ imputing his righteousness to us and by the power of that imputed righteousness, working this inherent righteousness in us." After the quote, Fesko states, "From this statement it seems clear that Trelcatius is saying that the imputed righteousness is the source (or power) of the inherent righteousness in redemption" (44).

Perhaps, but "clear" it is not. Fesko quotes from the 1610 English translation, but the Latin is at least convoluted: "Iusti operis Causa proxima quidem est iustitia inhaerens praecipua vero, ac primaria, Spiritus Christi, iustitiam Christi nobis imputantis, et ui imputatae illius iustitiae, hanc inhaerentem, in nobis operantis." The punctuation may need revision, and the Latin is somewhat ambiguous when it comes to who or what the "power" is that "works." Especially if we remove the commas around "hanc inhaerentem," the idea *could* be either the power of the *him* whose righteousness it is (Christ), or the power of the *righteousness* of him itself (the imputed righteousness of justification). Though the latter is more likely, the idea still seems to be that the Spirit is causing whatever power Trelcatius locates in the imputed righteousness. Or something like that.

b. Of course, the translation on which Fesko depends is certainly a possible and valid way of rendering it. Let us assume it is the better rendering. But again the most this demonstrates is that Trelcatius held this view. With regard to Trelcatius, it is interesting that Fesko notes that Trelcatius's text is "taken from his compendium of Calvin's *Institutes*, which shows how Calvin was received and understood" (44, n. 41). Yes, but this would seem to point in the opposite direction of his earlier insistence regarding Calvin and the need to revise perceptions of his relative importance: granted his work was important in its day, but how many *compendia* of Trelcatius were published after his death? Or of Zanchi? Or Alsted?

2. A central question we should ask as we read is, How should we understand the *significance* of the lines Fesko quotes in this section?

a. Firstly, Fesko lists a range of writers, but none of these authors is given any close attention; lines are pulled from their writings that seem to suggest something like the author's thesis, but there is little to no context given to the reader. These extracted sentences – and Fesko provides only *one sentence or less* for each of these, with the exception of Junius who also quotes a line from Augustine – should not be confused with careful analyses of each writer and their ministerial and polemical contexts. They should stand as quotes, yes, but they cannot stand as something more substantial as more than that.

b. Secondly, we have to remember the curious nature of the essay as a whole: specifically, there is no need to wrestle with these quotes in a way that suggests the author's phantom interlocutors actually exist. Again, I am not aware of anyone in Fesko's purview who has suggested that causal language is not used among Reformed theologians of the Reformation or post-Reformation eras, that no Reformed theologians speak of justification as causing sanctification, or that Calvin is the sole measuring stick of Reformed theology. And we certainly must not be afraid of disagreeing theologically with a Reformed author, which is a question quite distinct from the historical one. Indeed, not having that kind of vested stake in what they say (and not having to pretend they all said the same thing) frees us up to read them on their own terms. At the same time, the citations Fesko offers do not include any explanations – by the writers or by Fesko – of how the language of "effect" or "consequence" or "fruit" are being used or understood, particularly in light of the options for this vocabulary which we recently outlined.

c. Thirdly, and related to our previous point, Fesko understandably leads us to read these quotes as steps on the way to confirming his thesis. Halfway through the section, he says: "Quite clearly, causal language is part and parcel of Reformed explanations of union with Christ and explanations of the relationship between justification and sanctification" (45). The final sentence in this section confirms this is the goal: "Given the presented evidence, it is sufficient to say that one cannot draw a line of division between Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the Reformation and Early Orthodox periods on the use of causal language with regard to justification, sanctification, and union with Christ" (46). But our principal problem with this essay is that the thesis is already an anomaly. It's a thesis which, as we've said several times now, bears no relationship whatsoever to what is argued in any of the literature Fesko notes. Thus the goal is, from the start, not so much unattainable as irrelevant.

