

“The Old Wesley(s) and the New Luther:
An Invitation to Rethink their Views on Soteriology”

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I. Introduction:

Wesleyan scholars have long been interested in the intersection between the work of Martin Luther and that of the Wesley brothers. This is due, in large part, because there solid historical and soteriological connections between the co-founders of Methodism and the Saxon reformer. In the dramatic events May of 1738, both Wesleys identified Martin Luther as a formative influence in their “evangelical conversions.” But later, upon a closer reading of Luther’s works John Wesley grew increasingly critical of Luther’s understanding of the Christian life – particularly pertaining to righteousness, good works and sanctification.

Way back in 1963, when Philip Watson explored “Wesley and Luther on Christian Perfection,” he correctly averred: “there can be no doubt that, as Luther see it, the Christian is one who lives in love and grows in love. ... Yet it is equally beyond doubt that Luther has no room for the idea that a Christian might become ‘perfect’ in this life. *Simul Justus et peccator* remains for him the necessary characterization even of the matures, the holiest, of Christian believers.”¹ Dr. Watson also offered a structural trajectory which would indeed mark out a path followed by Methodist studies for many years: “We should ... remember that Wesley, who was steeped in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, things along the more dynamic lines of the Greek *teleiosis*, while Luther has the more static concept of the Latin *perfecto* in mind.”² This route pointed out

¹ Philip Watson, “Wesley and Luther on Christian Perfection,” *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 15, (1963), 300.

² Watson, “Wesley and Luther on Christian Perfection,” 301.

by both Watson and Albert Outler,³ has been pursued by many gifted Wesleyan scholars⁴ and recent work on the Wesleyan approach to sanctification has also focused attention more directly upon the *theosis* concept of the early Christian writers.⁵

Recently, the “dialectical” or oppositional reading of Luther’s theology (epitomized – perhaps by *Simul justus et peccator*) has been challenged by a group of creative Lutheran scholars from Finland. The pioneering work of the so-called “Finnish School,” comprised by Drs. Tuomo Mannermaa, Simo Peura, and Antti Raunio, among others, has more-or-less turned Lutheran studies on its head by suggesting that *theosis* and transformation of the inner person is more integral to the German reformer’s soteriology than the earlier dialectical approach might suggest.⁶ In what follows here, then, I will examine the Wesleys’ early acquaintance with Luther’s work, and their subsequent (largely John’s) disaffection and critique of it. An attempt will be made to understand why the “old Wesley(s)” did not anticipate or connect with the so-called “new Luther” or the Finnish School, and finally a few points of congruence and theological trajectories for future conversation will be suggested.

II. The Wesley’s Historical Connections With Luther’s Work:

³ Albert Outler, ed. *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 10.

⁴ John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley On Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 60-61; Randy Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodox: Influences, Convergences and Differences,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 20 (1990), 29-53. Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1991).;

⁵ A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God: a forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition*, (Wilton: Morehouse Press, 1998); K. Steve McCormick, “Theosis In Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1991), 38-103; James H. Charlesworth, “Two Similar Paths: Methodism and Greek Orthodoxy,” in S. T. Kimbrough, ed. *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 107-129; S.T. Kimbrough, “Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2008), 199-212, and Richard T. Harrison, “Orthodox and Wesleyan Perspectives on Deification,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2014), 52-70, among many others.

⁶ See Carl E. Bratten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union With Christ: the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), for a good introduction to this movement. See also Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present In Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), and *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther’s Religious World*, (Minneapolis, 2010).

The Wesleys's "conversion experiences" have been widely investigated, and yet as Frank Baker wrote so many years ago, "The letters, the sermons, the hymns, in which the two Wesley brothers reveal directly or indirectly their own views of what happened at Aldersgate, suggest that they thought of it as basically an experience of justifying faith: not the justification of arrant sinners who had previously neither possessed nor wanted any faith, but the justification of noble even saintly, sinners who had come to realize more fully their dependence upon God in Christ. In any case, this realization, though it might bring no reformation of conduct, did bring regeneration of life."⁷

The on-going assessment of the Wesleys' conversions has involved Wesleyan experts, for many years and are fully summarized elsewhere.⁸ While the fruits of this conversation are many, but for the current inquiry, I will focus on three main aspects: their recognition centrality of Justification by faith to the Christian gospel (as Baker stated above), and hence Martin Luther's writings dominate the theological landscape with respect to the "evangelical conversions" of both brothers. Second, it involved some serious rethinking of cardinal tenets of Protestant belief such as the nature and relationship of saving faith, good works and justification; which led a pointed conversation (with Count Zinzendorf) about the nature of Christian righteousness: is Christian righteousness "imputed" or "imparted?"

When John Wesley's journal described the events that led up to the experience of the evening of May 24, 1738, it started with Oxford and the Atlantic crossing for the Georgia mission in order to provide a theological context. This chronology (and a detailed treatment of it would merit a paper of its own) revolved around John's attempt to integrate a Luther-like

⁷ Frank Baker, "Aldersgate 1738-1963: the Challenge of Aldersgate," *Duke Divinity Bulletin*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (May 1963), 68.

⁸ Cf. Randy L. Maddox, ed. *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1990).

emphasis upon justification by faith alone (as was mediated to Wesley by Peter Böhler, Count Zinzendorf and other Moravians) with Wesley's understanding of his Anglican soteriological roots. This process was carried out in the emotional context of profound sense of disappointment and missional failure of John's part. Charles Wesley's appropriation of Luther's work seemed to follow a similar pattern, but was less fully articulated.

This soul straining examination of soteriological issues revolved around the nature of justifying faith continued unabated once John returned to England, and throughout the spring of 1738 and was brought to a head through a series of searching conversations with the Moravian missionary, Peter Böhler, in January 1738, when John Wesley averred that he did not have the "a true, living faith ... I fixed not this faith on its right object; I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. Again, I knew not that I was *wholly void of this faith*, but only thought *I had not enough* of it." John's encounter with the Moravian, resulted in John affirming "true faith in Christ (which is but one) that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, 'dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness,' I was quite amazed and looked upon it as a new gospel. If this was so, it was clear I had not faith."⁹ By March 5, 1738, through further conversation with Peter Böhler John Wesley felt he was "clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of 'that faith whereby alone we are saved,' with the full, Christian salvation."¹⁰ This realization had two rather opposite direct results; on the one hand Wesley was willing to say that he was not and had not previously been a genuine Christian, and he began to – at the Moravian's urging -- preach "salvation by faith alone."¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, 247-48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18:228.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

After about six weeks of preaching faith, under Böhler's tutelage, the two men spoke again, on April 22, 1738. By then John had not only fully embraced Böhler's conception of saving faith, he had also begun to integrate it into his own Anglican theological posture: "I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith, viz., that it is (to use the words of our Church), 'A sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ *his* sins are forgiven and *he* [is] reconciled to the favour of God.'"¹² John resolved to seek "a true, living faith in Christ [which] is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past, and freedom from all present sins."¹³ He, therefore, renounced "... all dependence in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness, on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up: (2) by adding to 'the constant use of all the 'other means of grace,' continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in him as my Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption."¹⁴

The chronology of a direct connection between the Wesleys and the writings of Martin Luther began with Charles Wesley's journal entry for Wednesday, May 17, 1738, in which he wrote: "Today I saw Luther on the Galatians, which Mr. [William] Holland had accidentally lit upon. We began, and found him nobly full of faith. My friend, in hearing him, was so affected as to breathe out sighs and groans unutterable."¹⁵ Charles continued: "I marveled that we were so soon, and so entirely, removed from him that called us into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. Who would believe our Church had been founded on this important article of

¹² JWJ, 18: 234.

