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Jesus and Faith: The Doctrine of Faith in Scripture and the Reformed Confessions

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Abstract

This article examines the complicated relationship between church confession and Holy Scripture as it manifests itself in the doctrine of faith expounded in the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century. I first locate the problem historically in the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism. I then summarize the New Testament witness to faith, examine whether the Reformed confessions do justice to this witness, and conclude by suggesting some theological possibilities for a fresh doctrine of faith within the context of a confessional and biblical Reformed theology. Along the way, I raise questions about the relationships between divine action and human action and between Son and Spirit in the event of faith.

Keywords

Reformed confessions, faith, christology, Holy Spirit, human agency, biblical interpretation

The Problem: The Relation between Christology and Soteriology

In his 1958 essay, “Jesus and Faith,” Gerhard Ebeling puts forward a bold thesis regarding the relation between christology and soteriology in the theology of the Reformers:

The task of Christology, then, is to give an account of the statement, ‘I believe in Jesus.’... [T]he question of who Jesus is and the question of what faith means cannot be answered apart from each other, but only in conjunction with each other... The Reformers’ understanding of faith had no effect on the formation of Christology—not, at least, in normal church dogmatics... Hence the difficulty... of maintaining the strict inner connexion between Christology and the doctrine of justification. The Christology mostly does not lead by any compelling necessity to the doctrine of

justification, and the latter in turn usually leaves it an open question how far Christology is really needed as its ground.¹

Ebeling's concern about the "inner connexion" between Jesus and faith, between christology and soteriology, led to his own attempt to ground human faith in the faithfulness of Jesus. Not surprisingly, then, the above quote was used by Richard Hays to set the stage for his project on the "faith of Jesus Christ,"² which accomplishes exegetically what Ebeling attempted theologically. It is with these concerns in mind that I turn to Edmund Schlink, who outlines the project for this paper in a passage from his *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*:

Does the concept of faith in the Confessions do full justice to what Paul means by *pistis Iesou Christou*? . . . Do the Confessions take up the full witness of the Synoptics concerning faith, which not only clings to Jesus as the one who bestows forgiveness, but is directed to him also as the one who hears *every* plea for help, and who not only cures the sickness of believers, but also responds to the believing parents of the sick by healing the disease? Do the Confessions restrict the concept of faith to the reception of forgiveness and thus abridge the all-inclusive promise (e.g., Mark 11: 22–24) which Jesus makes to faith? The Confessions should be examined further on the basis of the statements of Isaiah and John about faith, as well as the concept of faith in Hebrews, etc. Which of these particular biblical concepts of faith finds fullest expression in the Confessions?³

At the heart of this paper, therefore, is the problem between theology and exegesis. Ebeling raises the theological question "what is the relation between Christology and soteriology?" while Schlink raises the exegetical question "what is the relation between confession and scripture?"

In this essay I take up these two questions regarding the relation between Jesus and faith as it plays out in the Reformed confessions. My focus will be

¹ Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 202-03.

² See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3: 1-4: 11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

³ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J.A. Bouman (St. Louis: Augsburg Fortress, 1961), 303. While both Ebeling and Schlink are Lutheran theologians commenting on the Lutheran doctrine of faith, I will focus my attention in this paper primarily on the doctrine of faith in the Reformed confessions. This is justified because the doctrine of justification by faith alone is basically identical in the confessions of both traditions. While there are certainly distinct emphases, the basic problems identified by Ebeling and Schlink are common to both churches of the Reformation. That said, further work should be done to examine how the Lutheran confessional documents compare with both scripture and the Reformed documents.

on how the confessional documents employ scripture in support of their doctrinal statements. I argue that the confessions consistently define faith as a gift of God in response to Roman Catholic soteriology, while at the same time describing faith as a human act that is instrumentally efficacious. The confessions generally leave unaddressed the relation between divine and human action in the event of faith, a problem resident in the biblical text itself. In addition, the confessions fail to give full expression to the biblical witness to faith, allowing Paul's letters to dominate at the expense of giving the Synoptics and other passages their due. After providing some historical context, this paper will proceed by (1) offering an overview of the biblical witness to faith, (2) examining whether the confessions do justice to this witness, and (3) reflecting on certain theological possibilities for addressing the relations between Jesus and faith, and Son and Spirit within the context of a confessional and biblical Reformed theology.

The Problem Clarified: Catholic and Protestant Conceptions of Faith

The problem of relating Jesus and faith is complicated further by the tensions between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of faith. While there is not space to treat this issue thoroughly, it is important to bear in mind how the churches of the Reformation distance themselves from Catholicism before addressing how faithful they are to the biblical witness, since it is the historical context of the Reformation which shapes their approach to scripture. Because the focus here is on the doctrine of faith, I will simply mention the classical divide between defining faith primarily as *assensus* (belief) or as *fiducia* (trust).⁴

While certainly oversimplistic, Edward O'Connor describes the basic division between Protestantism and Catholicism as a division between these two definitions of faith: "Protestants hold faith to consist in *trust*, while Catholics hold it to be an *intellectual assent*."⁵ The problem is readily apparent in Thomas

⁴ A third definition of faith as *notitia* was assumed by all parties: "In *notitia* the individual becomes aware of the conditions, promises, and events that constitute divine revelation, especially the events surrounding God's consummate self-revelation in Jesus Christ." See Timothy Paul Jones, "The Necessity of Objective Assent in the Act of Christian Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (April-June 2005), 150-57, here 150.

⁵ Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C., *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels: A Problem in the Correlation of Scripture and Theology* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), xi; italics original. O'Connor goes on to say that "Protestant authors have tended steadily to insist on the volitional and emotional factors in the act of faith, and Catholics upon the activity of the intellect. Since early in the present century, however, a shift in emphasis has been noticeable on both sides" (xi).

Aquinas, whose doctrine of faith is thoroughly intellectual in nature. He defines faith throughout as the “assent of the intellect” (*assensus intellectus*) moved by the will; intellect and will are both involved in the act of faith. More specifically, faith is “an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.”⁶ Faith or belief is more than a mere assent to basic intellectual knowledge, but neither is it the beatific vision, in which faith will no longer be necessary. Instead, faith is a theological virtue which precedes and anticipates the future fullness of vision.