3. More importantly, though, and more positively, I would strongly recommend more serious attention to the qualifying note Fesko sounds immediately after saying the words quoted above, viz., "Quite clearly, causal language is part and parcel of Reformed explanations of union with Christ and explanations of the relationship between justification and sanctification." His very next words are: "*This is not to say that every rank and file Reformed theologian of the two periods explained things in this manner*," (45, emphasis mine) and then his quotes from Wollebius, Junius, and Polyander demonstrate this to be true. Each of these writers, says Fesko, "argues that the indirect effects of *faith* are justification, sanctification, assurance of salvation, and Christian freedom" (45, emphasis original).

a. Yes, indeed, there was historical variety in expression, and if we could acknowledge this not only as a historical reality but as a guide to acceptable modes of expression, this would be a significant advance.

b. Note that I say "acknowledge as a historical reality," which is *not* to suggest they are therefore all equally sound theologically. They are not, and the standard for determining which modes of argument and expression are more sound than others is the teaching of Scripture, not what Calvin or anyone else said. We must be willing to evaluate all of these modes of expression theologically without doing so by denying their historical variety. But this also reminds us that the most a volume of strictly *historical* studies like these can accomplish is answer, or attempt to answer, a *historical* question (what was said and why), not a biblical and theological question, even as the historical study is of course a necessary part of the process of reaching those conclusions.

c. Also, the theological distinction between "faith" and "justification" implicit in Fesko's qualifying statement is a very welcome one since these two terms are so frequently and erroneously treated as synonyms, especially in contemporary readings of historical texts in the context of justification controversies.

d. However, we cannot affirm the importance of this concession without noticing that it appears to take away with one hand what the author has been trying throughout the essay to push forward with the other, namely, the author's "part and parcel" argument.

4. Finally, and less importantly, in an unfortunate misstep Fesko footnotes pages in Richard Muller's very important series, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, but he cites the earlier version of volume 1, not the more standard, revised, and expanded edition included in the set released by Baker in 2003. Not having a copy of the older, 1987 text, this makes it difficult to trace Fesko's use of Muller.

Our next post follows Fesko's transition into a discussion of why "Aristotelian metaphysics" was so prominent in early Reformed theology. This will be the most natural point for us to raise questions about the author's reference to "metaphysics" and his assumptions regarding what "cause" means in this period.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (12), Metaphysics and Justification, pt. 8 (Aristotelian Metaphysics)

Posted on December 30, 2013 by Mark A. Garcia

On p. 46 of this essay, Fesko arrives at his main thesis which, as I have noted repeatedly, has the unfortunate distinction of demonstrating the equivalent of "there is a lot of water in the Pacific Ocean." I submit that Fesko's thesis that both Reformed and Lutheran theologians employed the language of causation is without counter in any extant literature, and certainly bears no relationship to what is argued in the studies he purportedly evaluates here.

But there is a further, and arguably more critical issue which arises in a reading of the essay: by "metaphysics," Fesko seems to have in view little more than "philosophy" or "Aristotle's causes" or some such general notion, not "metaphysics" in the classical and specific sense. This phenomenon prompts the question whether or not the author knows what metaphysics is in academic discourse and, if so, why he decided to speak of the "use of metaphysics" so insistently when all he means is "use of philosophical language and arguments" and often something as rudimentary as "use of causal language." It is important to see how this works out, so I ask you to bear with me.

At the outset of his discussion entitled "Why was Aristotelian metaphysics so important?" Fesko summarizes certain facts for the reader. He notes, for instance, that the early modern era was saturated with Aristotelianisms of various kinds, that the Reformers "never eradicated all use of philosophy in their theology" (46), and that the difference in the use of philosophy between the Reformation and post-Reformation theologians is a difference in degree, not in substance. In all of this, which should be uncontroversial for most readers (though I wish it were uncontroversial for all, and so I'm thankful for Fesko's reminders here), Fesko appropriately footnotes the helpful discussions of the question by Bagchi and Muller. He goes on to note that Aristotelianism underwent modification in the medieval and Reformation eras because "it was the common way for theologians to explain the world around them" (47).

