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John G. Deterding

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_deterdingj@csl.edu

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LUTHERAN SOLA FIDE VS. ROMAN CATHOLIC EX OPERE
OPERATO ON THE BASIS OF THE CONFESSIONS

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Systematic Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
John G. Deterding
May 1947

Approved by: Louis Sieds
John Theodore Mueller

TO

MY PARENTS

The Reverend and Mrs. John Deterding
Bluffs, Illinois

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LUTHERAN SOLA FIDE VS. ROMAN CATHOLIC EX OPERE
OPERATO ON THE BASIS OF THE CONFESSIONS

I. Introduction

The doctrine of sola fide is not one that is peculiar to the Reformation. The New Testament, and especially the epistles of Paul often speak of the sola fide. The doctrine did not begin with the teachings of Christ. The earliest writers of the Old Testament knew that man is saved by faith alone. The first promise of a Redeemer from sin required faith. This promise was given, Gen. 3,15, soon after man had fallen into sin. Every Gospel promise in the Old and New Testament point the believers to God alone through faith. We cannot, therefore, refer to the sola fide as being Lutheran in the same sense that we refer to the ex opere operato as being Roman Catholic. For the sola fide is Lutheran only in this sense that the confessing Lutheran Church has zealously guarded this truth and violently opposed any teaching contrary to it from the days of the Reformation even

until the present day.

A good definition of the sola fide as to its nature and function is given in the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. The fathers there confess: "We believe, teach, and confess that faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ, and thus in Christ of that righteousness which avails before God, for whose sake this faith is imputed to us for righteousness, Rom. 4,5. We believe, teach, and confess that this faith is not a bare knowledge of the history of Christ, but such a gift of God by which we come to the right knowledge of Christ as our Redeemer in the Word of the Gospel, and trust in Him that for the sake of His obedience alone we have, by grace, the forgiveness of sins, are regarded as holy and righteous before God the Father, and eternally saved." ¹ It is important that we emphasize the true meaning of faith, for the Catholics consider faith to be purely a matter of the intellect which has been illuminated by grace. To them it is a divine light whereby man discerns the decrees of God. It comprehends not only what God is to man, but also what man should be to God.² Though they may have a general historical knowledge of Christ, they do not believe that Christ is our Lord in the sense that He has acquired eternal life for us freely, without our works

1. Concordia Triglotta, p. 793, 3.4.

2. Cf. J.A. Moehler, Symbolism, p. 122.

and merits.

In our controversy with the Romanists we emphasize that special or personal faith is required of us. However, the chief stress must be laid on the fact that it is sola fide --- that faith is the only way to heaven. Thus the Confessions of our Church urge with special diligence the particulae exclusivae. The exclusive words of Paul give all honor for our salvation to Christ alone, and salvation is said to be appropriated through faith alone. Such words are: of grace, without merit, without Law, without works, not of works.³ St. Paul thus teaches the sola fide in Gal. 2,16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the Law; for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." Faith alone is spoken of as being necessary for justification. We are not made just by the deeds of the Law. Among the many other passages from Paul's writings that teach this truth are Eph. 2,8; Rom. 1, 17; 3,24; 4,3ff.; Gal. 3,11. Heb. 11 is also an important passage for the sola fide.

Though we are accounted righteous before God by faith, faith does not save as a good work or quality. The Bible and our Confessions simply say "through faith", not "for the

3. Concordia Triglotta, Formula of Concord, Epit. III., p. 795, 7.

sake of faith". We are freely justified for Christ's sake. We dare not make faith a meritorious work.⁴ As soon as we make faith a meritorious work, we lose the sola which makes the sola fide of such great value to us.

Opposed to the sola fide is the doctrine of ex opere operato, i.e., that the sacraments mechanically confer grace upon all who receive them. Faith is not necessary to receive this grace, but the mere outward ceremony effects it mechanically for all those who do not place an obstacle in the way. The roots of the ex opere operato error go back much farther than does Romanism. Yet we label it as a specific Roman Catholic error for the Romanists have championed it and developed it into the doctrine as we know it today. Prior to the days of the Protestant Reformers, it seems that the phrase ex opere operato was used "to express the belief that sacraments do not depend for their efficacy on the moral character or even on the private beliefs of the individual minister; that where an otherwise qualified person, though wicked or unbelieving, yet intending to do what the Church does, observes the appointed forms, the recipient need not be afraid that the promised grace is not received; the human minister being no more than an instrument in the hand of the true Giver, Christ Himself."⁵ Luther and his colleagues perhaps would have found no fault with this phrase if it had retained

4. Cf. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. IV (II), p. 147, 86. For a more detailed discussion, see also J.L. Neve, The Augsburg Confession, p. 84.

that meaning. However, when the Romanists used the phrase to justify their emphasis on the outward act and their denial of the necessity of faith in the use of the Sacrament, the Reformers objected. Again, when the Council of Trent made this Roman teaching a part of the dogma of Catholicism, the Lutherans saw that the ex opere operato error endangered, yes destroyed the Biblical doctrine concerning faith in the Sacraments.

We are not unfair in saying that the Romanists err in placing too much stress on the outward act at the expense of faith. This can be seen from a study of the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Canon VIII of the Seventh Session reads: "If any one saith that by the said Sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace: let him be anathema." ⁶ Since then the Romanists have consistently taught that the Sacraments always give grace (ex opere operato) whenever the recipient puts no obstacle in the way. According to their erroneous teaching, the disposition of the individual can determine the amount of grace. "The amount of grace conferred by a sacrament in each instance depends (1) on the eternal decree of God, who has endowed each Sacrament with

5. Clement Charles Julian Webb, "Sacrament", in The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., Vol. 19, p. 797.

6. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. II, p. 121.

a definite measure of grace, and (2) on the disposition and co-operation of the recipient. Note, however, that the Sacraments are efficacious ex opere operato, and consequently the disposition of the recipient is not the cause of grace, but merely a condition of a richer outpouring of the same, just as the dryness of a stick of wood is not the cause of its burning, but a condition of its being more rapidly consumed by the flames."⁷ Since the Romanists take such an attitude, the only preparation which they consider necessary is not placing an obstacle in the way of grace. Briefly, the Romanists teach that the Sacraments, ex opere operato, always confer grace upon all participants, though the amount of grace may vary with the individual. The Catholic Church thus determines who is to profit from the Sacraments. The Church determines to whom the priest may administer the Sacraments and hence also upon whom this ex opere operato grace may rest. We are not surprised therefore to hear reports that in foreign mission work Roman Catholic missionaries have taken children from heathen parents, secretly baptized them, and then reported them as Christians.⁸

The Roman Catholic Church is the first to persist in the error of ex opere operato. This teaching appeals to sinful human nature which is always inclined toward salvation

7. Joseph Pohle, tr. by Arthur Preuss, The Sacraments, A Dogmatic Treatise, Vol. I, p. 73.

8. Cf. J.L. Neve, Introduction to Lutheran Symbolics, p. 230. Also see M. Loy, The Augsburg Confession, p. 766f.

by works and outward rites. We may therefore surmise that the seeds for this error were prevalent long before the Council of Trent. A study of the subject indicates that our suspicions are correct. We can detect the beginnings of the ex opere operato error already very early in the Old Testament. The prophets and psalmists frequently had to remind the people that it was not the outward sacrifice or ritual that pleased God, but rather true faith and trust in Him. Psalm 51, 16.17: "For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." It was not the sacrifice itself that pleased God, but the spirit and faith that moved the believers to worship God in this manner. Similar examples are given Jer. 7, 22.23; Ps. 50, 13.15; 40, 6; 4, 5; 116, 17. Our Confessions refer to the ex opere operato as a Jewish opinion which was commonly held among the self-righteous people who were more concerned about outward formalities than they were about the condition of their heart. Paul denies that Abraham was justified by circumcision, Rom. 4,9, but asserts that circumcision was a sign of his faith.⁹ So also Heb. 11, 4 teaches that Abel was justified by faith. His sacrifice pleased God, not because he merited by this work the remission of sins and grace, but

⁹. Our Confessions remind the Romanists that they are victims of this condemned Jewish opinion. Cf. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. XIII, p. 313, 18f.

because he exercised his faith and manifested it to others thus inviting them also to believe.

Just as the ex opere operato error gained ground among the Jews of the Old Testament, so the idea was prevalent also among the heathen religions referred to in the Old Testament. There were many sacrifices at the worship of Baal in Israel and at the pagan worship of the idols in the groves in Judah. So the idea of work-righteousness spread to religions of all kind the world over. "It is a part of the Brahmanic and Hindu belief that, e.g., the sacrifice operates automatically, and whatever is said or done by the officiant during the ceremony has inevitably its appropriate effect independent of the disposition or intention of the beneficiary (who is altogether passive) or even of the celebrant, whose chance word or act, even, is irrevocable." ¹⁰

It is not surprising then to learn that this Jewish opinion of the Old Testament had not disappeared, but was still common among the self-righteous Pharisees as well as among a number of other sects of the New Testament. There too we find a great many people who were not ready to confess Christ as the complete propitiation for their sins, but were rather looking to their own deeds and works as merits worthy of God's attention. They felt that obedience meant reward. Jesus told His disciples, Luke 17, 10:

10. Samuel Macauley Jackson, The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. VIII, p. 247.

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants." Similarly, Christ often rebuked the Pharisees who thought that they were cleansed by all manner of washings, cleansings, and ceremonies. Christ bids them rather to be cleansed inwardly, which occurs only through faith, and then they might give attention to outward cleanness. This outward cleanness must deal with the works commanded by God, and not with the human traditions that had gained a foothold among the Pharisees.¹¹ Paul teaches the Judaizing Christians the futility of outward performances without faith when he writes, Gal. 5, 6: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

The teaching of Christ and His apostles in the New Testament did not put an end to the ex opere operato practices of many of the Jews. The situation in the early Christian Church is quite similar. We had those defenders of the faith who came out very forcefully for the sola fide. Ambrose said: "This is ordained of God, that he who believes in Christ shall be saved without works, by faith alone, freely receiving the remission of sins."¹² Augustine also placed the proper emphasis on faith, so that he too real-

11. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. III, p. 201, 161.