While faith involves both the intellect and the will, in accordance with the anthropology Thomas lays out in the *Prima Secundae*, the distinction between intellect and will—and the location of faith primarily in the intellect—is what enables him to distinguish between ‘living’ or ‘formed’ faith (*fides formata*) and ‘lifeless’ or ‘unformed’ faith (*fides informis*).⁷ This distinction, which the Reformers strongly opposed, depends on Thomas’s view that “since faith is a perfection of the intellect, that pertains directly to faith, which pertains to the intellect,” and therefore “what pertains to the will does not pertain directly to faith.”⁸ Thomas can even say that the charity “which gives faith its form, or makes it live, is not essential to faith.”⁹ In direct contrast to this view, the Reformers defined faith as an act of loving, heartfelt trust in God, who is not merely an object of assent but rather the God of grace to whom we cling.¹⁰

He cites B.B. Warfield as a representative of the “traditional Protestant viewpoint,” who said that faith “consists neither in assent nor in obedience, but in a reliant trust in the invisible Author of all good.” O’Connor goes on to relate these two definitions to two different modes of theological discourse, what he calls “speculative theology” and “biblical theology”—the former identified with faith as *assensus* and the latter with faith as *fiducia*. The former, he says, examines “the divine realities as they are in themselves,” while the latter “is directly concerned with the scriptural doctrine as such” (xiii). O’Connor is careful to note that all these distinctions are not nearly as sharp or as simplistic as he makes them out to be, and that Protestants and Catholics often share each other’s positions. But he also notes that these two trajectories, however oversimplified, illuminate a general division between the two traditions, one which must be addressed with care. O’Connor, as a Catholic, attempts to do so by engaging in a project of “biblical theology” that looks at texts favored by Protestants. He concludes, not surprisingly, by arguing that both emphases need to be upheld.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.2.9 resp.

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.4.4.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.4.4 resp.

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.4.4 ad 2.

¹⁰ The following passage from Calvin is paradigmatic of the Reformation’s rejection of the scholastic conception of faith: “First, we must refute that worthless distinction between formed and unformed faith which is tossed about the schools. For they imagine that people who are touched by no fear of God, no sense of piety, nevertheless believe whatever it is necessary to know for salvation. As if the Holy Spirit, by illuminating our hearts unto faith, were not the

In addition to conceiving faith as intellectual assent, the Catholic doctrine of faith also denies that Jesus could have had faith. The Catholic doctrine of faith as *assensus intellectus* presupposes that faith occurs in the absence of vision, following Heb. 11: 1. But Catholic Christology also presupposes that the human soul of Christ shares in the beatific vision through his union with the Logos. According to Thomas, “the soul of Christ, since it is united to the Word in person, . . . more fully receives the light in which God is seen by the Word Himself than any other creature. And therefore more perfectly than the rest of creatures it sees the First Truth itself, which is the Essence of God.”¹¹ Christ cannot have faith, therefore, because “the imperfect vision of faith is essentially opposed to manifest vision.”¹² Moreover, Christ’s vision of the First Truth is the basis for human faith in the truth of God.¹³ Consequently, Thomas says that “it was necessary that the beatific knowledge, which consists in the vision of God, should belong to Christ pre-eminently, since the cause ought always to be more efficacious than the effect.”¹⁴ Jesus Christ is the ‘author’ of our faith in that his beatific vision opens the way for our eventual participation in the fullness of knowledge, and we place our faith in Christ so that we may one day dispense with faith and “see face to face.”¹⁵ Catholic theology, at least prior to Vatican II, thus makes the separation between Jesus and faith an integral part of its doctrine.¹⁶ Because the Catholic conception of faith roots faith

witness to us of our adoption! And yet they presumptuously dignify that persuasion, devoid of the fear of God, with the name ‘faith’ even though all Scripture cries out against it. . . . They would have faith to be an assent by which any despiser of God may receive what is offered from Scripture. But first they ought to have seen whether every man attains faith by his own effort, or whether through it the Holy Spirit is witness of his adoption. Therefore they babble childishly in asking whether faith is the same faith when it has been formed by a superadded quality; or whether it be a new and different thing. From such chatter it certainly looks as if they never thought about the unique gift of the Spirit. For the beginning of believing already contains within itself the reconciliation whereby man approaches God. But if they weighed Paul’s saying, ‘With the heart a man believes unto righteousness’ [Rom. 10: 10], they would cease to invent that cold quality of faith.” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3.2.8.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.10.4 resp.

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.9.3 ad 1.

¹³ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.11.6 ad 2: “Our faith rests upon the First Truth; and hence Christ is the author of our faith by the Divine knowledge.”

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.9.2 resp.

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 13: 12.

¹⁶ It is an example of how far things have progressed that Hans Urs von Balthasar can write at such length about the faith of Christ. This began with his 1961 essay, “*Fides Christi: An Essay on the Consciousness of Christ*,” in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco:

in an intellectual assent that only exists in the context of finite human existence, faith is inherently a subjective act that is a mark of our imperfection. This makes the problem of the relations between Christ and faith and between theology and exegesis readily apparent, setting the stage for the advances made in the Reformation.

The Concept of Faith in the New Testament

An adequate treatment of this topic would require a monograph of its own.¹⁷ In lieu of such a project, here I will only provide brief accounts of the major treatments of faith in the New Testament witness for the purpose of identifying, to use Schlink's words, "which of these particular biblical concepts of faith finds fullest expression in the Confessions." The summaries include: (1) faith in the Synoptic Gospels, (2) faith in the Gospel of John, (3) faith in the Pauline epistles, and (4) faith in Hebrews and James.

Faith in the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels, according to O'Connor, present faith in a twofold sense: (1) faith as trust in the Savior, and (2) faith as belief in the identity and role of Jesus.¹⁸ This latter sense of faith takes various forms in the gospels, including the belief that Jesus is a savior, the Christ, the Son of God, and risen from the dead.¹⁹ While the passages about belief are important, O'Connor notes that most of the texts regarding faith in the Synoptics "associate faith with *salvation*," thus associating faith with trust in Jesus as the one who is capable of saving.²⁰ Most of these passages are found in

Ignatius, 1991), 43-79. In this essay, Balthasar examines the 'faith of Jesus' question from biblical, theological-historical, and eschatological perspectives. He expresses agreement with Adolf Deissman's interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ as a "mystical genitive," and he emphasizes the insights of Catholic mystics over against the doctrines from high scholasticism. Balthasar later develops his understanding of faith in his 1967 essay, "The Faith of the Simple Ones," in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. III: Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 57-83. In this later essay, he augments his earlier argument by focusing on the obedience of Christ which "now discloses itself as the fundamental element of Christology" (66). Finally, Balthasar takes up the issue again in 1978 in *Theo-Drama III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 170-72.

¹⁷ I am not making any attempt here at comprehensiveness or nuance. Space allows only the barest sketch of how faith is presented in key New Testament texts. The goal in this section is to highlight the *diversity* of how scripture treats faith, and in order to emphasize these distinctions it is necessary to paint with a broad brush.

¹⁸ O'Connor, *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, 83-93.

¹⁹ O'Connor, *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, 93.

²⁰ O'Connor, *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, 34; italics original.

the context of Jesus' healing miracles. A threefold structure exists in the majority of these passages:

- 1) One who is in need appeals to Christ for help.
- 2) Christ 'saves' this person by a miracle.²¹
- 3) This salvation is attributed to the petitioner's faith.²²

As the second and third elements in this typical structure show, there is an ambiguity in the text about the 'source' or 'cause' of the salvation. While Jesus is clearly the one who saves, Jesus himself repeatedly attributes the salvation to the recipient's faith. Throughout the Synoptics, Jesus explicitly says, "Your faith has saved you [or "made you well"]"²³ and on other occasions he implies that faith saves.²⁴ While it is evident that such faith is a trust in the power of Jesus to save, as opposed to an intellectual acceptance of his teachings, the seemingly salvific power of faith is nevertheless a complicating element for any biblical doctrine of faith. In what sense is faith salvific? And how is its efficacy related to that of Christ?