¹³ Ibid., 18:248.

¹⁴ Ibid., 248-49.

¹⁵ S.t.T. Kimbrough Jr, and Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* 2 Vol., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1:103-04, The editors identify this edition of Luther's *Galatian's Commentary* as likely being that published by Thomas Vautrollier, in London, 1575, or a subsequent reprint of it.

justification by faith alone! I am astonished I should ever think this a new doctrine, especially while our Articles and Homilies¹⁶ stand unrepealed, and the key of knowledge is not yet taken away.”¹⁷ Later that same day Charles Wesley “... spent some hours this evening in private with Martin Luther,” he wrote, “who was greatly blessed to me, especially his conclusion of the second chapter. I laboured, waited, and prayer to see ‘who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*’ [Gal. 1:6-7].”¹⁸ It is not insignificant that the person introducing the younger Wesley to Luther’s *Galatians* was William Holland (1711-61): “a founding member of the Fetter Lane Society, and on its division in 1740, Holland threw in his lot with the Moravians. He became one of their leading officers and preachers”¹⁹ Once again, the Wesleys’ understanding of Luther’s cardinal tenet of justification by faith was mediated to them by the English Moravians (including Böhler, John Bray, William Holland, Howell Harris, and others).

The fact that Charles described Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone as “a new doctrine” suggests something significant regarding his own theological reflection up to this point. The walk-up to the younger Wesley’s “personal Pentecost” also involved several soul searching conversations with Peter Böhler regarding faith and salvation; after having begun teaching the German Moravian missionary English, on February 21, 1738, Böhler began to teach Wesley the soteriological language of justification by faith. Charles wrote: “He asked me, ‘Do you hope to be saved?’ ‘Yes’ . ‘For what reason do you hope it?’ ‘Because I have used my best

¹⁶ See for example *Homily #3*, “The Homily on the Salvation of Mankind,” and *Article XI*, which reads: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.” http://anglicanonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html accessed on 5/8/18.

¹⁷ S.T. Kimbrough Jr, and Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* 2 Vol., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1:103-04, The editors identify this edition of Luther’s *Galatian’s Commentary* as likely being that published by Thomas Vautroillier, in London, 1575, or a subsequent reprint of it.

¹⁸ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, 1:104.

¹⁹ W. Reginald Ward and Rickard P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 18, Journals and Diaries I (1735-1738)*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 229, note #75.

endeavours to serve God?’ He shook his head, and said no more. I thought him very uncharitable, saying in my heart, ‘What, are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would you rob me of my endeavours? I have nothing else to trust to.’²⁰

Charles recollection of this conversation, and his state of mind at the time, suggests there was in his mind a misapprehension about the respective roles of faith and good works, with respect to justification and sanctification in the process of reconciliation with God. This perception is reinforced by a conversation Charles had with William Law on August 10, 1739: “He [Law] agreed to our notion of faith,” Charles wrote, “but would have it that all men held it I told him, he was my schoolmaster to bring me to Christ; but the reason why I did not come sooner to Him, was my seeking to be sanctified before I was justified.”²¹ This confusion was probably intensified by the fact that, as an ardent Anglican, Charles was accustomed to thinking of good works as having a significant (albeit secondary) role in working out one’s salvation. In the evening of May 17, while reading Luther’s *Galatians*, Charles was dramatically impacted by Luther’s *Christus pro me* emphasis (“Christ for me”) – a message which reverberates throughout Luther’s book.²²

Soon after having discovered this “new doctrine of justification by faith alone,” through instrumentality of Luther’s *Galatians*, and in the midst of serious illness and a lingering sense of vocational failure because of the fiasco of his mission work in Georgia, Charles Wesley was confronted by his nurse Mrs. Musgrave with the declaration, made on Pentecost Sunday, May 21, 1738 : “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe and thou shalt be healed of all

²⁰ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I:97.

²¹ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I, 184.

²² Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I:103.

thy infirmities!”²³ Charles experienced an “a strange palpitation of heart, I said,” he wrote, “but yet feared to say: ‘I believe, I believe.’”²⁴ His journal entry for May 23, 1738 reported: “At nine I began an hymn upon my conversion”²⁵ The next evening, on May 24, when John arrived at Charles’ sick room, fresh from a meeting at Aldersgate Street declaring: “‘I believe.’ We sang the hymn with great joy,” Charles recalled, “and parted with prayer.”²⁶ The opening lines of the hymn we have come to call “And Can It Be” echo the *Christus pro me* Charles met in Luther’s *Galatians*:

And can it be, that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour’s blood?
Died he *for me*? – who caused His pain!
For me? – who Him to death pursued.
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die *for me*?²⁷

Charles Wesley became an ardent evangelist for justification by faith alone -- even while sill upon his sick bed: “From this time I endeavoured to ground as many of our friends as came [to visit him] in this fundamental truth, salvation by faith alone, not an idle dead faith, but a faith which works by love, and is necessarily productive of all good works and all holiness.”²⁸ The inter-connection between justification by faith (alone) and good works, would eventually lead to

²³ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I, 106.

²⁴ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I: 106.

²⁵ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I: 109.

²⁶ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I:111.

²⁷ William Osborn, ed. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 Vol. (London: the Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, 1868-72), Vol. I, 105-06, with emphasis added.

²⁸ Charles Wesley. *Manuscript Journal*, I, 104. See for example, Anglican Article XII. Of Good Works.

“Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”

http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html accessed 5/8/18.

a separation between the Wesleys and Moravians, whom they believed represented the views of the German reformer. But on Sunday, June 11, 1738, Charles reported that he “Received much comfort in reading Luther.”²⁹

After several days of being “much buffeted,” and having “peace, but yet in heaviness, because of manifold temptations,”³⁰ on May 28, 1738, John Wesley was reviled “as an enthusiast, a seducer, and a setter-forth of new doctrines,” and when he preached at St. George’s and Long Acre Chapel.³¹ The rudiments of the sermon that John Wesley preached Long Acre Chapel, on May 20, 1738, are quite likely preserved in his “Standard Sermon #5, Justification by Faith,” and the impact of Aldersgate and Luther are abundantly very direct manner in which John approached his topic.

Wesley followed Luther in defining Justification as “pardon” and stressing it’s forensic or “imputed” character as he wrote: “The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he ‘showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of sin that are past.’”³² Putting a sharper point on his definition just about a year later, John declared: “Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins, and (what is necessarily implied therein) our acceptance with God.”³³ In his May 20th sermon on “Salvation by Faith,” John sought to distinguish clearly between justification and sanctification – a feat which may have eluded the Wesleys from time to time up this point: “... it is evident from what has been already observed that it [justification] is not the being made actually made just and

²⁹ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, I:120.

³⁰ JWJ, 18:250-52, May 24-27, 1738.

³¹ JWJ, 18: 252-53.

³² Outler, ed. JW Sermons, I: 189.