12. As quoted in M. Loy, op. cit., p. 556.

ized that the outward rite and performance had no merit whatever. The theologians of the early Church who were prominent in developing the sacramental system and the corresponding ex opere operato theory as we know it today were Hugo of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, and Thomas Aquinas. The Franciscan Duns Scotus modified some parts of the doctrine, but his teachings were set aside by the Council of Ferrara in 1439. They all started with the definition of Augustine that a Sacrament is a visible symbol of an invisible grace. "They went beyond him in the degree of efficiency they ascribed to it. They assert that the sacraments 'contain and confer grace' and that they have a virtue inherent in themselves. The favorite figure used to describe their operation is medicine, so that Hugo of St. Victor could term God the physician, man the invalid, the priest the minister, grace the antidote, and the Sacrament the vessel. The physician gives, the minister dispenses, and the vessel contains the spiritual medicine which cures the soul." ¹³ Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas taught that the Sacraments are more than mere channels of grace. They held the sacraments to be the efficient causes of grace in the recipient so that they confer grace ex opere operato by a merit in themselves.

At the time of the Reformation, the theologians had all but forgotten about the sola fide. The Scripture teach-

¹³. Samuel Macauley Jackson, op. cit., Vol. X, p. 142.

ing was still there, but the papistic error had completely deceived the people. It had gained weight with the years so that the long custom of thinking of the ex opere operato merit was seldom questioned. The theory was that the Church could determine upon whom they would bestow the graces of the Sacraments. In this way they obtained submission to papal decrees. The work done by the priest was considered all-sufficient, without any regard for the unbelief of the person to whom the Sacrament was administered. Going to church was considered meritorious so that they felt safe if they could do what the Church prescribed and could obtain the sacraments.¹⁴ Because this erroneous teaching had so altogether taken hold of the people, it seemed like a new doctrine when Luther resurrected the sola fide. Luther again taught Rom. 3, 28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." The Lutherans at Augsburg pressed the article of justification by faith alone because Scripture demanded it. There could be no other reason for departing from the long-maintained error.

In Christendom today we still find the two opposing doctrines of faith and work-righteousness. On the one hand, Roman Catholics still hold the ex opere operato theory and all its accompanying errors as firmly as they did at the time

14. M. Loy, op. cit., p. 761 f.

of the Reformation. On the other hand the Lutherans have steadfastly held to the teaching of the sola fide as they know it from Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The writers of the Confessions of our Church recognized the danger of permitting the ex opere operato error to continue to exist. In no uncertain terms therefore our Confessions condemn the papistic teaching. They offer Scripture proof for their stand that the sacraments are beneficial to man sola fide. In our consideration of the sola fide vs. ex opere operato on the basis of the confessions, we shall deal primarily with the Augsburg Confession. The corresponding articles of the Apology will likewise be discussed. The other confessional writings will be frequently referred to.

II. Sola Fide vs. Ex Opere Operato as Seen in Some of the
Chief Articles of Faith of the
Augsburg Confession

Article IV: Of Justification

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.

Men are justified before God only when they approach Him clothed in the merits of His beloved Son. If we seek justification through ceremonies ex opere operato, we are looking for a redeemer other than Christ. For if we do not place our trust in Him alone, Christ is of no benefit to us. Gal. 5, 4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law." Those who hold that they are righteous by their own observance of the Law have no need for a Savior. But Paul contends throughout all his epistles that justification is sola gratia, sola fide. St. Paul tells us Eph. 2, 8.9: "By grace are ye

saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works." We are justified not because of our love for God, although it is necessary that this should follow.¹

In speaking of justification, we must keep in mind that the Romanists often refer to it as "sanctifying grace". We are not surprised to find in Catholic literature passages which attribute all grace and all the blessings of justification to God alone. Isolated selections taken from their writings are so beautifully written that the apostle Paul or Martin Luther could well subscribe to them. Brief portions seem to teach the sola gratia and the sola fide.² Such beautiful selections from Catholic literature concerning justification are impaired though by the ex opere operato error which always appears. It is usually in the same book, and sometimes already in the succeeding paragraph.³ After speaking of the gratuitous character of grace, they speak of a negative preparation. This consists in the removal of obstacles which are an impediment to grace. The Romanists then point out that God is more inclined to shower His grace upon those who have prepared themselves negatively. In that manner they mar the Scriptural and Lutheran sola fide in justification. A historical faith is necessary also

1. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. III, p. 163, 29 f. See also Article XV, p. 317, 6 f.

2. Joseph Jacobs, The Sacramentary Teachings of the Church, p. 20.28f. Also, Charles G. Herbermann et al., The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VI, p. 698.

in the Catholic doctrine of justification, but it is only one of a number of steps. Faith alone cannot justify man according to their view.⁴

Often in the New Testament Jesus pronounced the forgiveness of sins upon men who had previously fallen from God's grace. This indicates that justification is not something which we can earn. We can contribute nothing through certain outward rites and ceremonies. These examples and the numerous direct passages of Paul which we have already quoted left no choice for the reformers. They must teach, because Scripture compels them to do so, that we are justified sola gratia and sola fide.

Article VI: Of New Obedience

Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants. Luke 17, 10. The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone.

The Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church are agreed on the necessity of a renewed Christian life. Both realize how important it is that the Christian not only pro-

3. Ibid.

4. Charles G. Herbermann et al., op. cit., Vol. VIII, p. 576 f.

fess his faith in his creed, but also in his life. The difference between the Lutherans and the Catholics consists rather in this that the Lutherans place this new obedience only after justification has been completed, whereas the Catholics make it a part of justification. For the Lutheran also his new obedience is sola fide. That is, he is able to lead a renewed Christian life only because of and only as a result of his faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," Heb. 11,6. The Lutheran knows that his new obedience is not meritorious. Even after regeneration, we are saved without works, without the deeds of the law, by grace alone through faith. So also across this article of the Augsburg Confession, our founding fathers have stamped the sola fide. Faith alone saves; faith alone leads us to new obedience.

Article IX: Of Baptism

Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who, being offered to God through Baptism, are received into God's grace.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.

When we come to these articles which deal with the sacraments, we find the real clash between Lutheran sola fide and Roman Catholic ex opere operato. Many who are misinformed believe that the Lutheran Church, since it insists

upon infant baptism, does not insist upon the necessity of faith for the reception of the benefits of this sacrament. Nothing could be farther from the truth. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." This passage led Luther to teach in his large catechism that faith alone makes the person worthy to receive profitably the saving, divine water. "This single word (He that believeth) effects this much that it excludes and repels all works which we can do, in the opinion that we obtain and merit salvation by them. For it is determined that whatever is not faith avails nothing nor receives anything." ⁵ Luther calls the traditional opinion that children receive grace without faith a mere "dream". He also rejects the view that children are baptized upon the future faith which they will exercise when they attain to years of discretion. He says, "Faith must be present before, or at least in, baptism; otherwise, the child is not released from the devil and sin." ⁶

The Catholics officially reject the sola fide of baptism in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. "If any one saith, that the baptized are, by baptism itself, made debtors but to faith alone, and not to the observance of the whole law of Christ: let him be anathema." ⁷ They hold that in baptism the right to sanctifying grace is given.

5. Concordia Triglotta, Large Catechism, p. 739, 32 ff.

6. As quoted in Julius Köstlin, tr. by Charles E. Hay, The Theology of Luther, Vol. II, p. 48 f.

This right to grace which is the freedom from original sin is the mark that is imprinted in baptism.

The Catholics point to the practice of infant baptism as an argument for the efficacy of the sacraments ex opere operato. We have never denied that the early church practiced infant baptism. But to use this fact as an argument favoring the ex opere operato theory is to preclude the possibility that little children can believe. This would be directly contrary to Scripture which teaches that little children do believe, Matthew 18, 6; Mark 9, 42. Luther opposed the view of the Romanists. He held that little children require faith in order to gain the benefits of the sacrament. This faith is wrought in the hearts of the little children by the Holy Spirit. God works this faith by means of the divine Word that is in and with baptism. The prayers of the believers in the congregation presenting the child for baptism aids in moving the Holy Spirit to work this faith in the child. Certainly it is no greater miracle to work saving faith in the heart of a child than it is to convert the sinful heart of a wicked and unjust man.⁸

Again we can be thankful for the fortunate inconsistency of the Roman teaching. From an official publication of the Catholic Church we quote, "An adult person must be

7. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 123. 7th Sess., Canon VII.

8. Julius Köstlin, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 399 f.

duly prepared for the reception of this sacrament, and must repent of his actual sins. If he has no sorrow for the sins actually committed, he receives Baptism unworthily and his sins will not be forgiven him." ⁹ Man can have no sorrow for his sins unless he first has faith. So here they seem to admit the necessity of faith. However, in view of their corresponding teachings good Catholics may well consider the sorrow for their sins to be a good work. Even here, though the language at first sounds good, and may, we pray, be correctly interpreted by some, yet many will continue to regard the work as the important thing. Thus the sola fide is still lost sight of.

"The Gospel merely says: 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved', while the Law issues the order: 'Do this, and thou shalt live'. Now, if the mere act of being baptized and partaking of Holy Communion brings grace to a person, the Gospel manifestly has been turned into a law, because salvation then rests on a person's works. Moreover, the Law has been turned into a gospel, because salvation is promised a person as a reward for his works." ¹⁰ A strong proof in favor of Luther's teaching that faith alone is necessary to receive the benefits of the Sacrament is given Acts 8, 36.37: "And as they went on their way, they came

9. A. Urban, Teacher's Handbook to the Catechism, (Vol. III -- The Means of Grace), p. 28.

10. C.F.W. Walther, tr. by W.H.T. Dau, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, p. 351.

unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The only thing that Philip required was faith. At our baptism it is not we that are performing a work but God.¹¹

Article X: Of the Lord's Supper

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise.

Under this article we shall treat only of the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. We shall have occasion to discuss at length the Catholic teaching concerning this Sacrament in future articles of the Augsburg Confession. Luther makes it very clear to the laymen that the sola fide in the Lord's Supper is essential for the reception of the benefits which Jesus has offered to us in this Sacrament. In that work which he especially prepared for the laymen, his Small Catechism, Luther teaches, "Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily? Answer. Fasting and bodily preparation is indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sin.

11. Ibid., p. 352.

But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unfit; for the words For you require altogether believing hearts." ¹² The chief stress of the Sacrament is laid upon the Word which can be accepted alone through faith. From John 6 we learn that without the Sacrament we can spiritually eat and drink at any hour by nourishing faith upon the words of Christ. Luther sees the importance of faith in the sacrament. He is therefore quick to reject the idea that the Lord's Supper can be presented as a satisfaction for others, either living or dead. The benefits can be gained by none save the believer, and to him only by virtue of his faith.¹³

Faith is necessary in order to receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper. By approaching the sacrament our faith is strengthened within us. Luther therefore urged frequent attendance at the Lord's Table so that we might constantly exercise and strengthen our faith. Our faith is not necessary in the Sacrament in order to secure Christ's presence in the Sacrament. His Body and Blood are truly present. Faith is necessary for the one reason; it is to serve as the hand that secures the benefits offered to us in the Sacrament.