Faith in the Gospel of John. Of all the gospels, John most clearly makes the notion of belief the central soteriological concept. George Allen Turner, in his discussion of Johannine soteriology, identifies belief as "the chief concern of the Evangelist."²⁵ The verb 'to believe' (πιστεύω) occurs 98 times in John, while only a total of 34 times in the Synoptics: "Believing in Jesus is not a theme . . . in the Synoptic Gospels, but it is a central theme of the fourth Gospel."²⁶ John speaks both of 'belief in' and 'belief that,' the former implying a 'personal commitment' and 'vital relationship' with the object of belief, whereas the latter is closer to an intellectual assent.²⁷ According to Rudolf Bultmann, faith in John "involves turning away from the world" and "accepting the life that Jesus gives

²¹ O'Connor, *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, 35: "It is the manifest intention of the evangelists to represent these miracles as a part of Christ's salvific activity, which indeed lies principally on the spiritual plane, but extends also to the corporeal, on which it is manifested visibly. Hence, the faith which obtains bodily cures is one with that which obtains eternal salvation."

²² O'Connor, *Faith in the Synoptic Gospels*, 34.

²³ Cf. Mark 5: 34, 10: 52, and parallels.

²⁴ Cf. Matt. 15: 28, Mark 2: 5, 9: 23; and parallels.

²⁵ George Allen Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19, no. 4 (1976), 271-77, here 272.

²⁶ Robert H. Smith, "'Seeking Jesus' in the Gospel of John," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15, no. 1 (1988), 48-55, here 52.

²⁷ Turner, "Soteriology," 272. Examples of 'belief in' include Jn. 1: 12, 2: 23, and 3: 18; examples of 'belief that' include 11: 27, 11: 42, and 16: 30.

and is.”²⁸ Faith or belief in John’s gospel, because of its intimate connection to the person of Jesus, is communicated through a variety of different metaphors and ideas. John equates or associates the verb ‘to believe’ with “to come” (5: 40; 6: 35, 37; 7: 37), “to follow” (8: 14), “to enter” (10: 9), “to drink” the living water (4: 13), “to eat” the flesh and blood of Jesus (6: 56-57), “to accept” (1: 12; 5: 43), “to know” (8: 32; 17: 3), and “to abide” (6: 56, 15: 5-10).²⁹

Of particular importance for the Reformed confessions is the ‘bread of life’ discourse in John 6. Zwingli established the Reformed precedent for interpreting this passage as a statement about faith, as opposed to the Roman Catholic interpretation of this passage as a statement about the Eucharist supporting transubstantiation. Modern interpretations of John agree with Zwingli by noting that this discourse equates ‘eating and drinking’ with ‘believing.’ According to Raymond Brown, John 6 is about Jesus’ revelation, and in that context, faith is identified as the proper response to this revelation.³⁰ Moreover, Brown says, John 6: 28-29 presents John’s version of the faith vs. works problem:

The crowd has been led by Jesus to penetrate beyond the superficial, material level of food, but their response (v. 28) is in terms of works that they can do. Jesus, in turn (v. 29), puts the emphasis on faith. Paul and James are the NT names we associate with the problem of faith and works, but here we have the Johannine solution. Obtaining eternal life is not a question of works, as if faith did not matter; nor is it a question of faith without works. Rather, having faith is a work; indeed, it is the all important work of God.³¹

Faith in the fourth gospel is therefore both an intimate relationship in which we abide in Christ³² and a gracious work of God. John’s gospel, perhaps due to Hellenistic influences, emphasizes the intellectual dimension more than the Synoptics but never at the expense of a personal relationship with Jesus.

²⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1965), 2:75; cf. Turner, “Soteriology,” 272.

²⁹ Cf. Turner, “Soteriology,” 272.

³⁰ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 264.

³¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, 264-65. Brown goes on to state: “[As] Bultmann has remarked, this believing is not so much a work done by man as it is submission to God’s work in Jesus” (265).

³² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 95: “The eating and drinking of Christ’s flesh and blood result in mutual ‘abiding’ of the believer and Christ. This is very close to the Pauline conception of *koinonia* (cf. Gal. 2: 19-20), and indicates a personal relationship of faith.”

Faith in the Pauline epistles. The topic of faith in Paul is an immense and hotly debated one, and since the Reformers tended to take their bearings from Romans and Galatians, I will focus my attention on those two letters. Whereas faith in the Synoptics is clearly trust or belief, the concept of faith in Paul's epistles is far more ambiguous. Faith is not simply an act of trust that Jesus can save. Even less is it an assent to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, since everywhere Paul simply juxtaposes 'Jesus' and 'Christ,' assuming that each is inexplicable without the other.³³ Paul uses two key Old Testament verses to explain faith (Gen. 15: 6 and Hab. 2: 4), both of which emphasize the human act of faith.³⁴ Francis Watson takes this to be proof that Paul understands 'faith' or 'believing' to be a subjective act rooted in the divine promise, rather than an objective act accomplished by Jesus himself.³⁵ On the other hand, as Richard Hays and others have noted, there is a strong exegetical case to be made for interpreting the several instances of πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective, rather than

³³ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 127-29: "[In] his rendering of his faith, Paul uses the expression *pisteuein eis Jesoun christon*, 'to believe in Jesus Messiah.' This expression . . . is an anomaly in Greek. . . . The Pauline formula becomes all the more significant as it never appears in the Synoptic Gospels, thus defining in a substantive way his conception of faith. It is as if, for Paul, there is no space between Jesus and Messiah for the copulative *is*. . . . He does not know that Jesus *is* the Messiah, he only knows *Jesus Messiah*. . . . What then does it mean that in Paul faith is expressed in the nominal syntagma 'Jesus Messiah' and not the verbal syntagma 'Jesus is the Messiah'? Paul does not believe that Jesus possesses the quality of being the Messiah; he believes in 'Jesus Messiah' and that is all. *Messiah* is not a predicate tacked onto the subject *Jesus*, but something that is inseparable from him, without, however, constituting a proper name. For Paul, this is faith; it is an experience of being beyond existence and essence, as much beyond subject as beyond predicate. . . . But what then is the world of faith? . . . [I]t is not a world of predicates, of existences and of essences, but a world of indivisible events, in which I do not judge, nor do I believe that the snow is white and the sun is warm, but I am transported and displaced in the snow's-being-white and in the sun's-being-warm. In the end, it is a world in which I do not believe that Jesus, such-and-such a man, is the Messiah, only-begotten son of God, begotten and not created, consubstantial [*sic*] in the Father. I only believe in Jesus Messiah; I am carried away and enraptured in him, in such a way that 'I do not live, but the Messiah lives in me' (Gal. 2: 20)."

³⁴ Gen. 15: 6 is quoted in Rom. 4: 3 and Gal. 3: 6, while Hab. 2:4 is quoted in Rom. 1: 17 and Gal. 3: 11. For an interpretation of Hab. 2: 4 that runs counter to Watson's, see Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 132-41.