³³ Outler, ed. JW Sermons, II, #42, “Satan’s Devices,” 157.

righteous. This is *sanctification*; which is indeed in some degree the immediate *fruit* if justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God *does for us* through his Son; the other what he *works in us* by his Spirit.”³⁴

On June 11, 1738, John Wesley fulfilled his obligation to preach at St. Mary’s, Oxford, and he chose as his scripture text, Ephesians 2:8, “By grace ye are saved through faith.” Based on the reception his new emphasis in preaching had received in London the week before, Albert Outler was justified in noting: “He was by now very well aware of the controversial character of his message, and he could not have expected a sympathetic hearing at Oxford. ... It is worth nothing that the Moravian substance in the sermon is now qualified by echoes from the Edwardian *Homilies*, as in the claim that salvation involved a *power not to commit sin* There is also an obvious Anglican nuance in the definition of saving faith presented here.”³⁵ In this same sermon, Wesley also rehearsed the popular objections against preaching justification by faith with the familiarity of one who had heard them all before: “... to preach salvation or justification by faith only is to preach against holiness and good works.”³⁶

Wesley’s s defined saving faith defined as including both assent (*fides*) and trust (*fiduca*) and with a Luther-like flourish that focused on *Christus pro me* “trust” clearly wins out over “assent” as his focal point. John wrote: “Christian faith is then not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as *given for us*, and *living in us*. It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that through the favour of God,

³⁴ Outler, ed., *JW Sermons*, I, #5, “Justification by Faith,” 187.

³⁵ Albert Outler, ed. *The Works of John Wesley: Vol. I, Sermons 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 110, emphasis added.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

and in consequence hereof a closing with him and cleaving to him as our ‘wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption’ or in one word, our salvation.”³⁷ Once again, John distinguished between justification (as “pardon”) and sanctification (as restoration). He declared: “... it is evident from what has been already observed that it [justification] is not the being made actually made just and righteous. This is *sanctification*; which is indeed in some degree the immediate *fruit* if justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God *does for us* through his Son; the other what he *works in us* by his Spirit.”³⁸ As we shall see, below, this ability to distinguish clearly between justification and sanctification came precisely at a time when others (like the English Moravians) seemed to be conflating those two, and it was an important development for the Wesleys.

Dick Heitzenrater rightly described “the nub of the problem” regarding John Wesley’s theological reorientation was that it required him to integrate justification by faith, as mediated by the Moravians, on the one hand, and with his own personal experience, on the other.³⁹ As John began to integrate Moravian soteriology into this own experience it became clear, as Heitzenrater noted, “...that he was trying to understand (and experience) a Lutheran theology in the context of his own Anglican and Arminian assumptions. The English Moravians looked for marks of salvation that Wesley would more naturally understand (within his own tradition) as evidence of sanctification. They were propounding a view that essentially equated conversion with perfection, an understanding of salvation as sanctification that Wesley was never able to

³⁷ Outler, *JW Sermons*, I:121.

³⁸ Outler, *JW Sermons*, I: 187,

³⁹ Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations,” 68. He also reminds the reader that Lutheran commentator on Wesley’s life and thought, Martin Schmidt, questions whether Wesley properly understood Böhler’s position. But even the more carefully nuanced approach to Wesley’s conversion which Schmidt presents “combines Pietist and Reformed ideas in a Lutheran fashion that would be problematic from an Anglican point of view. Cf. Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, 3 Vol. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), “The Conversion,” I:242-45.

accept fully, even in the light of his own experience under the Moravian tutelage.”⁴⁰ John’s journal hints at his on-going efforts to integrate the Moravian-Lutheran approach to justification by faith with his own Anglican tradition, on November 12, 1738, for example, John reported: “in the following week began more narrowly to inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much controverted point of justification by FAITH. And the sum of what I found in the Homilies I extracted and printed for the use of others.”⁴¹

By June 15, 1739, John Wesley was reading Luther’s *Comment on the Epistle to the Galatians* as he traveled by coach from Markfield to London, in the aftermath of his own disappointing visit to the Herrnhuth (the Moravian Mecca) and on the eve of the painful schism with the English Moravians -- who were embracing such a radical notion of saving faith that they drifted towards antinomianism and began to disparage any good works and spiritual disciplines. John reported that he “was utterly ashamed. How have I esteemed book, only because I had heard it commended by others! Or, at best, because I had read some excellent sentences occasionally quoted from it.”⁴²

In the throes of his own theological disappointment with the Moravians, Wesley argued that Luther “... makes not thing out, clears up not one considerable difficulty; that he is quite shallow in his remarks on many passages, and muddy and confused almost on all; but that he is deeply tinctured with *mysticism* throughout, and hence often fundamentally wrong.”⁴³ The two specific areas in which Luther’s “mysticism” showed through, in John Wesley’s view, was in

⁴⁰ Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations,” 68-69.

⁴¹ JWW, 19: 21. This extract was published by John Wesley under the title, *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*, (Oxford, 1738). Heitzenrater reported: “The tract was republished at least twenty times during Wesley’s lifetime. When the revival started in Bristol in 1739, the Wesleys gave away these pamphlets by the hundreds, John remarking to James Hutton that the pamphlet was ‘better than all our sermons put together.’” (cf. JWW, Letters, 25:645).

⁴² JWW, 19:, Journal II, 200-201.

⁴³ JWW, 19, Journal II: 201.

terms of the Luther's rejection of the theological role of human reason, as well as his disparagement of the interconnection between soteriology and good works. The former was probably rooted in the Wesleys' Arminian modification of the reformer's "total depravity" whereas the latter matter struck directly at the Methodist insistence that "methods" of spiritual formation were implicit in the process of sanctification.⁴⁴

The issue of good works and transformation of the inner person is particularly pertinent to our inquiry. Describing Luther's failure to see the interconnection of faith, good works and transformation, Wesley wrote:

... how blasphemously does he speak of good works and of the law of God! Constantly coupling the law with sin, death, hell, or the devil! Whereas it can no more be proved by Scripture that Christ 'delivers us from the law of God' than he delivers us *from holiness* or *from heaven*. Here (I apprehend) is the real spring of the grand error of the Moravians. They follow Luther, for better or worse. Hence, their 'No works, no law, no commandments..'⁴⁵

John Wesley's statement that Luther's *Galatians* was "deeply tinctured with *mysticism* throughout, and hence often fundamentally wrong"⁴⁶ reminds one of his "Preface" to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* which bewailed the "the scheme of the Mystic divines" whom "we had once in great veneration, as the best explainers of the Gospel of Christ."⁴⁷ Once again, they "lay another foundation," by on the one hand pulling "deeds of the law [whereby] no flesh be

⁴⁴ This assessment is supported by the note supplied by Ward & Heitzenrater. John Wesley's "revulsion against the work which had been instrumental in his brother's conversion is a measure both of this anxiety at the current situation [with the Moravians], and the degree to which his own mind was returning to old [Anglican] channels." Ibid., 200, note #99.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ JWW, 19, Journal II: 201.