However, his next statement indicates (again) where he believes this survey of the basics leads us. He states,

> "Hence, the metaphysical explanation of justification and its relationship to sanctification as well as union with Christ is an effort to relate the various and sundry parts as a whole. This is something that Garcia does not seem to grasp. Garcia writes: 'Within Calvin's soteriological model, to make sanctification follow justification as an effect is to concede the theological possibility that one may be truly justified but not yet sanctified, with the result that the legal fiction charge, to which Calvin was always sensitive, would be validated.' Yet such a conclusion misses the point of employing metaphysics and causality to explain the relationship between justification and sanctification and

> reflects an Enlightenment view of causality where observed causes and effects might not be linked, or even torn asunder."

Where to begin? But I will try.

1. Fesko notes the obvious, namely, that "metaphysical" explanations – by which he still seems to mean simply *explanations that use causal language* – of justification in relation to sanctification and union with Christ are efforts to relate "the various and sundry parts as a whole." This, Fesko claims, is something I do "not seem to grasp." Interesting. I wonder where Fesko gets the idea I do not grasp that causal language was used by Calvin and others in his day to relate these various theological realities, particularly since my book, which Fesko has in view throughout, is devoted specifically to that relationship and, as noted in previous posts, there is quite a lot in the book – and in positive form – about the place of causation language in those relationships. But to wonder this is to assume that Fesko has read the book with attentive care, and I regret that this is not an assumption any reasonably objective reader of the texts in question is able to grant on the basis of the evidence. And in saying so I purposely understate the fact. This only leaves other options for explaining why Fesko would suggest such a thing, but these are options that move us beyond the objective texts and evidence into the nebulous and dangerous regions of motives and intentions.

2. Fesko takes particular umbrage with my claim regarding the theological possibility created by models which make sanctification the effect of a prior justification. The problem here is that, if one was to go to the place in *Life in Christ* where Fesko is quoting (see p. 264), it is quite clear that this is not my personal assessment but my characterization of what Calvin is arguing. Granted that there continues to be a pandemic assumption that anything a Reformed theologian says about Calvin's views is taken, *ipso facto*, as a statement of the theologian's own views, let me point out what should be obvious: Garcia doesn't believe Calvin is Scripture and that Calvin is always right, and on any and every point in this book and elsewhere, "Calvin says *x*" is not the same as "Garcia says *x*." (Which also means, relevantly, that if I wish to argue a theological point *of my own*, I will not do so exclusively or even primarily by expounding Calvin but by expounding Scripture in conversation with the tradition. The only exceptions occur in those studies when Calvin or some other theologian has articulated a matter in a way that helps us make better sense of *Scripture*, as I've done twice on the question of imputation in relation to union with Christ.) And in this passage, quoted by Fesko, Garcia is providing a description of a theological orientation with which *Calvin* appears to be working (Fesko's quote begins, correctly, with the words, "Within *Calvin's* soteriological model…"). So one must deal with this characterization at the level of its fidelity to Calvin's writings and arguments, but Fesko has treated it my theological proposal instead.

3. Fesko's claim that my alleged blindness to the Reformation and post-Reformation use of "metaphysics" "reflects an Enlightenment view of causality where observed causes and effects might not be linked, or even torn asunder," is ironic. In fact, beyond what I actually argue in my work, Fesko, like other recent advocates of this view, is working here with a range of assumptions regarding "metaphysics" and causality that are later than the Reformation era. Only with the rise of Cartesianism in the sciences, and the attendant move toward mechanistic and biological uses of the vocabulary, did causation language begin more deliberately to entail views on how things *originate* or are *produced.* As Walter Ott among others has demonstrated, prior to Cartesian developments in metaphysics, causation language had been employed largely to provide descriptors of logical, rather than generative or mechanical, relationships: *x* causes *y* in the sense that *y* is entailed as a logical necessity *given x.* This is in keeping with what I suggested in an