³⁵ Francis Watson, "Response to Richard Hays," *Pro Ecclesia* 16: 2 (2007), 136-37. Watson strongly rejects the notion that faith is an autonomous human act: "[T]here can be no question of a *self-generated* human act or decision, an autonomous actualization of an immanent human capacity. 'Righteousness' . . . is contingent on a *pistis/pisteuein* that is itself intended in the prior divine speech-act and that acknowledges it as such. The human act is enclosed within the divine" (137).

objective, genitive.³⁶ Part of the argument in favor of the ‘subjective genitive’ interpretation (‘the faith of Jesus Christ’) is that in places like Gal. 2: 16 or Rom. 3: 22, Paul uses both the noun (πίστις) and the verb (πιστεύειν) in a way that seems to presuppose some difference between the two forms of πίστις. Of course, at the end of the day, such passages are exegetically inconclusive and the debate is finally a matter of *theological* interpretation.³⁷ Moreover, the notion of the subjective genitive did not enter into biblical scholarship until 1891 and thus was not a live option for the Reformers.³⁸

What distinguishes Paul’s thought is (a) his connection of faith with the notion of justification, (b) his participatory formula ἐν Χριστῷ, and (c) an apocalyptic framework conditioning his entire theology. While (c) is an important dimension of Paul’s thought, it did not receive attention until recently.³⁹ The ἐν Χριστῷ formula has also received more attention lately, particularly due to the interest in the ontic dimensions of Christian faith, such as participation and union.⁴⁰ But the focus throughout the Reformation is on the first of these features of Paul’s thought. The key chapters are Romans 3-5 and Galatians 2-3. Both of these passages present a strong rejection of becoming righteous

³⁶ Within the undisputed letters of Paul, there are seven instances in which Paul follows the word *pistis* with a genitive form of Jesus or some christological title: Rom. 3: 22, 26; Gal. 2: 16 (twice), 20; Gal. 3: 22; and Phil. 3: 9. Another example often mentioned is Eph. 3: 12. Cf. Arland J. Hultgren, “The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul,” *Novum Testamentum* 22: 3 (1980), 248-63.

³⁷ For more on this, see my article, David W. Congdon, “The Trinitarian Shape of Πίστις: A Theological Exegesis of Galatians,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2, no. 2 (2008), 231-58.

³⁸ The subjective genitive was first introduced by Johannes Hausleiter in 1891 in his article, “Der Glaube Jesu Christi und der christliche Glaube: ein Beitrag zur Erklärung des Römerbriefes,” *NKZ* 2 (1891), 109-45, 205-30. Cf. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 142; Hultgren, “*Pistis Christou*,” 250.

³⁹ For more on this topic, see the works of J. Christiaan Beker, including *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) and *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). See also the seminal commentary on Galatians by J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, The Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

⁴⁰ Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 347-54. In his most recent work, Thiselton presents an analysis of the Pauline idea of being ‘in Christ.’ He begins by noting the five meanings of this formula mentioned by Johannes Weiss, but then he goes on to address four questions, the second of which is related to our topic: “What is the role of *faith* if everything comes from sheer *grace* that is given ‘without strings?’” (347). In answer to this question, he affirms the view of D.E.H. Whiteley, and says that faith is “the believer’s *appropriation of the gift of righteousness*, and this has the effect of *bringing forward the eschatological verdict ‘rightwised’ or ‘not guilty’ into the present*” (351). He also affirms Tillich’s view that faith “is *accepting that we are accepted*.” He goes on to say that faith is not an intellectual work, but is rather “an *active response of confidence and trust*. Being in Christ is its ontological *ground*; dispositional response is part of its *appropriation in daily life*” (351). All italics original.

through doing “works of the law.”⁴¹ Instead, righteousness is a “gift” about which we cannot boast,⁴² and faith is an act of “trust” in the one who “justifies the ungodly.”⁴³ Paul’s language is more sophisticated than what we find in the Synoptics. Rather than attributing salvation to faith as an instrumental cause, Paul very clearly attributes salvation to God alone. Paul ascribes redemption⁴⁴ and reconciliation⁴⁵ solely to the work of Christ, and thus he speaks of being “justified by his blood” and “saved by his life.”⁴⁶ The reality of justification, even when clearly connected to a human act of faith, is always attributed to God through what Christ accomplished. So, for example, God “justifies the one who has faith in Jesus (or the faith of Jesus).”⁴⁷ Finally, faith is described as a reality brought about by the Holy Spirit,⁴⁸ who bears witness that we have been justified and adopted as children of God.⁴⁹ We might say, following John Barclay, that human agency for Paul is energized by and “embedded within” divine agency.⁵⁰

Faith in Hebrews and James. The letter to the Hebrews is most famous for its definition of faith as “the assurance (ὑπόστασις) of things hoped for, the conviction (ἔλεγχος) of things not seen.”⁵¹ Hebrews uses the noun ‘faith’ (πίστις) 32 times and the verb (πιστεύειν) 2 times. According to Craig Koester, faith in Hebrews has two dimensions: trust and faithfulness.⁵² Faith as trust “means hearing and receiving the gospel message (4:2-3), turning from sin to God (6:1), and drawing near to God with confidence (10:22).”⁵³ Faith as faithfulness “entails perseverance (6:12) and holding fast to the confession of the Christian community without wavering (10:23). Faithfulness is a way of life

⁴¹ Gal. 2: 15.

⁴² Rom. 4: 4.

⁴³ Rom. 4: 5; cf. Rom. 5: 6.

⁴⁴ Gal. 3: 13, 4: 4-5.

⁴⁵ Rom. 5: 10; 2 Cor. 5: 19.

⁴⁶ Rom. 5: 9, 10.

⁴⁷ Rom. 3: 26.

⁴⁸ Gal. 5: 22.

⁴⁹ Rom. 8: 15-17; Gal. 4: 6-7.

⁵⁰ John M.G. Barclay, “‘By the Grace of God I am what I am’: Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul,” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (Eds.) (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 156. Barclay suggests that we speak of ‘energism,’ rather than synergism or monergism, in the relation between divine and human agency.

⁵¹ Heb. 11: 1.

⁵² Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 125-26. Later, he says that faith “encompasses both trust in God and faithfulness to God” (472).

⁵³ Koester, *Hebrews*, 125.

for the people of God.”⁵⁴ Faith is therefore both theological—focused on God’s faithfulness—and Christological—because Jesus is the “pioneer of faith,”⁵⁵ the one who exemplified what it means to be faithful and trust in God: “Listeners are called to the same trust and faithfulness that Jesus exhibited, finding confidence by looking to Jesus.”⁵⁶ The saints of the faith are also models of faithfulness, as Hebrews 11 seeks to show. As Koester puts it, “to live by faith is to be faithful, as Jesus and Moses proved to be.”⁵⁷

James deserves mention in part because it serves as a counterpoint—not a contradiction—to the Pauline emphasis on justification apart from works. The key verse is James 2: 17, which maintains that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Not surprisingly, as a Lutheran, Schlink ignores James in his list of biblical texts that deal with faith. The Reformed, on the other hand, found James useful as a biblical support for Calvin’s third use of the law, and so the witness of James remains important in the Reformed confessions even though Paul’s letters are given priority.