⁴⁷ William Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 Vol., (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1868), Vol. I, 2.

justified” in order to “establish our own righteousness in the place of our own works.”⁴⁸ The crux of the matter, as the Wesleys had come to see it, was: “Holiness of heart, as well as holiness of life, is not the cause, but the effect of it [justification].” The mystics misunderstand the role of good works on the front end of salvation – if you will – since clearly “the sole cause of our acceptance with God ... And even the condition of it is not ... our holiness of heart and life; but our faith alone; faith contradistinguished from holiness as well as from good works.”⁴⁹ But the faith which “alone” justifies, is not “alone” when it comes to growing the life of holiness; “other foundation therefore, can no man lay,” John reported, “without being an adversary to Christ and His Gospel, than faith alone, faith, though necessarily *producing both, yet not including either good works or holiness.*”⁵⁰

Apparently, in reaction to his close reading of Luther’s *Galatians* in June and July of 1741, and (perhaps) his subsequent conversations with the Moravian Bishop, Count Nicholas Zinzendorf (whom Wesley received as an accurate interpreter of Luther), John edited a few of his earlier statements of admiration for Martin Luther out of his published sermons.⁵¹ And as he prepared an abridgement of *Luther’s Life*, in 1749, John Wesley found himself so disturbed by aspects of Luther’s character (which in Wesley’s mind reflected badly upon his sanctification) that he withheld it that abridgment from publication for nearly three decades.⁵² Over the next

⁴⁸ Ibid. xix.

⁴⁹ Ibid., xx

⁵⁰ Ibid., Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Outler, ed. JW Sermons: I:129, n. #119.

⁵² Ward and Heitzenrater, eds. *Journal & Diaries*, III (1743-1754), Vol. 20, 285, entry for July 19, 1745, where John lamented: “O! what a pity that he [Luther] had no faithful friend! -- none that would at all hazards rebuke him plainly and sharply for his rough, untractable spirit and bitter zeal for opinions, so greatly obstructive to the work of God.” Wesley’s abridgement was subsequently published in his *Arminian Magazine*, in 1778 (cf. Ibid., n.#31.).

four decades Martin Luther was referenced in John Wesley's standard sermons five more times, none of which have much bearing on the current conversation.⁵³

In much later, in "On God's Vineyard," Sermon #107, Oct. 1787, John Wesley returned to his earlier, stinging critique of Luther's soteriology:

It has been frequently observed that very few were clear in their judgment both with regard to justification and sanctification. Many who have spoken and written admirably well concerning justification had no clear conception, nay, were totally ignorant, of the doctrine of sanctification. Who has wrote more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone? And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conception of it? In order to be thoroughly convinced of this, of his total ignorance with regard to sanctification, there needs no more than to read over, without prejudice, his celebrated comment on the Epistle to the Galatians.⁵⁴

In literary flourish, fueled by theological triumphalism, John concluded that the Methodist had succeeded, soteriologically, where both Luther and many others had failed: "how many writers of the Romish Church ... have wrote strongly and scripturally on sanctification; who nevertheless were entirely unacquainted with the nature of justification. ... But it has pleased God to give the Methodist a full and clear knowledge of each, and the whole difference between them."⁵⁵ That is to say, what Luther got right (justification), the Roman Catholic got wrong; what the Roman Catholics got right (sanctification) Martin Luther got wrong; but the Methodist were (are?) right on both justification and sanctification. In positioning himself and the Methodists, in a "middle way" Luther and Rome, Wesley seemed to stand squarely within the *via media* of Anglicanism.

Delineating what he considered to be the distinctive Methodist slant on soteriology, John Wesley summed it up by answering the rhetorical question: "Who then is a Christian?" He

⁵³ Outler, JW Sermons, I:330,; II: 78;556-57;III: 335, 449.

⁵⁴ Outler, JW Sermons, III, 506.

⁵⁵ Outler, JW Sermons, III, 506.

replied “He that, being justified by faith, hath peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; and at the same time is ‘born again’ ... inwardly changed from the image of the devil to that ‘image of God wherein he was created.’ He finds the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him; and whom this love sweetly constrains to ‘love his neighbor,’ every man, ‘as himself.”⁵⁶ Following this description of justification by lively faith and re-creation (sanctification) by on-going infusion of God’s love, John made it clear that – in his mature view – justification was not by “faith alone,” since he also delineated several pages of “spiritual helps” whereby this salvation was both given by God and embraced by the Methodists and the – not surprisingly – Methodist practices, and discipline.⁵⁷

III. The Wesleys and Martin Luther Via the Moravians:

The question of to what extent the English Moravians accurately represented the gist of Martin Luther’s soteriology is a difficult one. Yet this clearly has bearing upon the question of how and why the Wesleys reacted to and interpreted Luther’s writings in the fashion they did. In this regard it is important to recall, however, that the understanding of Luther which the Moravians had gained was also one that was mediated to them through Pietism. This means that, while both Wesley brothers read and studied Luther’s works first hand, they did so in a theological context (through the Moravians and their own conversion experiences and in the midst of “the Stillness Controversy”) that provided a distinctive lens for reading the reformer.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Outler, Sermons, III:507.

⁵⁷ Outler, Sermons III:508-12.

⁵⁸ The literature for exploring this question is voluminous. See for example: Albrecht Beutel and Reinhold Rieger, “Religiö Erfahrung und Wissenschaftlich Theologie,” in *Festschrift für Ulrich Köpf zum 70. Geburtstag* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 1-12; Dale W. Brown, “The Wesleyan Revival from a Pietist Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 24, (1989), 7-17; Ted. A. Campbell, “Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: the Moravian-Methodist Connection,” *Communio Viatorum*, Vol. 45, No. 1, (2003), 67-80; Kenneth Collins, “The Influence of Early German Pietism on John Wesley,” *Covenant Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Nov. 1990), 23-42; Frederick Dreyer,

Briefly summarizing the historical-theological terrain surveyed above, one might say that the Wesley brothers encountered Luther's work initially at the point of the German reformer's emphasis upon justification by faith alone (vs. self-salvation via good works), and his corollary emphasis upon *Christus pro me*. For both Charles and John this began the process of reordering their thinking about the relative relationship between justification and sanctification (as illustrated in Charles' conversation with William Law and John's early sermons) and yet without dulling Luther's *Christus pro me* emphasis upon the liberating power of God's grace.

Early appreciation of Luther gradually paled, however, particularly on the part of John (Charles seems not to have returned to Luther much at all after the summer of 1738), due to important corollaries from Luther's thought which were seen in the English Moravians; of particular concern in this regard were those emphases which undermined the Anglican understanding of justification by "a lively faith that worketh by love" and the Wesleyan understanding of sanctification as Christian Perfection (involving methods of spiritual formation – like the five "means of grace"). The question of the nature of Christian righteousness (imputed or imparted?) also loomed large in the background of the conversations between John Wesley and the English Moravians when it came to the matter of sanctification.

John's theological assessment and ultimate schism from the English Moravians is detailed in "An Extract of the Reverend Mr. John Wesley's Journal, From November 1, 1739, to September 3, 1741." While there were claims of love and appreciation for the Moravians in

The Genesis of Methodism, (London: Associated University Press, 1999), Scot Kisker, "John Wesley's Puritan and Pietist Heritage Reexamined," *Wesley Theological Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 1999), 266-88; Sandra Gerlach, "John Wesley, Inquirer Seeking Grace: the Moravian View," *Methodist History*, Vol. 45, Vol. 4 (July 2007); Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Earnest Stoeffler, "Religious Roots of the Early Moravian and Methodist Movements," *Methodist History*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (April 1986), 132-40; and Karl Zeher, "The Relationship Between Pietism in Halle and Early Methodism," *Methodist History*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (July 1979), 211-24.