earlier post regarding an appropriate way in which we can say that one grace causes another in the *duplex gratia*: given one truly present redemptive grace in a person, the other(s) are logically (theologically) necessary, inasmuch as there is only one Christ in whom all graces are enjoyed in union with him, and thus there is no one grace without the other(s). In *Life in Christ*, and at length, I try to demonstrate how Calvin's theological reactions to the Roman Catholic and Tridentine charge of licentiousness (which they claimed the Reformation doctrine of justification created space for) reflects – rhetorically as well as substantively – just this model of logical relationships.

To be sure, on pp. 48-9, Fesko provides an overview of the changes introduced by Descartes, but he oversimplifies those changes by reducing them to the question of epistemological confidence in how things appear to our senses. More significantly, he seems to miss completely the implications of the Cartesian changes for his assumptions regarding what is meant by "cause" in the writings of Calvin and others. While he emphasizes that it was simply a way to insist justification and sanctification are inseparable but distinguishable (48), he equivocates repeatedly on what "cause" therefore means when it comes to how those graces are related to each other.

Put differently and more pointedly, the mere use of causation language has not been in dispute, but the function of that language in the broader exegetical, theological, and polemical contexts is a more complicated matter. Fesko's tacit confidence, in reading texts, that the historical uses of causation language reflect our own modern use of "cause" in the form of a generative or mechanical relationship is an easy mistake, certainly, but it is also a further example of the Whig historiography of which we were warned by the author early in this book. And this, to use Fesko's language, is something Fesko does not seem to grasp.

Fesko's Beyond Calvin (13), Metaphysics and Justification, pt. 9 (Conclusion of Essay)

Posted on January 1, 2014 by Mark A. Garcia

In this post we complete our review of this first essay in Fesko's *Beyond Calvin* by looking at the Conclusion (pp. 50-52). For the most part, I will take each of the sentences or points of the Conclusion under consideration *seriatim*, assessing each with a view to the question whether or not the author has demonstrated what he concludes. N.B.: In many cases, my responses will assume what I have covered in previous posts.

1. The Conclusion opens with the following statement: "This study began with claims of Garcia's identifying causal language as the trademark of historic Lutheran theology. The evidence gathered here challenges the viability of such a thesis." But, as demonstrated repeatedly, I have never "identified causal language as the trademark of historic Lutheran theology," and nothing the author has noted in my writings suggests otherwise. There is no such thesis. Nor has he identified any other author who has proposed this thesis.

2. "While lines of division can certainly be drawn between Lutheran and Reformed theologians, the employment of causality and metaphysics in the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and union with Christ is not one of those lines." Indeed, and I submit my own work as further evidence of this.

3. "Aristotelian metaphysics is common to both camps." But the author's conflation of "causality" and "metaphysics," and the general language of "Aristotelian metaphysics," confuses more than it explains, since we have not seen much evidence in this essay of a sense of "metaphysics" that means more than "causal language" and the like. Neither does this conclusion reflect a grasp of the various ways Aristotelian language was used among the Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the early modern era, as well as even within each tradition.

4. Fesko continues,

> "This raises important questions that are best illustrated by one of Garcia's claims. Garcia argues that Melanchthon's cause and effect explanation of justification and good works later became standard in the Lutheran tradition; he then goes on to quote Charles Hodge (1797-1878), 'There has never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants… It was universally admitted that good works are not necessary to our justification; that they are the consequences and indirectly the fruits of justification, and therefore cannot be its ground.' Garcia argues that Hodge's statement is 'rather remarkable,' implying that at minimum, the statement has more in common with Lutheran expressions, or at maximum, that Hodge is Lutheran at this point."