Assessment of the New Testament Witness to Faith. While admittedly oversimplistic, this brief survey indicates that faith is a key issue in the intersection of divine and human agency. Moreover, there is no definitive ‘biblical’ conception of how these two agencies interrelate. The Synoptics emphasize a kind of dialogical encounter between the Jesus who saves and the human person who trusts in God. John’s gospel looks at faith from the perspective of divine revelation. Jesus’ miracles are signs that “are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.”⁵⁸ Paul places faith within an apocalyptic-eschatological framework of triune divine agency: faith comes from the Father, has its origin and end in the Christ-event, and is always newly empowered by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Hebrews and James testify, respectively, to the necessary faithfulness of the Christian community (in correspondence to the faithfulness of Jesus) and to the necessary unity of faith with a life of obedience to the law of love. In general, we can say that the New Testament emphasizes the antecedent activity and grace of God: even where human activity is connected with a corresponding divine gift, the gift is always superabundant. God’s activity breaks open any human calculus of merit. That said, there is a tension between the gospels and Paul’s letters regarding the ‘autonomy’ of faith.

⁵⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, 126.

⁵⁵ Heb. 12: 2.

⁵⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, 127.

⁵⁷ Koester, *Hebrews*, 126.

⁵⁸ Jn. 20: 31.

Whereas the former appear to describe faith as an autonomous human possibility, for Paul, human activity is always ‘enclosed’ or ‘embedded’ within the divine activity of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Concept of Faith in the Reformed Confessions

While the early Reformed confessions distinguish themselves negatively—i.e., in terms of what they oppose, viz. Roman Catholicism—the later confessions distinguish themselves positively as part of a distinct theological and exegetical tradition. As their confessional identity develops, so too does their theological sophistication. This is evident in the doctrine of faith found in the Reformed confessions. I will examine the Reformed confessions by looking at their presentation of faith as (1) a divine gift and (2) a human act, before (3) analyzing the relation between the confessions and scripture.⁵⁹

Faith as divine gift. Following Ephesians 2: 8, the Reformed confessions are unanimous in affirming that faith is a sovereign gift of God’s grace.⁶⁰ The First Helvetic Confession describes faith as “a pure gift of God.”⁶¹ The French or Gallican Confession calls faith “a gratuitous and special gift which God grants to whom he will” through the “secret power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶² The Second Helvetic Confession makes a strong distinction between faith and works, appealing to the apostle Paul in support of the notion “that sinful man is justified by faith alone in Christ, not by the law or any works.” Faith is the basis for justification because “it is the gift of God.”⁶³ Throughout the confessions, faith is a divine gift precisely because, as Martin Bucer puts it in the Tetrapolitan Confession of 1530, “none of these things [i.e., creation and new creation] can be ascribed to human powers; and we must confess that all things are the mere

⁵⁹ All citations of the Reformed confessions are taken from Arthur C. Cochrane (Ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Cf. Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 32: “[In] this period [of the Reformation] one still knew that faith is an *objective* thing, not an arbitrary act at the individual’s discretion, and thus it is a *public* affair. With all seriousness it counts on the fact that the center of the religious question lies in the counsels of *God*, the Lord of the world and of history, and not in the sentiment, the heart, or the conscience of the *person* who believes in God.”

⁶¹ The First Helvetic Confession of Faith of 1536, ¶13, 104.

⁶² The French Confession of Faith of 1559, ¶21, 151.

⁶³ The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, ¶15, 256.

gifts of God, who favors and loves us of his own accord, and not for any merit of ours.”⁶⁴

As the last quote demonstrates well, the Reformers emphasized the gift nature of faith in order to combat the emphasis on meritorious human action within Catholic theology. For this reason, the discussion of faith consistently takes place in the context of a rejection of ‘salvation by works.’ Not surprisingly, the Belgic Confession states: “Therefore we justly say with Paul, *that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works.*”⁶⁵ Similarly, the First Confession of Basel does not ascribe righteousness to works, which are “the fruit of faith,” but rather “to a genuine trust and faith in the shed blood of the Lamb of God.”⁶⁶ Justification wholly depends upon the grace of God. The primary Reformation particle is thus not *sola fide* but *solus Deus*. As a gift from God and not a work of merit, our being-in-faith arises through actions which are done to us, hence the consistent use of passive verbs: we are “endued chiefly with faith”;⁶⁷ “by [Christ’s] Spirit we are regenerated into a new spiritual nature” and “made capable and able to do good works”⁶⁸ we are “enlightened in faith” by the Holy Spirit;⁶⁹ “by this faith we are regenerated in newness of life”;⁷⁰ faith is “wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost”;⁷¹ and if we have faith it is because “God has elected us” in Christ and we “are now engrafted into Christ by faith.”⁷² The reality of faith in all these passages is attributed to a divine working in us.

The active agent of this faith is the Holy Spirit. Faith is brought about by the ‘secret power’ of the Spirit, who conforms us into the image of the Son.⁷³ According to the Second Helvetic Confession, faith is “a pure gift of God which God alone of his grace gives to his elect . . . by the Holy Spirit by means of the preaching of the Gospel and steadfast prayer.”⁷⁴ Faith is identified with

⁶⁴ The Tetrapolitan Confession of 1930, ¶5, 60.

⁶⁵ The Belgic Confession of Faith of 1561, ¶22, 204.

⁶⁶ The First Confession of Basel of 1534, ¶9, 95.

⁶⁷ Tetrapolitan Confession, ¶4, 59.

⁶⁸ The Geneva Confession of Faith of 1536, ¶8, 122.

⁶⁹ French Confession, ¶21, 151.

⁷⁰ French Confession, ¶22, 151.

⁷¹ Belgic Confession, ¶24, 205. The Belgic Confession uses 1 Cor. 4: 7 three times to emphasize that faith is a gift from God.

⁷² Second Helvetic Confession, ¶10, 240.

⁷³ The French Confession’s use of the phrase ‘secret power of the Holy Spirit’ is a direct echo of Calvin’s statement that “we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits” through “the secret energy of the Spirit.” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1.