John's "open letter," those hundred pages also chronicled his gradual and growing disaffection and disapproval. Although there were many ancillary issues involved, it seems (to me at least) that the foundation of John's disaffection revolved about the English Moravian's radicalization of Luther's rejection of "good works" as being an aid to justification into a theology of "stillness" which led to a disparagement of any role for the "means of grace" and (what John would later call) "works of piety" as aids to sanctification. This, in John's view, evidenced a misapprehension about the proper relationship between justification and sanctification, which as we saw above, John Wesley was willing to blame on "mysticism."

The inter-connection between the two complaints which John Wesley raised against the English Moravians is, in my view, were rooted in a fundamental difference he had with them on the nature of Christian righteousness and the implications that had for one's understanding of sanctification (as Christian Perfection) and the nature of Christian life. This was aptly demonstrated by John Wesley's subsequent conversation with the Moravian leader Count Nicholas Zinzendorf (1700-60), on September 3, 1741. In that lengthy discussion Wesley detailed six points of contention, which revolved around the questions about nature of saving faith and the role of good works.⁵⁹ Their face-to-face dialogue carried out in their only common language, ecclesiastical Latin, and is recorded verbatim in John Wesley's journal. Wesley's objections to the Moravian program were clearly stated about half-way through the conversation: "I feared lest they should teach falsely; (1) Concerning the end of our faith in this life, to wit, Christian Perfection. (2) Concerning the means of grace, so termed by our church."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ JWW, Vol. 19, Journal II, 215-22., or Frank Baker, ed. *The Works of John Wesley, Voi. 26: Letters II (1740-1755)*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 14-31 in a fuller text.

⁶⁰ JWW, Vol. i9, Journal ((, 212.

This conversation led directly to an extensive discussion on Christian Perfection, in which Count Zinzendorf asserted: “I acknowledge no inherent perfection in this life. This is the error of errors. I pursue it through the world with fire and sword. I trample upon it; I devote it to utter destruction. Whoever follows inherent perfection, denies Christ.”⁶¹ That the Count and John Wesley are working from very different understandings of Christian Perfection is amply indicated by their subsequent dialogue, in which John sought to describe “perfection” in terms of an inner transformation which occurs within a Christian by an infusion and growth in love – which is NOT an “inherent perfection,” but which is a work of God the Holy Spirit: “I believe the Spirit of Christ works this perfection in true Christians.”⁶²

In this regard, it seemed that John Wesley was trying to safe-guard the potential of transforming grace as being operative within the Christian (“imparted righteousness”) whereas Zinzendorf was operating from a Lutheran understanding of justification that stressed “imputed righteousness” which offered no connection to sanctification or transformation within the Christian. This was certainly the “read” of Luther which John reflected when critiqued him in “On God’s Vineyard” (1787) writing: “Who has wrote more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone?” “And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conception of it?”⁶³

It is my view that the Moravian appropriation (or misappropriation), of Luther’s work and John Wesley’s pointed critique of it, can most productively be approached through an examination of the understanding of the normative Christian life as being *simul justus et peccator* (“simultaneously righteous and yet a sinner”) and the implications that has for

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Outler, JW Sermons, III, 506.

theological corollaries like justification by faith “alone,” the nature of Christian righteousness (imputed or imparted?), and the potential role of “good works” in Christian salvation. Hence, it is to Luther’s famous dictum – *simul justus et peccator* -- (“the old” read of Luther, if you will) we turn our attention.

IV. The “Old Luther on Faith, Righteousness and Good Works:”

Here I am drastically condensing and summarizing about twenty-five pages of primary research in *Luther’s Works*. In his early years as professor of Bible at Wittenberg University, Luther had a gradual reorientation from what must be acknowledged as a deficient understanding of late Medieval Roman Catholic soteriology to what would become his own nascent Protestantism. This transition can be traced through his lectures on the Psalms (1513-15) and Romans (1515-16). Particularly notable in this regard, was Luther’s comment on Romans 2:13, in which he described “to justify” as in objective or forensic terms as “to declare” or “to reckon righteous.”⁶⁴ And then further on, in his comment on Romans 4:7, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,” the reformer developed – at some length -- his description of the Christian life in which “... we are sinners before ourselves and yet in the reckoning of God we are righteous through faith. And we practice this faith in him who sets us free in so far as, while we wait till he takes our sin away, we meanwhile see constantly to it that it does not get the upper hand but is held in check.”⁶⁵ Luther used the analogy of the Christian life being like a person who is sick with a deadly disease as a way to describe the healing power of Christian faith. The Christian is one who is deathly sick in sin and yet “who believes his physician as he assures him that he will most certainly get well. In the meantime, he obeys his orders I hope of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

recovery and abstains from whatever is forbidden to him, let he slow up the promised cure and get worse again, until finally the physician accomplishes what he has so confidently predicted.”⁶⁶

This same period saw also Luther shifting ground on the nature of faith, he became increasingly disinterested in faith as “assent” (*fides*) which – in his mind was too thoroughly connected to what he viewed as the soteriological failures of Medieval Catholicism – was moving towards faith as “trust” (*fiducia*) which he discovered in reading the Rhineland theologians and in the gospels. This shift, also discernable in Luther’s early writings, moved him more and more towards the “Christ alone” axis of his theology. .⁶⁷

It was in the context of these aforementioned theological “shifts” which Martin Luther had the “Tower Experience” (*Turmerlebnes*) described in an autobiographical section in the “preface” to the Latin edition of his works (1546).⁶⁸ In his account Luther described shape of mind as he prepared his Romans lectures, for he was

... captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single work in Chapter 1 [:17], ‘in it the righteousness of God is revealed,’ that stood in my way. For I hated that word ‘righteousness of God,’ which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.⁶⁹

That night in the tower, he found a different understanding of that phrase, “the righteousness of God,” “... I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness

⁶⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁶⁷ Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 51-67, and well as Bard Thompson’s lectures on Luther – from many many years ago. Follow up with references LW. 10, 11.

⁶⁸ Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 87-95.

⁶⁹ Lewis Spits, ed. *Luther’s Works: The Career of the Reformer IV*, Vol. 34, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 336.

of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness of God with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”⁷⁰

In explaining what he would subsequently call “alien righteousness”⁷¹ Luther’s description of the righteousness of the practicing Christian reflect some of the conversation between John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf described above, and Luther seems to be taking the Count’s side in the argument: “Can one say that this sick man is healthy? [that is “righteous”]? No; but he is at the same time both sick and healthy. He is actually sick, but he is healthy by virtue of the sure prediction of the physician whom he believes.”⁷² Tying this analogy more concretely to Christian soteriology, then, Luther supplied a Christological interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30f), in which Christ is our “Good Samaritan,” the physician of our souls, in Whom we live by hope for our healing and salvation. This means, however, that “... this life is a life of cure from sin; it is not a life of sinlessness, as if the cure were finished and health had been recovered. The church is an inn and an infirmary for the sick and for convalescents. Heaven, however, is the place where the whole and the righteous live.”⁷³

Luther’s redefinition of the nature of righteousness *visa via* living the Christian life continued through several developments, as is illustrated in the very extensive *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses* (1518),⁷⁴ and came to fuller expression in his “Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness” of 1519. In that sermon, Martin delineated the types of Christian righteousness: “the first is alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This

⁷⁰ LW, 34: 337.