Luther utterly rejected the ex opere operato theory

12. Concordia Triglotta, Small Catechism, p. 557, 10.

13. For a fuller development of Luther's teaching concerning this, see Julius Köstlin, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 393.

when he held that the Sacrament works only injury if it is merely an opus operatum. It must be the work of one who works (opus operantis), i.e., it must be employed in faith. Our Sacrament must be pleasing to God on account of our faith and use of it.¹⁴ This attitude and teaching of Luther did not originate with him. He based his teaching upon Scripture, I Cor. 11, 27-29: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." This teaching of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions has been faithfully upheld by the Lutherans of America. From the pen of C.F.W. Walther we have the words: "If you imagine that by going to Communion you have once more done your duty and that God will regard your performance, your going to Communion is a damnable act, that will land you in eternal perdition."¹⁵ Only our faith can make us a worthy communicant. In the Epitome of the Formula of Concord we confess: "We believe, teach, and confess that all the worthiness of the guests of this heavenly feast is and consists in the most holy

14. Ibid., p. 342.

15. Op. cit., p. 353.

obedience and perfect merit of Christ alone, which we appropriate to ourselves by true faith." 16 Whenever we think of the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper, we think of the Sola Fide as opposed to Roman Catholic ex opere operato.

Article XI: Of Confession

Of Confession they teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: Who can understand his errors? Ps. 19, 12.

The Lutheran Church is fully aware of the great value of a confession of sins. For that reason, though they saw error and abuse in the confessions of the adherents to the Catholic faith, they never advocated the abolition of the custom. They advocated only the abolition of its abuses. In the Catholic Church oral confession is made a part of repentance. We shall have occasion to treat of it in that light under the next article. Here we wish only to point out that the Catholic laity gain the wrong impression. They think that by the confession of their sins, they are performing a good work which will merit God's grace and move Him to grant repentance. Thus the ex opere operato idea has crept in also here. For a Lutheran, confession is an opportunity to unburden his soul, and receive personal absolution and forgiveness which he must accept through

16. Concordia Triglotta, Art. VII, p. 813, 20.

faith. He knows that it is alone through faith in his Savior that he can gain the forgiveness of those sins which he has confessed. For a Catholic, confession is an obligatory work which he must perform. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent state: "Sacramental confession, when a confessor may be had, is of necessity to be made beforehand, by those whose conscience is burthened with mortal sin, how contrite soever they may think themselves. But if anyone shall presume^{to} teach, preach, or obstinately to assert, or even in public disputation to defend the contrary, he shall be thereupon excommunicated." 17

In this article of confession we again have the Lutheran Sola Fide opposed to the Roman Catholic ex opere operato.

Article XII: Of Repentance

Of Repentance they teach that for those who have fallen after Baptism there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance. Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that, for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin.

17. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, 13th Sess., Canon XI, p. 138 f.

The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance.

They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins comes through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

As the Reformers dealt with this article of repentance, they had to keep in mind that in Roman Catholic theology repentance consists of three parts: 1) contrition of heart; 2) oral confession; 3) satisfaction through good works. Of these, 2 and 3 are most important. Oral confession appears as an act in which man humiliates himself. He thus does something toward meriting grace. The further satisfactions continue and complete this work of meriting the remission of sins. Thus Rome once more places the emphasis on the outward act which is performed. Again the importance of faith is slighted.¹⁸ In treating of their first step in repentance, the Catholics distinguish between contrition and attrition. Perfect contrition (contritio) is a true supernatural sorrow from a motive of perfect charity, and it justified a person independently of the sacraments. Imperfect contrition (attritio) is a true supernatural sorrow from a motive of incipient charity or fear. Even this attrition, or imperfect contrition, makes a man worthy to receive the sacrament of penance ex opere operato.¹⁹ A further distinction between attrition and contrition is made by

18. J.L. Neve, Introduction to Lutheran Symbolics, p. 222 f.

19. Joseph Pohle, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 202.

some Catholic writers. "An act of attrition, without the priest's absolution, does not remit sin. But an act of charity or perfect contrition, with at least the implicit intention of going to confession, takes away sin immediately, though the obligation of confessing it still remains." 20 This distinction is worthy of our attention because it seems to have a place for faith in contrition whereas faith is lacking in attrition. However, we remember the previous references which taught that attrition also makes one worthy to participate in the sacrament which works ex opere operato. We are right back in the established Roman error.

To the second step of repentance, oral confession, the Catholics attach a great deal of importance. If a confessor is available, it dare not be omitted. Contrition grants forgiveness, but only when one carries through his intention to make a confession of sins to the priest. Here we see the ex opere operato error loom up with all its dangers. The sinner is led to think that he is pleasing God and meriting His favor by confessing his sins. Importance then is detracted from the faith which is necessary. The little performance of appearing before the priest on bended knee becomes the one thing needful. This is only the beginning of their work-righteousness theory in regard to repentance. It is carried through and perhaps becomes even more danger-

20. Francis Cassilly, Religion Doctrine and Practice, p. 232.

ous when they further teach that the third step in repentance is satisfaction through good works.

The Lutheran Church does not deny that good works must necessarily follow repentance, but they teach that these works are the fruits of faith. These works are not a part of repentance which merit before God. Augustine said that true satisfaction is to cut off the causes of sin, i.e., to mortify the flesh, and restrain the flesh. The purpose is not to compensate for eternal punishments, but to prevent the flesh from alluring to sin.²¹ The Roman Church officially rejects this view of Augustine and teaches rather that the satisfactions are a part of repentance which merit forgiveness. This can be seen from the pronouncements of the Council of Trent. They have decreed: "If any one saith, that God always remits the whole punishment together with the guilt, and that the satisfactions of penitents is no other than the faith whereby they apprehend that Christ has satisfied for them: let him be anathema." And again: "If any one saith, that the satisfactions, by which penitents redeem their sins through Jesus Christ, are not a worship of God, but traditions of men, which obscure the doctrine of grace, and the true worship of God, and the benefit itself of the death of Christ: let him be anathema."²² Their

21. Referred to in Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. VI, p. 305, 71.

22. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, 14th Sess., Canon XII. and XIV, p. 168 f.

anathemas are directed against the Lutherans who uphold the Scriptural sola fide.

The Lutherans teach that repentance is composed of but two parts: 1) contrition and 2) faith. Luther rejects the idea of the Romanists that mere attrition can be sufficient for repentance. He clings to the central doctrine of the Reformation, the sola fide. Only faith can receive the salvation from the keys. Luther recognizes nothing as true faith which does not already imply and itself produce actual contrition. In harmony with this idea Luther held that an enumeration of sins in the confessional would not be advisable. He feared that a person's penitence might merely be feigned from fear of punishment. Penitence should rather be awakened by the contemplation of the mercies of God, especially the wounds of Christ. Luther intimately associates penitence with faith.²³ The Apology in Article XII points out that the difference between the contrition of Judas and Peter is simply that Peter had faith and Judas did not have. Nothing less than faith can meet the divine requirement. Unless a man has faith he cannot receive anything from the salvation objectively offered. The Catholics too sometimes speak of faith as though it must precede repentance. But they understand by faith, not that which justifies, but that which in a general way believes that God exists, and that

23. Julius Köstlin, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 264.

punishments have been threatened to the wicked. In addition to this faith, the Lutheran Church requires a special faith by which each one must believe that his sins are remitted to him. It is this special faith which we propose in opposition to the opinion which bids us trust in the opus operatum of contrition, confession, and satisfactions. It is sola fide that we can gain the justification and regeneration that is offered in repentance.²⁴

The Catholics refer to the words of absolution as the cause of forgiveness.²⁵ This statement must be interpreted in the light of their teaching of the ex opere operato. Understood in the light of the sola fide, the Lutherans could also subscribe to that statement. For it is the Gospel message in and with the words of institution that strengthens that faith in our heart so that we are able to receive the benefits of forgiveness. Absolution is not received except by faith. Absolution is the promise of the remission of sins; therefore it necessarily requires faith. The words of absolution benefit sola fide.

In connection with this article treating of repentance, we might also briefly consider that abominable false teaching of the Roman Catholics concerning indulgences. This devilish practice and teaching perhaps more than anything

24. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Article XII, p. 267, 60.

25. Joseph Jacobs, op. cit., p. 184.

else prompted Luther to begin the work of the Reformation in earnest. It was against this practice that Luther drew up his ninety-five theses. This made it obvious to all people that he was no longer in agreement with the dogma and practice of the Romanists. The tenor of the whole Reformation work can be gathered from the very first of the ninety-five theses, in which Luther says: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance." This statement was provoked when Luther learned that the laymen felt no need for forgiveness because they had purchased an indulgence. This violated Luther's principle of the sola fide.

The Catholics give us the following definition: "An indulgence is simply a remission in whole or part, through the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ and His saints, of the temporal punishment due to God on account of sin after the guilt and eternal punishment have been remitted. It should be borne in mind that, even after our guilt is removed, there often remains some temporal punishment to be undergone, either in this life or the next, as an expiation to Divine sanctity and justice." 26 We note that the absolution is pronounced on the supposition that we are reconciled and accounted righteous not only by the mer-

26. James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of our Fathers, p. 375.

its of Christ, but also by the merits of the saints. The Romanists distinguish between a plenary indulgence and a partial indulgence. "For gaining a plenary indulgence the guilt of every sin, mortal or venial, ever committed must be forgiven. Of course a partial indulgence can be gained, though one be in the state of venial sin; for it would be possible that a person had other sins whose guilt had been forgiven, but of which there yet remained something of the temporal evil, and the partial indulgence would be applied to it. ... For plenary indulgences are generally attached as a condition the reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, with certain prayers for the intention of the Holy Father. [That the entire indulgence teaching is a man-made doctrine for which there is no scriptural authority can be seen from the next sentence.] Of course the Church can change any of these conditions when she chooses; new ones can be added or old ones partially or totally removed. All this is included in the power given the ruling authority to bind and loose." ²⁷ In no other doctrine does the ex opere operato teaching rise up so forcefully with all its dangers and implications. Their rejection of the sola fide and acceptance of work-righteousness leads from one error to another.