a. Fesko has read the statement incorrectly. In the context of my remark (in the Conclusion of *Life in Christ*, p. 267, n. 24), it is clear that what I find "rather remarkable" is Hodge's statement that "There has never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants…" regarding the relationship of justification to good works. And it is indeed remarkable, given the considerable variety of views on this relationship not only among the sixteenth-century Protestant theologians I discussed at length in my book, but also among Protestants between the Reformation and Hodge's day – including Nevin, with whom Hodge was of course in polemical conflict over the idea of union with Christ and Calvin. Simply from a historical perspective, Hodge's sweeping denial of any real difference among Protestants is, as I say, remarkable. In other words, Fesko obscures that I am not referring to the *view* that justification is the cause, in some sense, of good works as remarkable, but to Hodge's sweeping *historical* error.

b. Yes, Hodge's way of characterizing the relationship of justification to good works here does have "more in common with Lutheran expressions," but as my statement makes clear, I refer specifically to Melanchthon's way of relating these graces, particularly in his Romans expositions which I had discussed at length in the book and which are the background for my observation here. That way of expression did in fact become characteristic of the Lutheran tradition, evidenced in the Symbols of that tradition and in Melanchthon's relationship to them. My remark only makes sense if someone has read Hodge in light of my discussion of Melanchthon's expositions.

c. Fesko is here referring to a footnote in my Conclusion, and he is not the only one to refer to it (and to misuse it badly without regard for its context). Thus I might add here another "remarkable" note: it is remarkable that this footnote – the point of which continues to hold in view of the evidence – has received this attention, when other, more pertinent footnotes, and in fact most of the body of the book as well, have not.

5. Fesko will now proceed to capitalize still further on his misreading of the point in my footnote regarding Hodge. He states,

> "Given the uncovered evidence, Garcia's claim actually makes an important, albeit unintended, point. While space does not permit a full elaboration of the point, Hodge's expression has a great deal in common with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expressions. Given Hodge's commitment to the Westminster Standards (1646), a confession written during a time when Aristotelian metaphysics was quite common in Reformed theology, it is only natural that he would retain such expressions in his theology. In other words, Hodge seems to be more in tune with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expressions than Garcia."

a. Given that Fesko has mistaken what it is that I find "remarkable" in Hodge's statement, I simply observe that nothing in my footnote regarding Hodge so much as suggests his expression regarding justification and good works is unique to him or without precedent in the Reformed tradition.

b. I am not sure why Fesko is as liberal with "low blows" as he is in this essay, but I will resist the temptation to enter into a Pauline "I speak as a fool" mode regarding my allegedly being "out of tune" with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expressions, particularly the Westminster Standards. Quietly shaking my head and moving on to the next matter will have to do.

Instead, I would note an inconsistency in the approach of Fesko which mirrors a more general issue in recent rhetoric: when I or others refer to the importance of the language found in Calvin or in some other writer, Fesko and others with him protest with a finger-wagging, *tsk-tsk* reminder of the facts that no one Reformed theologian should be confused with the tradition, that only the Symbols of the tradition speak for the tradition, etc. (I call them facts because I generally agree with this protest, incidentally.) But if this holds for Calvin and others, surely it holds for Hodge too, does it not? Why then is Hodge's view – his own view on justification and good works, or his view of what Protestants "always" believed – representative? What makes it "more" representative than, say, Calvin's? Or if one is going to argue that Hodge's view *is* Calvin's view, why is Hodge's view more representative than Garcia's? Or Gaffin's? Or (fill in the blank)? Why Hodge and not Nevin, for instance? Appeal to the Symbols begs rather than answers the question, since all of these figures relate positively (I will assume, for the sake of argument) to the language of the Westminster Standards – as well as to various models found within the history of the Reformed tradition. So, again, if it is invalid to appeal to Calvin as representative, despite his historical importance for the shaping of the Reformed tradition in its infancy (cf. the alleged Calvin-onlyism with which Fesko is so concerned), why is it then valid to appeal to Hodge as representative, despite his lesser historical importance for the shaping of the Reformed tradition? Is it because he says what Fesko says? I disagree with some of what Calvin says in his theology and exegesis, but I find him instructive on many other things. So my motivation in studying Calvin isn't due to my need for a prominent voice to back me up. I can agree with Calvin and disagree with Hodge on a question, and vice versa, and so on with a host of other Reformed theologians. How, on the grounds of his objections to Calvin-onlyism, can Fesko appeal to Hodge at all? Or to Calvin? Or to Zanchi?