⁷¹ Cf. “Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 1519.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷⁴ LW. 31: 77-252.

is the righteousness of Christ, which he justifies through faith”⁷⁵ This “*alien* righteousness” which Luther said is “... instilled in us without our works by grace alone – while the Father, to be sure, inwardly draws us to Christ – is set opposite original sin ... Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death.”⁷⁶

Subsequent to and from this “alien righteousness” flows “the second kind of righteousness” that is, “our *proper* righteousness, not because we alone work at it, but because we work that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to self ... In the second place, this righteousness consists in love to one’s neighbor. And in the third place, in meekness and fear toward God.”⁷⁷ Here we note, parenthetically, that the dualism (or oppositionalism) that seemed to be implied in Luther’s earlier phrase *simul justus et peccator* was moderated by Luther’s emphasis upon the transforming and renewing power of “alien righteousness.” In light of this development, it seems that the Moravian bishop’s “Lutheran” understanding of righteousness captured well the emphasis of the *simul justus et peccator* emphasis but had also over-looked Luther’s subsequent assertion that “proper righteousness” was actually formed, by faith and grace, within the person who had received the “alien righteousness” of Christ. It is precisely this latter aspect that becomes a point of departure for the so-called “Finnish School” and a “new” reading of Luther’s work.

⁷⁵ LW, 31:297.

⁷⁶ LW. 31: 299.

⁷⁷ LW. 31:299.

In Luther's subsequent works, most especially, *The Freedom of a Christian* themes like "two kinds of righteousness" received fuller exploration from the standpoint of justification by faith and Christian living. Luther began his discussion by posing a tautology: "A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, and subject to none. A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." "These two theses," Martin admitted, "seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully."⁷⁸ These two freedoms are just as *simul* (simultaneous) as was the human condition described as *simul justus et peccator*, for at the very same time a Christian becomes "righteous, free, and pious ... that is, a spiritual, new and inner man, becomes what he is."⁷⁹

The person, who lives by justification by faith in Christ, lives free from concern about self-salvation through herculean efforts and good works. "From this," Luther wrote, "anyone can clearly see how a Christian is free from all things and over all things so that he needs no works to make him righteous and save him, since faith alone abundantly confers all these things."⁸⁰ In describing the freedom that Christian faith brings, Luther employed the metaphor of the Bride and Bridegroom as a way of indicating how, by faith, the Christ and the Christian "become one flesh" (metaphorically) and in this blessed union the soul is renewed and transformed through a "blessed exchange:"

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it united the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery ... Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh than there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages ... it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of glory in whatever Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life,

⁷⁸ LW., 31:344.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ LW. 31:356.

and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. ...⁸¹

Here we meet a more carefully nuanced description of the inner connection of faith and Christian righteousness. While good works are still decried as a basis or path leading up to justification, the righteousness imputed to a person through faith in Christ becomes in some sense "imparted" to her/him as through the blessed union described above, as the "things of Christ" become ours. Hence, Luther could argue: "The following statements are true: 'Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; and evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works.'⁸² In this faith-union with Christ the Christian lives dual identity as one who is completely free as well as a dutiful servant of all: "We conclude, therefore," Luther wrote, "that a Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love"⁸³

This brings us to a brief consideration of the two Martin Luther texts with which John and Charles Wesley had direct contact. Starting first with Luther's *Preface to the Romans* from which John Wesley heard read on the evening of May 24, 1738. That John "heard" the reformer's explication of justification by faith at that reading seems undeniable. But justification by faith was not a new doctrine to him at that point, since John had already given assent to it in private conversations with Peter Böhler by April 22, 1738, and had actually preached sermons

⁸¹ LW. 31:351.

⁸² LW. 31:361.

⁸³ LW. 31:371.

on that theme at least two occasions prior to that event in Aldersgate Street meeting.⁸⁴ So what John “heard” that evening was either something more and new, or that he had simply heard it in a new and more piercing manner; the latter explanation seems more like to me.

Luther’s *Preface* was first published in 1522 as an interpretive guide to what he considered the main NT book. It should not be confused with his *Romans Lectures* which were presented in 1515-16, and later published. Luther saw Romans as the repository of practically everything a “Christian ought to know,” “namely what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone”⁸⁵ The impact of that hearing a portion of Luther’s *Preface* read that evening, for John Wesley, was a sense of God’s acceptance and assurance of salvation wrapped up in a strong “Christ for me” (*Christus pro me*) emphasis.⁸⁶ Luther’s brief *Preface* has quite a bit to say about the nature of Christian faith and righteousness. For example, while summarizing Romans 8, Luther wrote:

Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith. When the see no improvement of life and no good works follow ... they fall into error saying, ‘Faith is not enough; one must do works in order to be righteous and be saved.’ ...

Faith however is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God John. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but

⁸⁴ JWJ, 18:234, 240.

⁸⁵ LW., 35:380.

⁸⁶ W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley: Vol. 20: Journal and Diaries I (1735-1738)*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 249-50. John wrote: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. ...

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times.⁸⁷

It is precisely this sort of "living, busy active faith" which is the basis on "alien righteousness," Luther asserted, as well as the worker of true righteousness: "It is called 'the righteousness of God' because God gives it, and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ our Mediators, and makes man to fulfill his obligation to everybody. For through faith a man becomes free from sin and comes to take pleasure in God's commandments, thereby he gives God the honor due him, and pays him what he owes him. Likewise, he serves his fellow-men willingly, by whatever means he can, and thus pays his debt to everyone."⁸⁸ Reading Luther in the whole text gives the reader a more balanced picture of the Reformer's understanding of the two sides of Christian righteousness (imputed and imparted) than was propounded by Count Nicholas Zinzendorf in his conversation with John Wesley on September 3, 1741.⁸⁹

But it was Luther's *Galatians Commentary* (1535) which figured most prominently in the events associated with Charles Wesley's "personal Pentecost." Galatians was Luther's favorite NT book. He called it "... my own Epistle. I have betrothed myself to it. It is my Katie von Bora."⁹⁰ So when Charles and his friend, Mr. William Holland, Mr. "had accidentally lit upon" reading the book they were delving into a place of love and comfort for the Great Reformer. Hence, they "... found him nobly full of faith. My friend, " wrote Charles, "in hearing him,

⁸⁷ LW. 35:370.

⁸⁸ LW. 35:371..

⁸⁹ JWW, Vol. i9, Journal II, 21

⁹⁰ LW. ?? find this in Luther's table talk.

was so affected as to breathe out sighs and groans unutterable.”⁹¹ On May 18, 1738, upon further reading in the first two chapters of Luther’s *Galatians* Charles found himself praying and waiting for a visitation from Christ “who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.”⁹² The *Christus pro me* emphasis is prominent in *Galatians*, but did not appear until the second chapter. Luther wrote that St. Paul addressed “... the chiefest matter which he handeleth in this Epistle, namely, the article of justification.”⁹³ *Simul justus et peccator* was also well described by Luther’s “preface” to the *Galatians Commentary*:

Although I am a sinner according to the Law, judged by the righteousness of the Law, nevertheless I do not despair. ... [Because] above this life I have another righteousness, another life, which is Christ, the Son of God ... For His sake this body of mine will be raised from the dead and delivered from the slavery of the Law and sin, and will be sanctified together with the spirit. Thus, as long as we live here, both remain. The flesh is accused, exercised, saddened, and crushed by the active righteousness of the Law. But the spirit rules, rejoices, and is saved by passive righteousness, because it knows that it has a Lord sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Father⁹⁴

In *Galatians*, however, Luther’s dialectical approach to works vs. faith, and the two kinds of righteousness were softened under the impact of another important Pauline concept – faith as union with Christ. Luther wrote, for example: “... faith justifies because it takes hold of an possesses this treasure, the present Christ. ... Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us as righteous, and grants us eternal life.”⁹⁵ Or again, a little further on in the same section of *Galatians*, “Here it is to be notes that these three things are joined together: faith, Christ and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hole of Christ and has Him present, enclosing Him as the

⁹¹ CW Manuscript Journal, I:103.