Contrary to the teaching of Scripture that all men are

27. Joseph Jacobs, op. cit., p. 217.

lost in sins so that without the help of God they could never hope to attain salvation, the Romanists teach that there are those who have committed very few and very insignificant sins. Their sins are so small that a single repetition of the Lord's Prayer might compensate for a day's offenses. As examples of those who sin very little they point to the Virgin Mary for whom they claim complete holiness; they point to the apostles and to the many holy men in the priesthood who dedicate their lives to the work of the Gospel. These people who sin very little are the very ones who perform an abundance of good works. From this they formulate the satanic dogma of the Treasury of the Church. These works of supererogation performed by the saints flow into the Treasury of the Church, and are then applied to the individual sinners when they seek an indulgence.²⁸ What else can we call this than an acceptance of false christs and false saviors? For they do not depend fully and completely upon the atonement won for us on the cross of Calvary. They look also to the merits of mortal and sinful men. Following this theory through they teach that the merits from the Treasury of the Church can be applied to the individual through certain rites and ceremonies ex opere operato. "For each recitation of the Lord's Prayer there is received three hundred days (indulgence), and for each

28. Ibid., p. 211 ff.

recitation of the Hail Mary there is received one hundred days' indulgence." 29 Some prayers grant to the person an indulgence to take effect at some future date ex opere operato.³⁰ They even go so far as to grant indulgences for souls in purgatory, as though the mere outward rite connected therewith will ex opere operato be a benefit for one who has passed from this life. They also attach an indulgence to certain objects, e.g., a rosary or crucifix. There are certain indulgenced prayers and ejaculations.

It is no surprise to us that Luther and the Lutherans arose in open rebellion to such perverse teachings. Luther had to come to the rescue of the sola fide. Faith alone can grant freedom from sin. And when our sins have been forgiven, all the guilt and punishment has been taken away by the Son of God who died on Calvary. No one can be aided by his works; no one can be aided by the works of other mortal men. The two parts of repentance are contrition and faith. We must live and die for the sola fide as opposed to the ex opere operato.

Article XIII: Of the Use of the Sacraments

Of the Use of the Sacraments they teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted

29. Ibid., p. 216.

30. Francis Cassilly, Religion Doctrine and Practice, p. 261.

to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments.

They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and who do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required.

In his writings Luther often refers to the Augustinian maxim: "Not the Sacrament, but the faith of the Sacrament justifies." Luther insisted as much as Augustine on the teaching that predominates in the writings of St. Paul, namely, that we are justified by faith alone. Since "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Luther felt that the reception of Christ in the Sacrament would be in vain if He were not at the same time distributed and applied through the Word. That was the danger he saw in the Catholic masses where the preaching of the Word was relegated to the gackground. He feared that the Sacrament then degenerates into vain and barren formality and falls into contempt.³¹ The Sacraments should be used only together with the Word, for they benefit only by means of faith. This faith is wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Unbelief frustrates the salutary effect of the Sacraments. Mark 16, 16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Acts 8, 36: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a

31. Julius K stlin, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 195.

certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Not the outward rite, but faith which accompanies this rite is what secures the benefits of the Sacraments for the individual.

The Romanists fail to place the proper emphasis on the sola fide. They come again with their ex opere operato teaching concerning the use of the sacraments. The Council of Trent has decreed: "If anyone saith that the Sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or, that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto; as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from the unbelievers: let him be anathema. If any one saith, that grace, as far as God's part is concerned, is not given through the said sacraments, always, and to all men, even though they receive them rightly, but (only) sometimes, and to some persons: let him be anathema." ³² The Romanists maintain that the Sacraments contain grace not in the same sense that a subject contains an accident, a place contains a thing, or a vessel contains a liquid, but they contain

32. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, 7th Sess., Canon VI and VII, p. 120 f.

grace by way of cause and instrumentally. Steyaert says that they are not only signs of grace, like those of the old Law, but also instrumental causes, from which it is proper to derive it.³³ The stumbling block for these Catholic theologians is the sola fide. They cling to their reason and rationalize that they must do something to win God's favor. They fail to understand that we are unable to do anything to merit God's gift. They make justification a reward rather than a gift. They are ready to admit that if the Lutheran teaching of justification is the correct teaching (as we know it to be from Holy Scripture), then there can be no place for the ex opere operato theory concerning the use of the Sacraments. From one of their standard works in the field of dogmatics we quote: "The sacramental system of the Reformers flowed quite logically from their false idea of justification. If justification really consisted in a merely extrinsic application of the merits of Jesus Christ, which cover the sinner and hide his wickedness from the sight of God, and if faith were the only thing whereby man is justified it would be perfectly proper to regard the Sacraments in the sense of Luther as a kind of acted sermons calculated to sustain faith. Quite consistently, therefore, did the Augsburg Confession 'condemn those who hold that the Sacraments work justification ex opere

33. Joseph F. Berg, A Synopsis of the Moral Theology of Peter Dens, p. 362 f.

operato." 34

The validity of the Sacraments is not dependent upon the personal or official character of the minister. Their validity rests on their divine institution. They have their efficacy in themselves. The minister's unbelief could not invalidate the promise of forgiveness made by God. Luther wrote: "Our faith and Sacrament must not rest on the person, be he godly or wicked, ordained or unordained, called or sneaking in, the devil or his mother, but on Christ, His Word, His office, His command and ordinance." The Catholics teach that only the ordained priest can forgive sins and "effect" the sacraments, and that his "intention" is essential in this matter.³⁵ The Council of Trent went on record also for this teaching. "If any one saith, that, in ministers, when they effect, and confer the sacraments, there is not required the intention at least of doing what the Church does: let him be anathema."³⁶ Again we see why it was so important that the fathers restore the sola fide which had been crowded out by the Romanists.

The controversy between the sola fide and the ex opere operato would perhaps not have been raised if our adversaries had kept in mind that the Sacraments are the visible Word. The false teachers agree with us that preaching, un-

34. Joseph Pohle, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 122 f.

35. Th. Engelder et al., Popular Symbolics, p. 105.

36. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, 7th Sess., Canon XI, p. 121.

less it is received by faith, does not benefit the hearers. It rather increases their responsibility. Concerning the use of the Sacraments, however, they teach that God operates with His grace whenever men merely use them. The Sacraments are nothing more than the Word of God attached to a symbol. The Word of God does not benefit a person who does not believe; so also an unbeliever is not benefited by going through the action of being baptized. The Sacraments, like the Word, benefit only those who embrace them by faith. They benefit sola fide.³⁷

Article XX: Of Good Works

Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God. Concerning these things preachers heretofore taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as particular holy-days, particular fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such like. Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things, they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as heretofore. Besides, they begin to mention faith, of which there was heretofore marvelous silence. They teach that we are justified not by works only, but they conjoin faith and works, and say that we are justified by faith and works. This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church,

37. C.F.W. Walther, op. cit., p. 347.

has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches, our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows: ---

First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith, when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation, 1 Tim. 2, 5, in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him. Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ has said of Himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. John 14, 6. This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul, Eph. 2, 8: By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, etc.

And lest any one should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. And Ambrose, in his De Vocatione Gentium, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his De Vocatione Gentium he says as follows: Redemption by the blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to the laborer.

But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God. As Paul teaches Rom. 5, 1: Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience; neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.

Heretofore consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works; they did not hear the consolation from the Gospel. Some persons were driven by conscience into the desert, into monasteries, hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. Some also devised other works whereby to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. Hence there was very great need to treat of, and renew, this doctrine of faith in Christ, to the end that anxious consciences should not be without consolation, but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ.

Men are also admonished that here the term "faith" does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history -- namely, this article: and forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Now he that knows that he has a Father gracious to him through Christ, truly knows God; he knows also that God cares for him, and calls upon God; in a word, he is not without God, as the heathen. For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this article: the forgiveness of sins. Hence, they hate God as an enemy, call not upon Him, and expect no good from Him. Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word "faith", and teaches that the term "faith" is accepted in the Scriptures, not for knowledge such as is in the ungodly, but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified mind.

Furthermore, it is taught on our part that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God. It is only by faith that forgiveness of sins is apprehended, and that, for nothing. And because through faith the Holy Ghost is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works. For Ambrose says: Faith is the mother of a good will and right doing. For man's powers without the Holy Ghost are full of ungodly affections, and are too weak to do works which are good in God's sight. Besides, they are in the power of the devil, who impels men to diverse sins, to ungodly opinions, to open crimes. This we may see in the philosophers, who, although they endeavored to live an honest life, could not succeed, but were defiled with many open crimes. Such is the feebleness of man when he is

without faith and without the Holy Ghost, and governs himself only by human strength.

Hence it may be readily seen that this doctrine is not to be charged with prohibiting good works, but rather the more to be commended, because it shows how we are enabled to do good works. For without faith human nature can in no wise do the works of the First or of the Second Commandment. Without faith it does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross, but seeks, and trusts in, man's help. And thus, when there is no faith and trust in God, all manner of lusts and human devices rule in the heart. Wherefore Christ said, John 15, 5: Without Me ye can do nothing; and the Church sings:

Lacking Thy divine favor,
There is nothing found in man,
Naught in him is harmless.

In no way did the confessional fathers of the Lutheran Church attempt to minimize the importance of good works. They always held that good works are necessary in their proper place. They are necessary by reason of the divine command and by reason of the power in true faith to produce them. They are not necessary as a means of justification and salvation. Every Christian must show and live a life of repentance. But there is no merit in it. God accepts us as His children because of our faith, and not because of our life of good works. The Christian's faith in the atoning work of Christ must move him to repentance and to a life of new obedience.³⁸ The Apology in Article III deals at length with the promises that are added to the commands of the Law. It carefully points out that it

38. M. Loy, op. cit., p. 750.

is not this obedience to the command that merits such promises. These promises are rather the gracious gifts of God to His children. "Christ preaches repentance when He says: Forgive, and He adds the promise: And ye shall be forgiven, Luke 6, 37. Nor, indeed, does He say this, namely, that when we forgive, by this work of ours we merit the remission of sins ex opere operato, as they term it, but He requires a new life, which certainly is necessary. Yet, in the meantime, He means that remission of sins is received by faith." ³⁹ This article of the Apology points out that Christ often connected the promise of the remission of sins to good works. This was not because He taught that good works are a propitiation, for He rather taught that they follow reconciliation. If good fruits do not follow, the repentance is hypocritical and feigned. Good works are merely a sign which may admonish us to believe more firmly. But just as the Lord's Supper does not justify us ex opere operato, without faith, so alms do not justify us without faith, ex opere operato.⁴⁰

Our Lutheran Dogmaticians have always accepted the principle that good works are necessary in their proper place. They have, however, violently opposed the opinion of the Romanists that good works are necessary for salvation.

39. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Article III, p. 193, 138.

40. Ibid., p. 199, 153 ff.

To teach that good works are necessary for salvation is to teach that Christ is not our sole Mediator. He who trusts in his own works to merit grace despises the merit and grace of Christ. He seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength. If we imagine that we can merit the remission of our sins through our own deeds, we are casting contempt upon Christ. John 15, 5: "Without Me, ye can do nothing." 41

The Catholics too know the Scriptural teaching that Jesus made atonement for the sins of all men on the cross of Calvary. They too know that the Almighty God who created us is equally powerful to redeem us from eternal punishment. We are amazed then that they can still find a place for their teaching that good works are necessary for salvation. In one of their official treatises, they explain it as follows: "There is one evil in sin that is infinite, and that is the insult of God. It is the malice of sin. The absolution of the priest takes that away. For only the reparation of Christ can be a due compensation for the outrages thus given the majesty of God. And this reparation is obtained only through the sacrament of Penance. But the temporal injustice caused by the misuse of these faculties and of life does not concern the reparation of Christ. They form a debt that must be paid. This can be done only by

41. For a very simple and yet excellent treatment of this subject, see C.H. Little, Lutheran Confessional Theology, p. 105.

performing sufficient good works to fill in the void made by them. This is done in this way. Man has certain good works to perform in worshipping God; these are due Him and must be done. But the rest of the time of life is man's own. If he uses some of this time that is his own in doing good, he not only gets a reward for that good in so far as it is meritorious of eternal life, but likewise he is meriting a temporal reward. For he is using his life and faculties beyond what is necessary in doing good. This action has the same value in goodness that there is temporal injustice in any sinful act that be in evil. Yet it is more than is ordinarily due from him, so that it makes good for the temporal injustice in sinful acts. This is what is meant by good works." 42 This position of the Romanists is contrary to Scripture which repeatedly tells us that we must dedicate all our life to God, and that even the best that we do has no merit before God. Not our good works, but the sola fide is the one thing necessary for salvation.

For the Lutheran dogmaticians, the matter was settled by many clear Bible passages, such as Rom. 3, 28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." The Catholics place their own interpretation upon this passage, however, and contend that Paul here speaks only of the good works performed by men

42. Joseph Jacobs, op. cit., p. 209.

in their natural state. They contend that this does not speak of the good works performed by those who are in Christ Jesus. M. Loy answers this contention of the Catholics in a beautiful manner. "In reply to this it is sufficient to remind Christians that, when they are in Christ Jesus and thus justified by faith, they have no need of any other or any further justification before God, and that they would only be entrapped by the wiles of the devil if they yielded to the sophistries which are calculated to disturb their peace in the believing possession by faith of the only righteousness which avails before God. All works of man are excluded, that there may be no boasting of his ability or prowess or merit, but all the glory of our salvation may be given to the Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us." 43

When we once realize that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God", and when we once learn from Scripture that we can do nothing to work out our own righteousness, we shall at the same time see the futility of trying to merit grace ex opere operato by means of our own good works. We are sinful and can claim no merit. Even if we were free from sin, we would not yet have a claim on eternal life and temporal reward because of our deeds. For then we would only be performing those duties which God has assigned to us. We would be filling an obligation and not

43. op. cit., p. 484.

meriting a reward. Luke 17, 9-10: "Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." The Lord rewards faithful service, but not when we do it with the intention of earning a special favor from God. Our good works are the fruits of faith. They benefit us only if they are done sola fide. Thus we can appreciate why the early Lutherans were so diligent in writing and speaking against Roman Catholic ex opere operato.

III. Sola Fide vs. Ex Opere Operato as Seen in Some of the
Articles of the Augsburg Confession in which are
Reviewed the Abuses which Have Been Corrected

In general, we shall treat of these articles much more briefly than we did those in the preceding section, for we have spoken of these abuses in those related articles of the Confession which we have already considered. The only article of this section which will be dealt with at any length is Article XXIV which treats of the Mass. We treat that article at greater length, because in the previous section we considered primarily the true Sacrament as it is known in the Lutheran Church, and also because the Sola Fide vs. Ex Opere Operato controversy is so prominent in this abuse of Roman Catholicism.

Article XXII: Of Both Kinds in the Sacrament

To the laity are given Both Kinds in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because this usage has the commandment of the Lord in Matt. 26, 27: Drink ye all of it, where Christ has manifestly commanded concerning the cup that all should drink.

And lest any man should craftily say this refers only to priests, Paul in 1 Cor. 11, 27 recites an example from which it appears that the whole congregation did use both kinds. And this usage has

long remained in the Church, nor is it known when, or by whose authority, it was changed; although Cardinal Cusanus mentions the time when it was approved. Cyprian in some places testifies that the blood was given to the people. The same is testified by Jerome, who says: The priests administer the Eucharist, and distribute the blood of Christ to the people. Indeed, Pope Gelasius commands that the Sacrament be not divided (dist. II, De Consecratione, cap. Comperimus). Only custom, not so ancient, has it otherwise. But it is evident that any custom introduced against the commandments of God is not to be allowed, as the Canons witness (dist. III., cap. Veritate, and the following chapters). But this custom has been received, not only against the Scripture, but also against the old Canons and the example of the Church. Therefore, if any preferred to use both kinds of the Sacrament, they ought not to have been compelled with offense to their consciences to do otherwise. And because the division of the Sacrament does not agree with the ordinance of Christ, we are accustomed to omit the procession, which hitherto has been in use.

The Catholic practice of administering the Sacrament under but one kind is in harmony with other Catholic teachings. For the Catholics are not bound by the sola scriptura principle as was Luther. Not the Bible, but the Catholic Church is for them the supreme authority. The Church has the sole power of interpreting Scripture. They have the authority to make new laws which are just as binding as are the laws of God. The Church had authorized communion under one kind. She had furthermore taught that the Sacraments benefit the recipient ex opere operato. Quite naturally then, the Catholic laymen had not protested against their incomplete Sacrament. For Luther it was a different story. He was bound to the sola scriptura. It was there-

fore imperative for him to learn how the Sacrament had been instituted and practiced in the New Testament. From Scripture, which was Luther's guiding principle, he had learned the sola fide. He knew that the Lord's Supper could be a true Sacrament only if it was practiced as it had been instituted by the Lord Jesus Himself. He knew that it could be of benefit to the recipient only through his own personal faith.

The sola fide vs. ex opere operato controversy did not play a prominent role in this article. However, it is easy to see that the ex opere operato theory of the Romanists was one of the factors which must have caused the theologians to become careless in their teachings concerning the Sacraments. If the sola fide had never lost the central position which it deserves in the Sacrament, there would not have been the readiness to depart from the manner in which our Lord instituted His Last Supper on Maundy Thursday evening. Luther, who had learned the necessity of the sola fide for a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper from the Bible, had also learned from the Bible the true manner in which Jesus had instituted His Sacrament. Thus the Lutherans continue to give both kinds in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Article XXIV: Of the Mass

Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. For ceremonies are needed to this end alone that the unlearned be taught (what they need to know of Christ). And not only has Paul commanded to use in the church a language understood by the people, 1 Cor. 14, 2.9, but it has also been so ordained by man's law. The people are accustomed to partake of the Sacrament together, if any be fit for it, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public worship. For none are admitted except they be first examined. The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. (In this connection they are also instructed regarding other and false teachings on the Sacrament.) This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries than among us.

But it is evident that for a long time this also has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men that Masses have been basely profaned and applied to purposes of lucre. For it is not unknown how far this abuse obtains in all the churches by what manner of men Masses are said only for fees or stipends, and how many celebrate them contrary to the Canons. But Paul severely threatens those who deal unworthily with the Eucharist when he says, 1 Cor. 11, 27: Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. When, therefore, our priests were admonished concerning this sin, Private Masses were discontinued among us, as scarcely any Private Masses were celebrated except for lucre's sake.

Neither were the bishops ignorant of these abuses, and if they had corrected them in time, there would now be less dissension. Heretofore, by their own connivance, they suffered many corruptions to creep into the Church. Now, when it is too late, they begin to complain of the troubles of the Church, while this disturbance has been occasioned simply by those

abuses which were so manifest that they could be borne no longer. There have been great dissensions concerning the Mass, concerning the Sacrament. Perhaps the world is being punished for such long-continued profanations of the Mass as have been tolerated in the churches for so many centuries by the very men who were both able and in duty bound to correct them. For in the Ten Commandments it is written, Ex. 20, 7: The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. But since the world began, nothing that God ever ordained seems to have been so abused for filthy lucre as the Mass.

There was also added the opinion which infinitely increased Private Masses, namely, that Christ, by His passion, had made satisfaction for original sin, and instituted the Mass where in an offering should be made for daily sins, venial and mortal. From this has arisen the common opinion that the Mass takes away the sins of the living and the dead by the outward act. Then they began to dispute whether one Mass said for many were worth as much as special Masses for individuals, and this brought forth that infinite multitude of Masses. (With this work men wished to obtain from God all that they needed, and in the mean time faith in Christ and the true worship were forgotten.)

Concerning these opinions our teachers have given warning that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For Christ's passion was an oblation and satisfaction, not for original guilt only, but also for all other sins, as it is written to the Hebrews, 10, 10: We are sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ, once for all. Also, 10, 14: By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (It is unheard-of innovations in the Church to teach that Christ by His death made satisfaction only for original sin and not likewise for all other sin. Accordingly, it is hoped that everybody will understand that this error has not been reprov'd without due reason.)

Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Now if the Mass take away the sins of the living and the dead by the outward act, justification comes of the work of Masses, and not of faith, which Scripture does not allow.

But Christ commands us, Luke 22, 19: This do in remembrance of Me; therefore the Mass was instituted that the faith of those who use the Sacrament should remember what benefits it receives through Christ,

and cheer and comfort the anxious conscience. For to remember Christ is to remember His benefits, and to realize that they are truly offered unto us. Nor is it enough only to remember the history; for this also the Jews and the ungodly can remember. Wherefore the Mass is to be used to this end, that there the Sacrament (Communion) may be administered to them that have need of consolation; as Ambrose says: Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine. (Therefore this Sacrament requires faith, and is used in vain without faith.)

Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holy-day, and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass (the Communion) they speak very much. Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to the Communion and keeping back others. And it appears from the ancient Canons that some one celebrated the Mass from whom all the other presbyters and deacons received the body of the Lord; for thus the words of the Nicene Canon say: Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the presbyters, from the bishop, or from a presbyter. And Paul, 1 Cor, II, 33, commands concerning the Communion: Tarry one for another, so that there may be a common participation.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the Mass with us has the example of the Church, taken from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since public ceremonies, for the most part like those hitherto in use, are retained; only the number of Masses differs, which, because of very great and manifest abuses, doubtless might be profitably reduced. For in olden times, even in churches most frequented, the Mass was not celebrated every day, as the Tripartite History (Book 9, chap. 33) testifies; Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done, except the solemn rite of Communion.

The Council of Trent declared that faith alone was not sufficient for the reception of the Eucharist, and that any one who would teach that faith alone were sufficient is ana-

thema. But even the Romanists speak of the necessity of faith for the proper preparation for the Sacrament. But they do not understand by faith what the Lutherans understand by that term. We note their definition of faith from the following prayer which has been prescribed for Catholics before receiving the Eucharist: "O my God, I firmly believe all that Thou hast revealed, and that Thy Holy Catholic Church presents to us to be believed. But especially I believe that Thou art really present in this most holy Sacrament as God and man with flesh and blood, truly and substantially, because Thou, the infallible Truth, hast declared it." ¹ The Romanist is pledged to accept in faith all that his Church teaches him. He is not concerned whether or not it is taught in the Bible. As long as the Church teaches it, it must be accepted and obeyed. This opens the way for the acceptance of countless errors and false teachings. The Romanist's faith in the Eucharist is concerned with the real presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus. But, ^{it} should also be concerned with the full atonement made for our sins on Calvary. The Catholics ought to realize also that the gift of eternal salvation is offered us by free grace, and all that we need do is to accept it sola fide. Such a faith the Catholics do not demand, but rather teach that the Sacrament can work its benefit ex opere operato.

1. As prescribed in A. Urban, Teacher's Handbook to the Catechism (Vol. III -- The Means of Grace), p. 89.

The ex opere operato of the Catholic Mass comes to the fore in their use of the Latin language for the ceremony. The Sacrament which Jesus ordained for His people is to benefit the people even though it is conducted in a language entirely foreign to those who are to receive the benefits thereof. The Catholics justify their action, for they say that they are speaking not to the people, but to God, to whom all languages are equally intelligible. Much of the service is spoken or chanted in an undertone so that the people could not hear it even if it were in English. They point to the worship of the Old Testament where the priest offered sacrifice and prayed for the people in the sanctuary while they prayed at a distance in the court.² It hardly seems possible that a New Testament people who have the advantage of the Words and Sacraments of their Savior could yet revert to the Old Testament to seek their manner of worship. This surely is not pleasing to God who has revealed Himself to us in such a wonderful manner. The Romanists do not feel, however, that they are taking the Word and Sacraments from the lay-people. For they teach that those who are ignorant of Latin lose nothing of the sacramental effect, since the Sacraments produce their effects ex opere operato. They imagine that the mere work of

2. James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of our Fathers, p. 332 f.

hearing and seeing is a service, and that it profits without being understood. Luther's sola fide which he learned from the Bible had no place in the Mass as it was practiced among the Catholics. Our Confessions therefore strongly urged the sola fide in the Sacrament as opposed to Roman Catholic ex opere operato.³

In direct agreement with their ex opere operato belief, they teach that the Mass may be performed to benefit not only the believers, but also the unbelievers; not only the living, but also the dead! Such a teaching leaves no place for the sola fide at all. "For Catechumens and unbelievers, the mass may not only be offered indirectly but also directly, for the good of unbelievers themselves, whether temporal or spiritual. It is proper also to offer mass indirectly for baptized heretics, but whether it may be done directly is a controverted point; and the more probable opinion is, that baptized heretics are entirely excluded from all the direct benefits of the sacrifice of the mass. Mass can not and ought not to be offered for the lost, who are suffering in hell, because it can not help them, for in hell there is no redemption. The sacrifice of the mass is not offered to the Saints, as it is a worship of latria, which is due God alone. Nor is it offered for the saints, because as they enjoy the vision of God, there is no more guilt re-

3. See also Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Art. XXIV, p. 385, 2 f.

remaining for which they must atone. It is piously and usefully offered only for the souls in purgatory; and it is certain that the sacrifice of the Mass is infallibly of advantage to them for the remission of the punishments remaining from guilt, at least as to a part." ⁴ The Mass is thought of as being a work of satisfaction for sins committed. The works of a priest in performing the Mass are placed alongside of the atoning works of Jesus on the cross. This has led them to convey the benefit of this mass to unbelievers and even to the dead. Article XXIV of the Apology rejects their ex opere operato error. "Neither can the remission of Guilt be received in any other way than by faith. Therefore the Mass is not a satisfaction, but a promise and Sacrament that require faith." ⁵ The Catholics have not changed their stand. Soon after our fathers wrote the above works which reaffirmed their faith in the truth that the Sacrament is the visible Word which must be accepted by faith, the Romanists anathematized them. In an official sentence they restated their opinion that the Mass is also a satisfaction which can be applied to others ex opere operato. This decree of the Council of Trent still stands: "If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving; or, that

4. Joseph F. Berg, A. Synopsis of the Moral Theology of Peter Dens, p. 424.

5. Concordia Triglotta, p. 415, 90 f.

it is a bare commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice; or, that it profits him only who receives; and that it ~~ought~~ not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, pains, satisfactions, and other necessities; let him be anathema." 6 How grateful we must be to Luther for restoring the sola fide to its proper position!

When they apply the merits of the Mass to unbelievers and to the dead ex opere operato, they are attributing to it almighty power. We are not surprised then to hear that they place the Mass alongside of the atonement on Calvary. They teach that the sacrifice of the Mass is identical with that of the cross, both having the same victim and High Priest -- Jesus Christ. The difference consists in this, that on the cross Christ was offered up in a bloody manner, and in the Mass He is offered up in an unbloody manner. On the cross he purchased our ransom, and in the Eucharistic Sacrifice the price of that ransom is applied to our souls.⁷ Over against this, the Lutherans teach that there is but one sacrifice of Christ which must be accepted sola fide. The Bible knows of no sacrifices which could be applied ex opere operato on behalf of others.

Though the Catholics wish to make the Mass an ex opere

6. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. II, p. 184 f. 22nd Sess., Canon III.

7. James Cardinal Gibbons, op. cit., p. 311 f.

operato benefit, they come face to face with the Scripture passage, 1 Cor. 11, 27: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." In seeming contradiction to their ex opere operato theory, they teach that he who receives Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin is unworthy, and brings damnation upon himself. He commits the sin of sacrilege, and certain judgment awaits him.⁸ However, if it should happen that anyone would be in mortal sin without knowing it, and if he had attrition, he could go to communion without committing sacrilege. In fact, his mortal sin would be forgiven in the Sacrament. "Venial sins need not and should not keep us from Holy Communion; but the purer our conscience is the more graces we receive in Communion, and so it is well to make an act of contrition for all venial sins beforehand. If, however, we are so weak that we cannot bring ourselves to give us an affection for venial sin, let us approach the sacrament anyhow, trusting that its graces will enable us to become more perfect."⁹ In other words, one must be hopelessly in sin and manifestly impenitent of his sin before the Catholics would condemn him as an unworthy communicant. They do not consider unbelief to be a sin, however. As long as he does the works

8. A. Urban, op. cit., p. 84 f.

9. Francis Cassilly, op. cit., p. 205.

commanded by the Church, it would make little difference whether he had faith or not. For the Lutherans, it is the sola fide which alone can make a worthy communicant.

As a result of the Catholic opinion that the ceremonies justify ex opere operato, without faith, we find that very frequently the Mass is celebrated for others when no one except the priest is present. This is not considered by the Roman hierarchy to be an abuse of the Mass, but it meets the approval of the Church and is even encouraged. The Church officially took this stand at the Council of Trent. "The sacred and holy Synod would fain indeed that, at each mass, the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire, but also by the sacramental participation of the Eucharist, that thereby a more abundant fruit might be derived to them from this most holy sacrifice: but not therefore, if this be not always done, does it condemn, as private and unlawful, but approves of and therefore commends, those masses in which the priest alone communicates sacramentally; since those masses also ought to be considered as truly common; partly because the people communicate spiritually thereat; partly also because they are celebrated by a public minister of the Church, not for himself only, but for all the faithful, who belong to the body of Christ." 10 The Romanists have retained only the

10. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 181 f., 22nd Sess., Chap. VI.

ceremony of the Sacrament, and then they imagine that this work, as applied on behalf of others, merits for them grace and all good things. Instead of placing the proper emphasis upon the Word of God, they have rather set forth human satisfactions and human traditions. By these they affirm that men are justified before God. These traditions and ceremonies of Catholicism conflict with the righteousness of faith; as though, without faith, a ceremony can profit either the one performing it or others. Luther recognized the vanity of the ex opere operato as it was prevalent in the Mass, and he saw the necessity of revitalizing the Scriptural teaching of the sola fide.¹¹

Article XXV: Of Confession

Confession in the churches is not abolished among us; for it is not usual to give the body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning faith in the absolution, about which formerly there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by God's command. The power of the Keys is set forth in its beauty, and they are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; also, that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sin. Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ and the righteousness of faith no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by

11. For a more thorough treatment of the abuses of the ex opere operato in the Roman Catholic Mass, see especially Article XXIV of the Apology.

no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But Of Confession they teach that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies, 19, 13: Who can understand his errors? Also Jeremiah, 17, 9: The heart is deceitful; who can know it? But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see nor can remember. The ancient writers also testify that an enumeration is not necessary. For in the Decrees, Chrysostom is quoted, who says thus: I say not to you that you should disclose yourself in public, nor that you accuse yourself before others, but I would have you obey the prophet who says: "Disclose thy way before God." Therefore confess your sins before God, the true Judge with prayer. Tell your errors, not with the tongue, but with the memory of your conscience, etc. And the Gloss (Of Repentance, Distinct. V, Cap. Consideret) admits that Confession is of human right only (not commanded by Scripture, but ordained by the Church). Nevertheless, on account of the great benefit of absolution, and because it is otherwise useful to the conscience, Confession is retained among us.