c. To demonstrate his point regarding my ignorance of the use of Aristotelian-type language in the Westminster Standards, Fesko refers to the use of "secondary cause" and other "causal language" in the Westminster Confession. Apparently this is designed to persuade me and the reader that the Westminster Standards use the causation language I am thought to deny to Reformed theologians and the Reformed tradition. To which I reply, yes, of course, not only do the Standards use the language of causation, etc., and I also note this sounds a lot like what I described in chapter 3 of *Life in Christ* (et al.) regarding Calvin's exegesis of Romans and his use of the notion of secondary causation.

6. We then read, "In fact, some of the recent literature that has eschewed metaphysical explanations and sought to eliminate the use of the *ordo salutis* in favor of a model that employs union with Christ as the controlling paradigm, begs the following question: What philosophical paradigm is being employed in contemporary formulations?"

The example the author cites for this point is a comment by Julie Canlis in which she refers to Gaffin as one who has prioritized "union over a traditional *ordo salutis*." Fesko then notes that Canlis refers to Gaffin's book on the resurrection. If Canlis's own work is Fesko's concern, it is a new concern raised in the Conclusion and even here Fesko does not deal with her arguments at all. And since Gaffin does not, in fact, seek to eliminate the use of the *ordo salutis* by way of his theology of union with Christ, this bears no actual relationship to Gaffin except apparently to offer some more guilt by association. Fesko will do this again in the next essay. Two pages later, on p. 53, in an essay on the *ordo salutis* that uniquely and extensively illustrates the root fallacy (professors and teachers, take note), the author will blend Gaffin (and Evans) together with Otto Weber, Barth, and Pannenberg on the way to including Schweitzer in this mix.

7. Then,

> "Garcia's conclusion and even desire to eliminate causal language from historic and dogmatic soteriological formulations has more in common with post-Enlightenment theology than that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To say, for example, that to employ cause and effect language to explain the relationship between justification and sanctification is to admit that they can be separated is more indebted to Enlightenment views of causality than those of the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Reformers and Early Orthodox theologians knew nothing of effects without causes."

a. Granted it is a broken record, but I have made no such conclusion nor expressed any such desire.

b. It is noteworthy that Fesko works throughout the essay, as here, with the tacit assumption that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ways of speaking or thinking are *necessarily* to be rejected, particularly if they are different from Reformation and post-Reformation forms. Related to this is his un-argued assumption that Enlightenment views on causality are *necessarily* inferior to pre-Enlightenment views. I grant no such assumption. This needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed; otherwise we are dealing with naive primitivism that assumes what is older is necessarily better – a view which, importantly, denies that the Spirit is at work in history and in the Church *sanctifying her in her grasp of the truth*. What is new is not necessarily better, but what is old is not necessarily better, either. To appeal to a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century theologian saying what you wish to say is not the same as making a biblical or theological argument.

c. In this statement, Fesko supplies a footnote that reads, "To see how Garcia takes the historical conclusions of his work and employs them dogmatically, see…" and refers to one of my journal articles on imputation. In this article I propose that Calvin's critique of the aberrant views of Andreas Osiander points to profitable ways to think Christologically about the relationship of imputation to union with Christ. (I later concluded the proposal in a more focused way here.) Again it would appear that, for Fesko, it is invalid to use historical conclusions from historical research in a dogmatic context. I do not know how it is possible to do otherwise, at least if one believes the history of the Church's theological reflection

on Scripture and the Faith has any contemporary relevance at all. And if it does not, are we not then re-inventing the Faith over and over again? Is there nothing we can learn today from what our Fathers have said and taught before us? Furthermore, what is Fesko doing throughout this book if not employing his own historical conclusions for a dogmatic end, that end being the dogmatic claims of what belongs to the Reformed tradition and what does not? This holds even more fundamentally when Fesko turns soon to the question of the *ordo salutis* and argues an explicit dogmatic point from an explicitly historical analysis.