⁹² Ibid., I:104.

⁹³ Philip S. Watson, ed. *Martin Luther: Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co., 1953), 70.

⁹⁴ LW. 26:9.

⁹⁵ LW. 26: 132.

ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous. This is the means and the merit by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins and righteousness.”⁹⁶ This approach, said Luther, “brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors” and leads directly to Christian freedom since “... a Christian does not have anything to do with the Law and sin, especially at the time of temptation. For to the extent that he is a Christian, because in his heart he has Christ, the Lord of the Law, as a ring has a gem. Therefore when the Law accuses and sin troubles, he looks to Christ; and when he has taken hold of Him by faith, he has present with him the Victor over the Law, sin death, and the devil – the Victor whose rule over all these things prevents them from harming him.”⁹⁷

Thus, in his *Galatians*, Luther demonstrated that in stressing justification by faith alone – without works – as the path to Christian freedom – he was not denigrating the Law or good works *per se*, but rather a false or mistaken apprehension of them. “[W]e make a distinction here,” he wrote, “and we say that we are not disputing now whether good works ought to be done. Nor are we inquiring whether the Law is good, holy, and righteous, or whether it ought to be observed; for that is another topic. But our argument and question concerns justification and whether the Law justifies.”⁹⁸ “Therefore,” Luther reported, “we conclude with Paul that we are justified solely by faith in Christ, without the Law and works. But after a man is justified by faith, now possesses Christ by faith, and knows that He is his righteousness and life, he will certainly not be idle but, like a sound tree, will bear good fruit (Mt. 7:17).”⁹⁹ Hence, he urged that God the Holy Spirit “... does not permit a man to be idle but drives him to all the exercises

⁹⁶ LW. 26: 132,

⁹⁷ Ibid. 26:133-34.

⁹⁸ LW, 26:145.

⁹⁹ LW. 26:155.

of devotion, to the love of God, to patience in affliction, to prayer, to thanksgiving, and to the practice of love toward all men.”¹⁰⁰

It seems very likely that because of Luther’s all-out assault upon justification by works, which John Wesley read in the context of the conflicts and negative practical results of Luther’s *sola fideism*, which Wesley saw demonstrated by the Moravians, John did not recognize Luther’s vital emphasis upon “Christ present in faith” like the precious gem in within the ring,¹⁰¹ and the transformation that Christ and the Holy Spirit within the Christian (after justification) through love and good works. Martin Luther, himself, seemed to admit that at he was stressing justification by faith in a radical manner when averred: “I am making such a point of all this to keep anyone from supposing that the doctrine of faith is an easy matter. It is indeed easy to talk about, but it is hard to grasp; and it is easily obscured and lost. Therefore let us with all diligence and humility devote ourselves to the study of the Sacred Scripture and to serious prayer, lest we love the truth of the Gospel.”¹⁰²

V. The “new Luther” and the “old” Wesley:

As we reported at the outset, the “new Luther,” epitomized by Tuomo Mannermaa’s *Christ Present in Faith* offers a new lens for reading the “old” dialectical Luther who operated most successfully in forensic categories revolving around justification by faith alone.¹⁰³ Mannermaa posits the deliciously credible idea that justifying faith, for Luther, resulted in much more than the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ upon the Christian. Setting himself over-and-against the wholly forensic interpretation of Luther’s

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁰¹ Cf. LW. 26: 132.

¹⁰² LW. 26: 114.

¹⁰³ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

understanding of justification by faith as epitomized in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* and developed by several generations of Lutheran scholars, Mannermaa, follows the pattern laid down in the ancient orthodox Christian writings in their doctrine of “divinization” or *theosis*.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, then, the “new” read of Luther stresses that a veritable and transforming presence of Christ dwells within the believer through justifying faith; and hence, the clear emphasis of title of Mannermaa’s main work is that of *Christ Present In Faith*. As he wrote: “It is a central idea of Luther’s theology that in faith human beings really participate in the person of Christ, and in the divine life and victory that come with him. Or, to say it the other way around; Christ gives his person to us through faith. ‘Faith’ means participation in Christ, in whom there is no sin, death, or curse.”¹⁰⁵

This participation in and presence of Christ was strongly sounded in the *Galatians Commentary* which John Wesley found so “deeply tintured with *mysticism* throughout, and hence often fundamentally wrong ...”¹⁰⁶ Ironically, it seems that Wesley did not see the Christological bridge between the German reformer and himself, which Luther stressed in terms of Christ-present-in faith and which Wesley preached as Christ-present-in-love. Luther’s extensive comments on Galatians 2:20, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me,” “reveals,” says Mannermaa, “the extent to which Luther thinks of the completeness of the union between Christ and the believer. The ‘old self’ dies and is replaced by the person of Christ. Christ is ‘in us’ and ‘remains in us.’ The life that the Christian now lives *is*, in an ontologically real manner, Christ himself.”¹⁰⁷ Luther, himself, was equally clear on this point as he wrote: “... faith must be taught correctly, namely, that by it you are cemented to Christ that

¹⁰⁴ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 1-9, 16-17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ JWW, 19, Journal II: 201.

¹⁰⁷ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 39.

He and you are one person, which cannot be separated but remains attached to Him forever and declares: 'I am as Christ.' And Christ, in turn, says, 'I am as that sinner who is attached to Me and I to him. For by faith we are joined together into one flesh and one bone.' Thus Eph. 5:30 says "We are the body of Christ, of His flesh and bones," in such a way that this this faith couples Christ and me more intimately than a husband is coupled to his wife."¹⁰⁸

Mannermaa's "new" emphasis upon the "real presence" of Christ in the Christian closely connects Luther's conceptions of justification and sanctification: "Luther's view of the relationship between justification and sanctification," he wrote, "... lends a perspective for looking at the distinction from the center that unifies the two: this center is the notion of Christ who is present in faith."¹⁰⁹ "Faith," Mannermaa writes, "as stated repeatedly above, is the real presence of the person and work of Christ. Because of the Christian's union with Christ, his or her works are works of Christ himself. ... Luther argues that Christ who is present in faith becomes, as it were, incarnate in Christian's works."¹¹⁰ This transformative aspect of Luther's "blessed exchange" was also ably explained in the *Galatians Commentary* that John Wesley studied on June 15, 1741. For example, commenting upon Galatians 2:20, once again, Luther wrote:

says Paul, 'whatever this life is that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.' That is, the Word I speak physically is not the word of the flesh; it is the Word of the Holy Spirit and of Christ. The vision that enters or leaves my eyes does not come from the flesh; that is, my flesh does not direct it, but the Holy Spirit does. Thus hearing does not come from the flesh, even though it is in the flesh, but it is in and from the Holy Spirit. A Christian speaks nothing by chase, sober, holy, and divine things – things that pertain to Christ, the glory of

¹⁰⁸ LW. Vol. 26:168.