Because of its intimate relation with previous articles, we have already considered the abuse of Roman Catholic confession under Article XI: Of Confession and also under Article XII: Of Repentance. The early fathers of our Church felt that the abuses of the Roman Catholic system were so serious and numerous that they devoted this additional article to the subject. The abuses are here dealt with at greater length. The Lutherans had no objection to confession. On the contrary, they cherished it as something of great value for the individual Christ-

ian. They hesitated to admit one to the Lord's Table who had not previously made confession of his sins. They did not take this attitude because they felt that there was any merit ex opere operato in confession. They urged confession though to lead the individual Christian to a true and sincere repentance, so that he may then receive the Sacrament sola fide. The Roman Catholics had previously urged confession to such an extent that the lay-people felt that this mere ceremony was the thing that offered them justification. The Lutherans, who continued this confession, did so only after instructing the people that it was not the act, but faith in the suffering and death of their Savior that brought them the remission of sins. The instructed people were quick to grasp this new idea. They were taught that an enumeration of sins was not necessary, for our sins are greater and more numerous than we can tell. When they properly understood the greatness of their sins, they at the same time recognized the need for the sola fide.

Article XXVII: Of Monastic Vows

What is taught on our part concerning Monastic Vows, will be better understood if it be remembered what has been the state of the monasteries, and how many things were daily done in those very monasteries, contrary to the Canons. In Augustine's time they were free associations. Afterward, when discipline was corrupted, vows were everywhere added for the purpose of restoring discipline, as in a carefully

planned prison.

Gradually, many other observances were added besides vows. And these fetters were laid upon many before the lawful age, contrary to the Canons.

Many also entered into this kind of life through ignorance, being unable to judge their own strength, though they were of sufficient age. Being thus ensnared, they were compelled to remain, even though some could have been freed by the kind provision of the Canons. And this was more the case in convents of women than of monks, although more consideration should have been shown the weaker sex. The rigor displeased many good men before this time, who saw that young men and maidens were thrown into convents for a living. They saw what unfortunate results came of this procedure, and what scandals were created, what snares were cast upon consciences! They were grieved that the authority of the Canons in so momentous a matter was utterly set aside and despised. To these evils was added such a persuasion concerning vows, as, it is well known, in former times displeased even those monks who were more considerate. They taught that vows were equal to Baptism; they taught that by this kind of life they merited forgiveness of sins and justification before God. Yea, they added that the monastic life not only merited righteousness before God, but even greater things, because it kept not only the precepts, but also the so-called "evangelical counsels."

Thus they made men believe that the profession of monasticism was far better than Baptism, and that the monastic life was more meritorious than that of magistrates, than the life of pastors, and such like, who serve their calling in accordance with God's commands, without any man-made services. None of these things can be denied; for they appear in their own books. (Moreover, a person who has been thus ensnared and has entered a monastery learns little of Christ.)

What, then, came to pass in the monasteries? Aforetime they were schools of theology and other branches, profitable to the Church; and thence pastors and bishops were obtained. Now it is another thing. It is needless to rehearse what is known to all. Aforetime they came together to learn; now they feign that it is a kind of life instituted to merit grace and righteousness; yea, they preach that it is a state of perfection, and they put it far above all other kinds of life ordained of God. These things we have rehearsed without odious exaggeration, to the end that the doctrine of our teachers on this

point might be better understood.

First, concerning such as contract matrimony, they teach on our part that it is lawful for all men who are not fitted for single life to contract matrimony, because vows cannot annul the ordinance and commandment of God. But the commandment of God is, 1 Cor. 7, 2: To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife. Nor is it the commandment only, but also the creation and ordinance of God, which forces those to marry who are not excepted by a singular work of God, according to the text Gen. 2, 18: It is not good that the man should be alone. Therefore they do not sin who obey this commandment and ordinance of God.

What objection can be raised to this? Let men extol the obligation of a vow as much as they list, yet shall they not bring to pass that the vow annuls the commandment of God. The Canons teach that the right of the superior is excepted in every vow; (that vows are not binding against the decision of the Pope;) much less, therefore, are these vows of force which are against the commandments of God.

Now, if the obligation of vows could not be changed for any cause whatever, the Roman Pontiffs could never have given dispensation; for it is not lawful for man to annul an obligation which is simply divine. But the Roman Pontiffs have prudently judged that leniency is to be observed in this obligation, and therefore we read that many times they have dispensed from vows. The case of the King of Aragon who was called back from the monastery is well known, and there are also examples in our own times. (Now, if dispensations have been granted for the sake of securing temporal interests, it is much more proper that they be granted on account of the distress of souls.)

In the second place, why do our adversaries exaggerate the obligation or effect of a vow, when, at the same time, they have not a word to say of the nature of the vow itself, that it ought to be in a thing possible, that it ought to be free, and chosen spontaneously and deliberately? But it is not unknown to what extent perpetual chastity is in the power of man. And how few are there who have taken the vow spontaneously and deliberately! Young maidens and men, before they are able to judge, are persuaded, and sometimes even compelled, to take the vow. Wherefore it is not fair to insist so rigorously on the obligation, since it is granted by all that it is against the nature of a vow to take it without spontaneous and deliberate action.

Most canonical laws rescind vows made before the age of fifteen; for before that age there does not seem sufficient judgment in a person to decide concerning a perpetual life. Another Canon, granting more to the weakness of man, adds a few years; for it forbids a vow to be made before the age of eighteen. But which of these two Canons shall we follow? The most part have an excuse for leaving the monasteries, because most of them have taken the vows before they reached these ages.

Finally, even though the violation of a vow might be censured, yet it seems not forthwith to follow that the marriages of such persons must be dissolved. For Augustine denies that they ought to be dissolved (XXVII. Quaest. I, Cap. Nuptiarum); and his authority is not lightly to be esteemed, although other men afterwards thought otherwise.

But although it appears that God's command concerning marriage delivers very many from their vows, yet our teachers introduce also another argument concerning vows to show that they are void. For every service of God, ordained and chosen of men without the commandment of God to merit justification and grace, is wicked; as Christ says, Matt. 15, 9: In vain do they worship Me with the commandments of men. And Paul teaches everywhere that righteousness is not to be sought from our own observances and acts of worship, devised by men, but that it comes by faith to those who believe that they are received by God into grace for Christ's sake.

But it is evident that monks have taught that services of man's making satisfy for sins and merit grace and justification. What else is this than to detract from the glory of Christ and to obscure and deny the righteousness of faith? It follows, therefore, that the vows thus commonly taken have been wicked services, and, consequently, are void. For a wicked vow, taken against the commandment of God, is not valid; for (as the Canon says) no vow ought to bind men to wickedness.

Paul says, Gal. 5, 4: Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace. To those, therefore, who want to be justified by their vows Christ is made of no effect, and they fall from grace. For also these who ascribe justification to vows ascribe to their own works that which properly belongs to the glory of Christ.

Nor can it be denied, indeed, that the monks have taught that, by their vows and observances, they were justified, and merited forgiveness of sins, yea, they

invented still greater absurdities, saying that they could give others a share in their works. If any one should be inclined to enlarge on these things with evil intent, how many things could he bring together whereof even the monks are now ashamed! Over and above this, they persuaded men that services of man's making were a state of Christian perfection. And is not this assigning justification to works? It is no light offense in the Church to set forth to the people a service devised by men, without the commandment of God, and to teach that such service justifies men. For the righteousness of faith, which chiefly ought to be taught in the Church, is obscured when these wonderful angelic forms of worship, with their show of poverty, humility, and celibacy, are cast before the eyes of men.

Furthermore, the precepts of God and the true service of God are obscured when men hear that only monks are in a state of perfection. For Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, and yet to conceive great faith, and to trust that for Christ's sake we have a God, who has been reconciled, to ask of God, and assuredly to expect His aid in all things that, according to our calling, are to be done; and meanwhile, to be diligent in outward good works, and to serve our calling. In these things consist the true perfection and the true service of God. It does not consist in celibacy, or in begging, or in vile apparel. But the people conceive many pernicious opinions from the false commendations of monastic life. They hear celibacy praised above measure; therefore they lead their married life with offense to their consciences. They hear that it is an evangelical counsel not to seek revenge; therefore some in private life are not afraid to take revenge, for they hear that it is but a counsel, and not a commandment. Others judge that the Christian cannot properly hold a civil office or be a magistrate.

There are on record examples of men who, forsaking marriage and the administration of the Commonwealth, have hid themselves in monasteries. This they called fleeing from the world, and seeking a kind of life which would be more pleasing to God. Neither did they see that God ought to be served in those commandments which He Himself has given, and not in commandments devised by men. A good and perfect kind of life is that which has for it the commandment of God. It is necessary to admonish men of these things.

And before these times, Gerson rebukes this error of the monks concerning perfection, and testifies

that in his day it was a new saying that the monastic life is a state of perfection.

So many wicked opinions are inherent in the vows, namely, that they justify, that they constitute Christian perfection, that they keep the counsels and commandments, that they have works of supererogation. All these things, since they are false and empty, make vows null and void.

Monastic life is a life of good works designed to free the monks and others from temporal punishments. Again we see the absence of the sola fide, and in its place we see that monster, ex opere operato. Christ has given us the benefits of His suffering and death so that we can seek the gift of God through His merits. The Bible knows of no other way to salvation. The Romanists, though, who were eager to ascribe to man a part in working out his own salvation, have laid aside the teachings of Holy Scripture. They have taken from Christ the glory and honor that is due Him, and have instead ascribed this honor to man. Paul writes, Gal. 5, 4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace." Those who seek the remission of sins by monastic vows rather than by faith in Christ detract from the honor that is due Him. "If by the law of Moses, which was divinely revealed, did not merit the remission of sins, how much less do those silly observances (monasticism, rosaries, etc.), averse to the civil custom of life, merit the remission of sins! ... They feign that among those who observe this Law of Christ, the monks observe it more

closely than others, on account of their hypocritical poverty, obedience, and chastity, since indeed all these things are full of sham." 12 If those monks were able to keep the Law perfectly, they would not yet have merited the forgiveness of sins. They would still have to confess that they were unprofitable servants.