⁷⁴ Second Helvetic Confession, ¶16, 257-58.

the subjective, and thus with the Spirit who sanctifies, while the reconciliation is identified with the objective, and thus with Jesus Christ who redeems. This subjective-objective dichotomy is a consistent feature of the doctrine of faith in the Reformed confessions. The redemptive work of Christ is *extra nos*, while faith is part of the Spirit's sanctifying work *in nobis*. To use Karl Barth's terminology, faith in the confessions is "the subjectivization of an objective *res*,"⁷⁵ and the Spirit is the agent of this subjectivization. Faith is *in Christ*, but it is *by the Spirit*. The Spirit is not only the agent of faith but also the agent of good works, the 'fruit of faith.' According to the French Confession, all good works "proceed from his Spirit."⁷⁶ They are not, of course, meritorious, but rather flow from the new spiritual nature realized *in nobis* through the Spirit's application of Christ's salvific work. Following Paul, such works are the "fruit of the Spirit."⁷⁷ Through the Spirit "our will is rendered conformable to God's will, to follow in his way and to seek what is pleasing to him."⁷⁸ Only because of the gifts of the Spirit and faith are we able to live in conformity to God's will as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Faith as human act. While the confessions strongly affirm the character of faith as a divine gift received by the human person, at times they speak of faith more as a human act—not a human *work*, of course, but an act that emphasizes the role of human agency. Take, for example, the Scottish Confession of Faith, which most explicitly makes faith a gift of the Spirit. Human nature, according to the Scots Confession, is "dead, blind, and perverse," from which nothing good can arise without the enlivening and enlightening power of God. For this reason, "faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost . . . who sanctifies us, and brings us into all truth by His own working."⁷⁹ Faith, in other words, is brought about by the Spirit who works freely in those who are elect. Yet, in the following section on good works, the confession speaks of the Holy Spirit as one "who dwells in our hearts by true faith" and "whom God's chosen children receive by true faith."⁸⁰ The Spirit's "possession of the heart" is made contingent upon a person's act of faith, even though such faith was earlier described as the sovereign and free work of the

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 volumes, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Eds.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956-75), here IV/1, 742. Hereafter cited as *CD*.

⁷⁶ French Confession, ¶22, 152.

⁷⁷ Gal. 5: 22-23.

⁷⁸ Geneva Confession, ¶8, 122.

⁷⁹ The Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560, ¶12, 171.

⁸⁰ The Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560, ¶13, 172.

Spirit. These views are not necessarily opposed, but simply represent two sides of the same action—a faith primarily granted by God and then secondarily received by the human person. Even so, it is this twofold character of faith which the Reformed confessions consistently affirm, though with widely varying levels of clarity and theological refinement.

The earlier confessional documents are more ambiguous in their presentation of faith. Zwingli's very early "Sixty-seven Articles of 1523" represents an inchoate doctrine of faith that altogether lacks an emphasis on divine agency in faith. Salvation is everywhere attributed to God alone in Christ alone, but then he states: "For our salvation is based on faith in the Gospel and our damnation on unbelief."⁸¹ Faith is 'in the gospel,' rather than in the person of Christ. As the parallel with unbelief shows, Zwingli's definition of faith is closer to an intellectual assent than a trust in the person and work of Christ, though this may be due to the brevity of his treatment of the subject. In any case, faith is a human act of belief as opposed to a human act of unbelief. Similarly, the Geneva Confession of 1536 describes faith as our belief "in the promises of the Gospel," which is "the entrance which we have to the great treasures and riches of the goodness of God."⁸² While the First Helvetic Confession of 1536 clearly calls faith a "gift of God," it goes on to describe faith as "the true and proper service with which a man is pleasing to God."⁸³ We see here the origins of the Reformed emphasis on faith as both gift and task, but without the later systematic description of how human and divine agencies interrelate in the event of faith. In these earlier Reformed documents, faith appears more clearly as a human act of belief in the gospel *kerygma* in opposition to the Catholic doctrines. The relation between faith and either Jesus or the Spirit is left unexplained for the most part.

The Belgic Confession has a more nuanced understanding of the role of human agency in the act of faith. Because of the influence of Calvin, faith is attributed first and foremost to "the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost."⁸⁴ Word and Spirit "kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him."⁸⁵ Through faith we "possess Jesus Christ" and receive justification. The author of the confession, Guido de Brès,

⁸¹ Zwingli's Sixty-seven Articles of 1523, ¶15, 37.

⁸² Geneva Confession, ¶11, 123.

⁸³ First Helvetic Confession, ¶13, 104.

⁸⁴ Belgic Confession, ¶24, 205.

⁸⁵ Belgic Confession, ¶22, 203.

recognizes that one might interpret faith as a work that achieves our salvation and thus, in an attempt to clarify matters, he states:

However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works, which he hath done for us and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.⁸⁶

The concept of faith as an “instrument” is an attempt at this later stage to reach greater systematic coherency, though it falls short. It remains unclear in this confession how faith as a gift of the Spirit is also a human instrument for embracing Christ. How is human agency as an instrumental cause of justification not a kind of work? Here the tension between faith as both divine gift and human act seems to reach its theological breaking point. Moreover, is it really adequate to speak of faith as something “that keeps us in communion” with Christ? Would it not be more appropriate on Reformed soil to say that Christ, in light of our election in him, remains in communion with us, and that by his Spirit our faith is continually granted as a gift? As it stands, the Belgic Confession, along with all the other documents of the Reformation during this time, creates a split between potentiality and actuality. The potential of our salvation is accomplished in Jesus Christ, but it only becomes actual as we ‘embrace’ him and ‘appropriate’ his benefits: “[We] always hold fast this foundation, . . . relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, *which becomes ours when we believe in him.*”⁸⁷ The objective reality remains a potentiality that the Spirit actualizes in a kind of cooperation with active human receptivity. Human beings are thus not involved in accomplishing the objective redemption, but there is some form of involvement in the subjective appropriation of this redemption.

Before looking at how faithful the confessions are to the witness of scripture, it is worth looking at how the confessions define faith in contrast to a Catholic doctrine of intellectual assent. Throughout the Reformed confessions, the emphasis on the affections and the heart is clear: faith is defined as “certain confidence and assurance of heart”,⁸⁸ faith becomes “effectual and

⁸⁶ Belgic Confession, 204.

⁸⁷ Belgic Confession, ¶23, 204; italics mine.

⁸⁸ Geneva Confession, ¶11, 123.

living... in the hearts of believers”;⁸⁹ and the Spirit who brings about faith “takes possession of the heart... so that he begins to hate what before he loved, and to love what he hated before.”⁹⁰ Luther’s concern about finding a gracious God is echoed throughout these confessions in their witness to faith as a reality which takes hold of the human heart and reorients one’s affections. Potentially implicit in Reformational soteriology is an alternative, Reformational anthropology that challenges the Aristotelian hierarchy of mind and reason over the body and the appetites.

Confessions and Scripture. How then do the Reformed confessions employ scripture to support their doctrines of faith? In order to address the relation between theology and exegesis in the confessions, I examined which passages (and how many) were used in relation to the topics of faith, justification, and good works in each of the sixteenth century confessions. The purpose of this analysis is to determine which parts of scripture’s witness to faith are given the most attention in the confessions, and which parts are slighted.⁹¹ Out of 221 passages of scripture cited in the confessions, the largest number of them (53 or 24%)—not surprisingly—are from Romans, followed by the Gospel of John (23; 10%) and Galatians (18; 8%). While Romans is certainly a major

⁸⁹ Second Helvetic Confession, ¶13, 250.

⁹⁰ Scottish Confession, ¶13, 172.

⁹¹ This analysis, of course, remains necessarily inconclusive, since not all the confessions cite scripture and those that do cite scripture differently. Those that do not use scripture—e.g., Zwingli’s Sixty-seven Articles, Ten Theses of Berne, and the Geneva Confession—are not represented in this examination. The same applies to the Scots Confession, no doubt due to its hasty composition. Those that do use scripture vary widely in how they employ it. The First Helvetic and French Confessions cite biblical references but rarely quote scripture in the text itself. The Belgic Confession also cites many references in the notes, but uses much more scripture in the body of the confession. The Second Helvetic Confession cites fewer passages but integrates them into the text. The point is that any statistical analysis of scripture usage in the confessions is of limited value.