8. He continues, "Or to claim that to employ cause and effect language implies that it corrupts justification as a forensic declaration because justification becomes generative of sanctification has more in common with Enlightenment mechanistic views of causality than sixteenth- and seventeenth-century metaphysical models."

a. Yes, so we should not read early modern theologians such as Calvin or Vermigli or Zanchi as though they have a generative model of causation in view but understand their use of "cause" and "effect" in early modern terms. In other words, we must stop doing what the author has been doing throughout even as he has told us not to do it.

b. Furthermore, given our own historical location, we should thus also clearly and insistently refrain from pretending that our own use of causal language is necessarily empty of that generative or mechanistic sense which was occasionally present but not dominant in the early modern era. Instead, if we are going to use that language, we are obliged to clarify what we do and do not mean by it.

c. If we refuse to clarify what *kind* of causation model we intend, then, *given our historical location with regard to causation language*, it is not sufficient simply to *deny* that one's doctrine of justification – when it is a doctrine of justification as the cause of sanctification and its good works – does not have a transformative, non-forensic core. One must *demonstrate* why it does not within the causation model one has proposed. I have suggested my own proposals for how this might be done, but I have yet to see an example of such a demonstration among those who, like Fesko, still retain, in their rhetoric, the productive or generative notion. To say this is an Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment concern is not a reply, not least since we speak in an Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment environment.

9. After some remarks on faith, passivity, and causality that I confess I do not understand, we read, "Garcia, therefore, appears to be using an Enlightenment grid to analyze the causal language of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and hence produces questionable results." If necessary, see above for a response to this claim.

10. In the closing remarks to his Conclusion, Fesko asks, "In the age of quantum physics and theories of relativity, are there better paradigms to be employed in the explanation of soteriology? Has Aristotelian metaphysics seen its best and brightest days?" Given that he does not suggest otherwise, it would appear Fesko is rather confident that there are no better paradigms at hand and that Aristotelian metaphysics has not yet seen its best days. But this is a curious point since he has emphasized the differences between the *Aristotelian* paradigms at work in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, and the modified *Aristotelian* paradigm at work in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras. So *which Aristotelianism* is the better one: the older one that only relates ideas in terms of consequent necessity and the like, or the later one which includes clear notions of production and mechanism? *And why*? And how should one use Aristotelian terms like cause and effect *in this era* in a way that avoids the

pitfalls of whichever version of Aristotelianism we wish to reject? We are not told. Instead we are reminded that, in the sixteenth century, this was a "common sense" way to explain the facets of salvation (pp. 51-2), as though it is still common sense today in the same way.

The author will move on to discuss the *ordo salutis* in his next essay, so this concludes the review of this first essay in the book. I have reviewed the introduction and this first essay at such length (13 posts and nearly 30K words) because the matters are of such great importance – not only the matters of theology and history, but of scholarly rigor and responsibility. I should hope that that much is clear in what has been examined so far. The other essays in this book, which I will continue to review in turn, evidence the same problems as this opening essay does. But it is critically important to recognize these problems as more than technical and, thus, to understand the reason for these many review posts: this is nothing like pedantry, and in the context of current debates and publications, as well as ecclesiastical realities, these essays contribute fuel to the sober sentiment that, however much we may wish to believe otherwise, we face in our day a complicated crisis in contemporary confessional Reformed scholarship.