¹⁰⁹ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 49.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

God, and the salvation of his neighbor. These things do not come from the flesh, nor are they done according to the flesh, nevertheless they *are in the flesh*.”¹¹¹

John Wesley’s critique of Luther included a rejection of what he took to be the Reformers completely forensic view of justification by faith, as one implying “pardon” and a change of a person’s standing before God, without an actual change within their person. This same idea is registered in John’s sermon “Justification by Faith” (which may have been preached as early as May 28, 1738, but published in 1746).¹¹² It hints at another problem he might have had with Luther’s soteriology.¹¹³ John wrote, “Least of all does justification imply, that God is *deceived* in those whom he justifies; that he thinks them to be what, in fact, they are not; that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are. It [justification] does by no means imply, that God judges contrary to the real nature of things; that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous. Surely no. ...”¹¹⁴

Returning to this same topic, in 1765, in his sermon “The Lord Our Righteousness,” John gave a spirited defense of Christ’s “imputed righteousness” as the basis of our justification which appealed to the Anglican formularies as well as his own early sermons.¹¹⁵ But ultimately John could not let the matter rest at that stopping place; “I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has *imputed* it,” Wesley wrote. “I believe ‘Jesus Christ is made of God unto us sanctification’ [1 Cor. 1:30], as well as righteousness; or that God sanctifies, as well as justifies all them that believe in him. They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed are

¹¹¹ LW. Vol. 26:171,. Emphasis added.

¹¹² Outler, ed. *JW Sermons*, I:181.

¹¹³ Outler, ed. *JW Sermons*, I:188. Albert Outler, in his n. #43, suggests that Wesley was reacting against “the typical Puritan doctrine of forensic justification in which Christ’s imputed righteousness allow the Father justly to pardon the elect and therefore regard them *as if* they were righteous. The ruling metaphor, in that view, is a forensic one.” [emphasis added].

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁵ Outler, ed. *JW Sermons*, I:453-58.

made righteous by the Spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God ‘after the likeness wherein they were created, in righteousness and true holiness,’ [Eph. 4:34].”¹¹⁶

The new emphasis upon Luther’s concept of *Christ Present in Faith* reshapes the traditional understanding of Luther’s famous *dictum Simul justus et peccator* (“simultaneously righteous and yet a sinner”), which has often been taken to mean that because righteousness is wholly imputed (and not imparted or “implanted” as Wesley said) in the Christian. Hence, the Christian’s life in the world is one constant struggle without any real progress in holiness or sanctity. Once again Luther’s *Galatians Commentary* points in a different direction. Commenting on Galatians 3:25, “now that faith has come, we no longer live as one under a custodian,” Martin Luther drew upon the metaphor of leaven to show how the Christian – while in struggle with the commands of the law as well as the world, the flesh and the devil – also lives in hope and victory;

To the extent that I take hold of Christ by faith, therefore, to that extent the Law has been abrogated for me. But my flesh, the world, and the devil do not permit faith to be perfect. I would, of course, wish that the little light of my faith that is to my heart might be diffused through my whole body and all its members. But this does not happen; it is not diffused all at once, but it has begun to be diffused. Meanwhile our comfort is that we have the first fruits of the Spirit and have begun to be leavened, but that we shall be completely leavened when this sinful body is destroyed and we arise new with Christ. Amen.”¹¹⁷

Mannermaa’s comment on this same passage is helpful: “This passage shows how the concept of the presence of Christ in faith makes understandable Luther’s view of Christians as partly righteous and partly sinners; Christ did not come to only once, historically, but he comes incessantly, in the spirit, and removes sin from the believer. To use a patristic, realistic image, Christ is regarded as leaven which is to permeate the whole dough ... The concrete and real

¹¹⁶ Outler, Ed., *JW Sermons*, I: 458-59.

¹¹⁷ LW. Vol. 25: 350-51.

being of the Christ-leaven in human being is indisputably evident in Luther's statement that to the extent there is still sin in believers, to that extent Christ is not yet present."¹¹⁸

This cursory examination of Luther's cardinal doctrines through the interpretive lens provided by the new "Finnish School," suggests that John Wesley, in particularly his later critiques of Martin Luther's view of sanctification, may have missed an incarnational aspect of the reformer's soteriology regarding the real presence of Christ in the faith of the Christian. But it should also be said that, even if the Finnish School is correct about this, Wesley was not alone in missing this tenet of Luther's soteriology. The same "misread" of Luther can easily be seen in the *Formula Concord* (1577) which epitomized the Lutheran tradition.¹¹⁹ As Mannermaa noted, "in the FC, 'justification by faith' merely denotes the forgiveness of sins that is 'imputed' to Christians on the basis of the perfect obedience and complete merit of Christ."¹²⁰

Interestingly, the theology of the "old Wesley" and the "new Luther" share much common ground. This is particularly true with respect to the transformative trajectories of their soteriologies. While it must be admitted that the Finnish School's new read of Luther's offers a very fruitful basis for conversation and consensus on matters like: justification by faith, Christology in the shape of "Christ for us" and "Christ within us" (*Christus pro nobis*, as *Christus in nobis*), as well as the nature of righteousness -- as both "imputed" and "implanted" (to use John Wesley's term) -- which allows for and demands real growth in grace, and ultimately an understanding of Christian life as *theosis*, that is, being "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). This new point of view over comes a bit of the dilemma which the traditional

¹¹⁸ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 59-60.

¹¹⁹ Theodore Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), "Preface," 3-16.

¹²⁰ Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4. Cf. Tappert, ed. *Book of Concord*, "Augsburg Confession," Article IV, "On Justification," 107-68.

interpretation of Luther's soteriology has presented for Methodists because of its apparent emphasis upon forensic justification without an accompanying emphasis upon the transformation and righteousness of the person (sanctification). It also seems to overcome the traditional Lutheran polarization faith and good works – which seems to undercut the Methodist stress upon “methods” (works of piety and works of mercy) or “means of grace,” in the process of sanctification.¹²¹

Seen from this vantage point, John Wesley's later critique of Luther's soteriology, as a person who was “ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification” and “confused in his conception of it” was somewhat misplaced.¹²² It is my assessment that John's reception of Luther's thought, as mediated to him initially by the English Moravians, was strongly also tintured by Wesley's own personal struggles with the dangers of “mysticism” and his schism with the Moravian “still ones.” Had he read Luther's *Galatians Commentary* with an open mind (in 1741) John might have caught at least a hint of the *theosis* concept which was so formative for the soteriology of both he and Charles and which has become the basis the new Finnish interpretation of Luther's thought. But it should also be said that generations of Lutherans and capable Lutheran scholars also missed the same point that Wesley did, perhaps because they were unduly influenced by the more static soteriology of later Lutheranism as epitomized in parts of the *Formula of Concord*.

¹²¹ The five spiritual disciplines delineated both in Jackson, *JW Works*, VIII, 322-23, “Large Minutes,” and John Wesley's Sermon, “The Means of Grace,” No. 16, in Outler, *JW Sermons*, I:376-97.

¹²² Outler, *JW Sermons*, III, 506.