A quick word about my method of tallying passages is in order. The problem I faced in conducting this analysis was how to record scriptural references. Should I give one point for every verse, so that Gal. 2: 19-20 would equal two points for Galatians? Should I instead give one point each time a book of the Bible is mentioned, regardless of how many chapters or verses are referenced? I settled instead on a compromise: one point for every time a different chapter is mentioned. I chose this because on a few occasions, a confession cites an entire chapter (e.g., John 6 or James 2) without indicating which verses are important, and on many occasions the confession says something like Rom. 4: 2ff. Rather than count every verse, I concluded that counting different chapters was the best way of judging how often certain passages were used. As a result, a reference like ‘Rom. 3: 27; 8: 1, 33’ from the Belgic Confession (¶22) received two points, for chapters 3 and 8 of Romans. Unfortunately, this method does not weigh citations like ‘John 6’ any heavier than ‘John 6: 44.’ Again, this makes my analysis of limited value.

text in the Reformation, its witness to the nature of faith is especially heightened in these confessional documents compared to the New Testament overall. Out of 484 references to πίστις/πιστεύειν in the NT, Romans contains 61 or 13%, while Galatians contains 26 or 5%. The central passage, cited 11 times in the confessions, is Romans 3: 21-28. In addition, Romans 4: 1-8 is cited seven times, and Galatians 2: 16-20 six times.

Within the sections I analyzed, John receives nine more references in the confessions than all of the Synoptics combined (14; 6%), even though O'Connor says that the Protestant conception of faith is primarily rooted in the Synoptic Gospels. That said, compared to the number of references to faith in these four gospels, their appearance in the confessions marks a demphasis in contrast to Paul's letters: John contains 98 or 20% of the references to faith in the NT; the Synoptics contain 58 or 12%; and combined the four gospels contain 32% of the NT references, while they are mentioned in the confessions only 17% of the time. In all of the Synoptic references in the confessions, none of the passages that speak of faith having saving efficacy are cited, except the exorcism in Matthew 17, when Jesus says that the disciples were unable to cure the demon-possessed boy because of their "little faith."⁹² The key use of John 6 comes in the Second Helvetic Confession, in which Heinrich Bullinger follows Zwingli's interpretation: "[The] Lord abundantly shows that we receive Christ by faith, in John, ch. 6, where he puts eating for believing, and believing for eating. For as we receive food by eating, so we participate in Christ by believing."⁹³

More surprisingly, Hebrews and James receive very little discussion at all. James is mentioned only twice: the French Confession cites all of James 2 in Article 22 on the necessity of faith bringing forth good works through the Spirit, and the Second Helvetic Confession contains the only comparison of James and Paul on the nature of faith, concluding that "James does not contradict anything in this doctrine of ours."⁹⁴ Instead of James, the confessions tend to cite Galatians 5: 6 ('faith working through love'), a passage mentioned three times (French, Belgic, and Second Helvetic). Hebrews is a more interesting matter. The 'classic' definition of faith in Hebrews 11: 1 only gets one mention in all the confessions, appearing in a series of biblical citations related to the topic of the "increase of faith."⁹⁵ The only other three references to

⁹² Cf. French Confession, ¶20, 151.

⁹³ Second Helvetic Confession, ¶15, 256.

⁹⁴ Second Helvetic Confession, ¶15, 257.

⁹⁵ Second Helvetic Confession, ¶16, 258.

Hebrews are to Hebrews 11: 6, where the author (whom the Reformers thought was Paul) states: “[Without] faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” The choice of 11: 6 over 11: 1 is understandable: the former offers a more direct response to Roman Catholicism by implicitly rejecting works of merit, while the latter was a passage used often by Catholics in support of faith as *assensus intellectus*. Entirely absent from the confessions is any mention of faith as faithfulness modeled on Jesus and the ‘saints,’ and the important description of Jesus as “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”⁹⁶ receives no mention at all.⁹⁷

What does this cursory look at the use of scripture in the confessions indicate? For starters, the Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, and James receive very little mention in the confessions. Altogether, they make up 9% of the NT references in the confessions (on my count, at least), even though within the NT they comprise 23% of the references to faith.⁹⁸ By neglecting these witnesses in constructing their doctrine of faith, the Reformers lose a number of important elements, including: (1) the notion of faithfulness exemplified in Jesus’ life (which Paul himself leaves out, since he focuses almost exclusively on the cross); and (2) the miraculous power of faith recorded in the Synoptics with reference to the mission of Jesus and the mission of the apostles, which the Reformers leave out in part because they view this mission as completed with the original twelve. The confessions rightly emphasize the definition of faith as *fiducia* (in addition to *notitia* and *assensus*),⁹⁹ but it is disconnected from the kind of trust displayed throughout the Synoptics.

The Pauline witness everywhere dominates in the Reformed confessions, but even here the witness is limited to the forensic and does not adequately capture the ontological depths of meaning in the notion of being ‘in Christ.’ Faith is not understood in light of Christology or a particular ontological relationship with Christ; the connection is formed by the Spirit as the ‘bond of union’ (Calvin) between humanity and Jesus. Despite a distinctly different doctrine of faith from the Roman Catholics, the Reformers did not connect this to a distinctly different Christology. Whereas Catholicism maintains a logical relationship between Christology and pistology, Protestantism’s early

⁹⁶ Heb 12: 2.

⁹⁷ Interestingly, Calvin never mentions Heb. 12: 2 anywhere in his 1559 *Institutes*.

⁹⁸ To compare, Romans makes up 13% of the NT references to faith but 24% of the NT references in the confessions.

⁹⁹ Cf. Second Helvetic Confession, ¶16, 257: “Christian faith is not an opinion or human conviction, but a most firm trust and a clear and steadfast assent of the mind.”

stages did not elaborate any such relationship. Not surprisingly, to answer Schlink's question, the doctrine of faith in the Reformed confessions offers little if any room for reading πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive, which would identify faith as something that objectively precedes us in the history of Jesus himself. More importantly, despite the dominance of the Pauline witness, the confessions fail to grasp the way Paul locates human agency within the antecedent and superabundant agency of Father, Son, and Spirit. One could say that the confessions adopt the Pauline witness because it serves their rejection of Catholic merit, but maintain a Synoptic emphasis on human trust in God—though without making much use of the Synoptics.

Jesus and Faith: Some Concluding Reflections

I return then to the original concern of this paper—viz. the relation between Jesus and faith. Living before or on the cusp of modernity, the Reformers were not burdened by the bifurcation between subject and object as we are today. Similarly, Lessing's 'ugly ditch' had not yet yawned. And so the modern concern with subject-object relations is somewhat anachronistic when applied to the biblical text and the early confessions of the Reformation. Even so, it is an issue that scripture presents for us, in the relations between Son and Spirit, between reconciliation and justification and sanctification, between Christ's death and resurrection, and our own death and resurrection. While the confessions certainly want to ground *sola fide* in *solus Christus*, at least in some sense, it is unclear what exactly this could mean. Christ is only the object and not the subject of faith.

Calvin actually offers a way forward rooted in Christology which the confessions do not pick up, though later theologians like Karl Barth would. In Book III, Calvin addresses what it means to have Christ as the object of faith:

Augustine has finely spoken of this matter: in discussing the goal of faith, he teaches that we must know our destination and the way to it. Then, immediately after, he infers that the way that is most fortified against all errors is he who was both God and man: namely, as God he is the destination to which we move; as man, the path by which we go. Both are found in Christ alone. But, while Paul proclaims faith in God, he does not have in mind to overturn what he so often emphasizes concerning faith: namely, that all its stability rests in Christ. Peter, indeed, most effectively connects both, saying that through him we believe in God [1 Peter 1: 21].¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *Institutes*, 3.2.1.

In this remarkable passage, Calvin shows a strong inclination toward positing something like the 'faith of Jesus Christ.' But because he is unable to conceive of this exegetical possibility, he rests content in using 1 Peter while asserting that Paul's doctrine of faith is rooted in the person of Christ, even if (in Calvin's mind) this is not always clear in the text itself. This passage suggests that Calvin wants to understand Christ as both the object and subject of human faith. Jesus is both the *telos* of faith and its 'pioneer.' We both believe in Jesus and follow him in our belief; in his own faithfulness, he shows us the way of faith. Christology and pistology are here interrelated, even if only in a nascent way.

While Calvin offers us a substantial improvement over the relation between Jesus and faith in the confessions, there are other issues to be addressed. In particular, the confessions raise the problem of the connection between Son and Spirit. What happened 'there and then' on the cross is an accomplished reality, but it remains for the Spirit to apply this reality to people 'here and now.' While efficacious, Christ's sacrifice is not yet effectuated. It remains for the Spirit and for the human act of faith to put reconciliation into effect. After the arrival of Lessing's ditch, however, the problem of the relation between history and reason, time and eternity, past and present became far more intractable. As Hegel put it in his Jena diary: "In Swabia people say of something that took place long ago that it is so long since it happened that it can hardly be true any more. So Christ died for our sins so long ago that it can hardly be true any more."¹⁰¹ In the twentieth century, Barth answers Hegel and Lessing with his doctrine of 'contemporaneity' or 'simultaneity': in our hearing of the Word of God we are contemporaneous with the writers of the biblical texts,¹⁰² and in the event of faith, awakened by the Spirit, we are contemporaneous with Jesus Christ himself.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 82.

¹⁰² Cf. Barth, *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, 59: "In Bullinger's *Second Helvetic Confession*, we first find the conceptual distinction between God's speech *then* . . . and his speech *now* . . . The distinction posits something objective versus something subjective, and thereby jeopardizes the *simultaneity* between the biblical authors and us. Only in this simultaneity, however, can the consequence of the revelation they experienced, their 'writing' [scriptum], become witness for us, become the Word of God, the 'very Word of God.'" And later: "The meaning of this old doctrine of inspiration is as follows: Inspiration or revelation is conceived of as one single timeless, or better, simultaneous act of God upon the biblical authors *and* upon us."

¹⁰³ On the Christological unity of the "here and now" and the "there and then," see Barth, *CD* II/1, 262: "[God's revelation] is not, therefore, an event which has merely happened and is now a past fact of history. . . . But it is also an event happening in the present, here and now"; III/2,

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben provides another option in his recent interpretation of Romans, which suggests thinking of the time of Jesus as “messianic time,” i.e., the “operational time” within which the work of God is accomplished, as opposed to linear “chronological time” within which we do our human work.¹⁰⁴ ‘Messianic time’ is “operational time pressing within the chronological time, working and transforming it from within.”¹⁰⁵ He connects this idea of ‘messianic time’ with the *parousia* and makes the radical assertion that the *parousia*, as the presence of God, is not deferred by our present, chronological time but instead encompasses it. We are not bereft of Christ’s presence but rather embraced by it; messianic time ‘stretches’ to include our time.¹⁰⁶ With Barth and Agamben, then, we can replace the binary oppositions between objective and subjective, efficacious and effectuated, past and present with a more robust understanding of Word and Spirit that acknowledges reconciliation as a reality actualized ‘there and then,’ but which ‘stretches’ in the Spirit to include our own ‘here and now.’ Certainly more work remains to be done on this topic. Here I only suggest that the theological and exegetical issues raised by the Reformed confessions need not remain problems. There are resources available within both the Reformed tradition and contemporary theology for thinking beyond the apparent impasse.

466-68: “the yesterday of Jesus is also to-day”; IV/1, 223: “[the divine judgment] took place in Him, in the one man, and therefore there and then, *illic et tunc*, and in significance *hic et nunc*, for us in our modern here and now”; IV/1, 291: “...His being and activity in contemporaneity with us, and our being in contemporaneity with Him”; IV/2, 503: “He is the same there and then as He is here and now”; IV/3.1, 216-17: “He does not exist only primarily in His *illic et tunc*, but also secondarily with this man in His *hic et nunc*.” For more on the contemporaneity of Christ in Barth’s theology, see R. Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 65-82.

¹⁰⁴ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 65-68.

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 67-68.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 70-71: “[The *parousia*] does not mean the ‘second coming’ of Jesus, a second messianic event that would follow and subsume the first. In Greek, *parousia* simply means presence. . . . *Parousia* does not signal a complement that is added on to something in order to complete it, nor a supplement, added on afterward, that never reaches fulfillment. Paul uses this term to highlight the innermost uni-dual structure of the messianic event, inasmuch as it is comprised of two heterogeneous times, one *kairos* and the other *chronos*, one an operational time and the other a represented time, which are coextensive but cannot be added together. Messianic presence lies beside itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant, and without ever adding itself onto it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfillment. . . . The Messiah has already arrived, the messianic event has already happened, but its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its *parousia*, not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable. . . . The Messiah always already had his time, meaning he simultaneously makes time his and brings it to fulfillment.”

To conclude, the Reformed confessions present a doctrine of faith as a divine gift that includes a necessary human response. The doctrine is historically situated in the context of a dispute with Roman Catholicism about the very nature of faith. Against the Catholics, the Reformers emphasize the nature of faith as a heartfelt trust in Christ and the gospel of justification. Their employment of scripture toward this particular end results in a heavy emphasis upon the Pauline epistles to the neglect of the Synoptics, Hebrews, and James, in addition to other texts. In particular, the confessions fail to provide a satisfactory understanding of the relation between the person of Jesus and the nature of faith; Christology and pisticology are not mutually implicated in that while faith is directed to Jesus, Jesus is not similarly 'directed' toward faith, so to speak. The problem is represented by the relationship between Son and Spirit, which seems to involve a bifurcation between objective and subjective, past and present. Recent exegetical work, as well as the theological resources of Calvin, Barth, and Agamben, to name just a few, offer fruitful and creative ways of integrating Jesus and faith today.