Just as they have attempted to do on previous occasions, the Romanists wished to justify their practice from the Old Testament by pointing to the Nazarites. The Apology also commented on this claim of the Papists. "The rite of the Nazarites was an exercise (a bodily exercise with fasting and certain kinds of food) or declaration of faith before men, and did not merit the remission of sins before God, did not justify before God. (For they sought this elsewhere, namely, in the promise of the blessed Seed.) Again, just as circumcision or the slaying of victims would not be a service of God now, so the rite of the Nazarites ought not to be presented now as a service, but it ought to be judged as an adiaphoron. It is not right to compare monasticism, devised without God's Word, as a service which should merit the remission of sins and justification, with the rite of the Nazarites, which had God's Word, and was not taught for the purpose of meriting the remission of sins, but to be an outward exercise, just as other ceremonies of

12. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Article XXVII, p. 423, 11 ff.

the Law. The same can be said concerning other ceremonies prescribed in the Law." 13 Our Confessions have spoken so thoroughly and so conclusively on the subject that little more need be added. The Lutherans were sure of their ground for they stood firmly upon Scripture. The sola fide was the central doctrine which they favored as opposed to the abuses of the ex opere operato.

13. Ibid., p. 439, 58.

IV. Sola Fide Vs. Ex Opere Operato as a Living Issue

We must not think that the sola fide vs. ex opere operato controversy passed with the middle of the sixteenth century. We must not consider it to be a waste of time to study and write about such issues today. For the controversy is as alive today as it was in the days of the Reformation. The Romanists have not recanted their doctrines. They have not been convinced by the persuasive Gospel or by the admonition of Luther and his followers. To this day they stubbornly and persistently maintain that certain practices and ceremonies in the church justify the individual ex opere operato. An examination of the bibliography which we have used in the preparation of our thesis will reveal that we have quoted largely from Catholic works of recent publication. The Romanists have not passed through the exit portals of the "Dark Ages". They continue to place their trust and confidence in uncertain superstitions and traditions, rather than in the sure and abiding Word of God. To maintain their position of the ex opere operato

is to abolish the full use of the Gospel, that message which points us to the atonement through the blood-bought redemption won for us by Jesus Christ.

If it were true that the Sacraments justify ex opere operato, then we would have no need for faith, and no need for Christ. Then we could gain salvation through our own merit, works, and satisfactions. Then Jesus and Calvary were mere sham, for we have learned from Holy Scripture that no man can be saved except he have faith in His Redeemer. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16, 16. Our confessional fathers, in drawing up the Apology, took note of this fact that if we would consistently accept the ex opere operato, we would abolish the Gospel. "If we merit the remission of sins by these elicited acts (that spring from our mind), of what benefit is Christ? If we can be justified by reasons and works of reason, wherefore is there need of Christ, or regeneration (as Peter declares, 1 Pet. 1, 18 ff.)? ... If we here receive the doctrine of the adversaries, that by the works of reason we merit the remission of sins and justification, there will be no difference between philosophic, or certainly pharisaic, and Christian righteousness." ¹ Luther knew the way of salvation only through the merits of Jesus Christ. This way he has kept clear for us

1. Concordia Triglotta, Apology, Article IV, p. 123, 9 ff.

through his emphasis on the sola scriptura and sola fide.

The Romanists are so bitter in their condemnation of the sola fide for they fully realize that if this principle were accepted, it would mark the vanity of many of their ceremonies and practices. Honest Catholic theologians confess that if the Sacraments must operate sola fide, then "a Sacrament conferred in the Latin or Greek language would effect nothing for him, who does not understand this idiom; then a sacrament sometimes may afford grace to the spectators, in whom it might excite faith, and not to the receiver himself, in whom perhaps faith might not be excited." ²

The Catholics have rejected the sola scriptura, and have added to the Word of God the traditions of men and the decrees of the Church. They have likewise rejected the sola fide, and have added to faith a system of work-righteousness and merit by which sinful man tries to appease the anger of the holy and just God.

The Lutherans have rightly held to the sola scriptura. Without that they could not have maintained and taught the sola fide. Faith, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, is wrought in man only through the means of grace which God has provided, namely, His Word and Sacraments. In Article VII of the Schwabach Articles we read, "There is no other means, no mode, nor way, nor path to obtain faith. For

2. Joseph F. Berg, op. cit., p. 363.

thoughts outside of, or before the hearing of the Word, holy and good as may seem, are nothing but lies and error." 3

This is confirmed by Luther in the Smalcald Articles, when he says: "And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word." 4 Luther was compelled to attack the ex opere operato, for it seized at the very throat of Christianity in that it aimed to destroy both the sola scriptura and the sola fide.

The implications of the ex opere operato error are more penetrating than they at first seem. The controversy is definitely a living issue for these implications can gradually steal more of the gospel truths from the believing Christian. Taking the sola fide from the Sacraments has affected their other teachings in like manner. Besides the two Sacraments which we have considered at great length, the Catholics speak of five other sacraments which are really mere pseudo-sacraments. To these pseudo-sacraments they also ascribe the ex opere operato.

Speaking of one of these false sacraments, marriage, Joseph Jacobs says: "There must be, therefore, an increase of Sanctifying Grace in their souls that will demand a cor-

3. As quoted in J. L. Neve, Introduction to Lutheran Symbolics, p. 161.

4. Ibid.

responding increase of actual graces as times and circumstances in this state demand. This special increase of Sanctifying Grace comes to their souls in the sacrament of matrimony." 5 It is true that God has instituted matrimony and that it is His will that one man and one woman should live together in wedded bliss. It is also true that sinful men and women need the help of Almighty God so that their home might have those blessings which it needs to enjoy this life and to prepare for life eternal. But it is a mere fable of the Church that God has promised any spiritual graces that accompany the ceremony of matrimony. It is not true that the rites of the marriage ceremony confer ex opere operato upon the pair those graces which they will need in later life to meet the troubles and trials that will confront them. Luther, accepting only what the Bible teaches, knew that the couple could never expect spiritual blessings in later life unless they continued to accept Jesus as their Savior by faith alone. It was Luther's sola fide opposed to Roman Catholic ex opere operato.

The Romanists contend that the pseudo-sacrament of marriage is not intended for all. There is a higher and more noble "sacrament" -- one that confers even greater graces ex opere operato. This is the Catholic sacrament

5. Op. cit., p. 62.

of holy orders. It is thought that this sacrament imprints an indelible character upon the individual. He will always possess those special graces which are conferred upon him at his ordination. "If any one saith, that, by sacred ordination, the Holy Ghost is not given; and that vainly therefore do the bishops say, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; or, that a character is not imprinted by that ordination; or, that he who has once been a priest can again become a layman; let him be anathema." ⁶ Just as is the case with matrimony, so it is true that the office of the holy ministry requires many blessings from God. It is true that a minister of the Gospel can be successful only if God the Holy Spirit is working through him. But again it is a fable instigated by the Roman hierarchy that the ordination confers these graces ex opere operato. According to Roman belief, it is a mechanical process by which the priest gains an increase of grace at his ordination. Quoting again from Joseph Jacobs: "This increase of Grace then comes to the soul in Holy Orders as a result of the powers that are conferred. This increase of Grace can be removed from the soul; in fact, it is removed by any mortal sin. But the powers given by the sacrament remain. Their demand for that grace also remains in the soul. If the sin that drove the Grace from the soul is forgiven, the Grace must return to it." ⁷ We can

6. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 191 f., 23rd Ser., Canon IV.

readily see the dangerous implications which this ex opere operato theory might lead to.

Another of their pseudo-sacraments to which they ascribe the mechanical ex opere operato operation is extreme unction. From the epistle of James where the apostle speaks of applying ointment for healing purposes, the Romanists have created their teaching concerning extreme unction. They teach that it is a sacrament. The recipient is anointed with oil and prayers are spoken. The sick person receives ex opere operato spiritual aid and whenever it is conducive to his soul's welfare, he is also given corporal strength. The official teaching of the Romanists is, "If any one saith, that the sacred unction of the sick does not confer grace, nor remit sin, nor comfort the sick; but that it has already ceased, as though it were of old only the grace of working cures; let him be anathema." ⁸ The entire "sacrament" is one in which works are overemphasized and faith is relegated to the background. The ceremony is to work a spiritual benefit even though the recipient may be unconscious at the time. James was not thinking of such an ex opere operato ceremony. The unction was for the physical healing. Their spiritual welfare was strengthened alone by faith. James said in this connection, "And the prayer of faith

7. Op. cit., p. 62 f.

8. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 169, 14th Sess., Canon II.

shall save the sick." James knew the same way to eternal life that Paul knew -- salvation by faith alone without the deeds of the law.

The Romanists have also made of the rite of confirmation a "sacrament". The Lutherans too practice confirmation. For them it is a rite of the Church in which the confirmand confesses his faith in the Triune God. He renews his baptismal covenant to resist all evil. With the help of the Holy Spirit, he vows to remain steadfast in the one true faith until his death. The Lutherans have not made of confirmation a sacrament, because Jesus did not institute it, and because the Bible no where ascribes to it special spiritual blessings. The Romanists consider it to be a sacrament in which the confirmand receives ex opere operato an increase of Sanctifying Grace. By this outward ceremony, they teach that he has prepared his soul for a more effectual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For Luther, the important thing at the confirmation service is the sola fide. The child must confess his faith, and pray the Holy Spirit for a growth in faith during the remainder of his life-time.

The last of the pseudo-sacraments of the Catholic Church is penance. We have already discussed the Roman error concerning this sacrament under Article XII: Of Repentance. Luther also often spoke of penance as a sacrament. He considered it to be a means of grace for the recipient not because the outward act was performed, but only

because the Word of God was used in the absolution. Luther knew that the Word of God was the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts.

The implications of the ex opere operato extend beyond the sacraments and pseudo-sacraments to the sacramentals. They distinguish the sacramentals which are mere Church rites from the Sacraments for which they claim divine origin. The majority of the Catholic theologians do not ascribe ex opere operato benefits to the sacramentals, though this is still a controverted issue. Usually it is said that the sacramentals benefit ex opere operantis. In either instance the necessity of faith is overshadowed by the importance attached to the work. Catholic dogmaticians write, "Theologians argue as to whether the sacramentals may confer other graces ex opere operato (as, for example, the forgiveness of venial sins, the remission of temporal punishments) and not merely through the intercession of the church or the action of the one who uses them. Some writers (e.g., Dominicus Soto and Bellarmine) do not hesitate to attribute such efficacy to the sacramentals, whereas the majority reject the assumption, and justly so, for three reasons: first, because the Church is not empowered to institute efficacious signs of grace; second, because the sacramentals do not produce their effects infallibly; and third, because the Church in her rites makes use, not of affirmative, but of deprecatory expressions, which show that she looks to the divine

mercy for the effect. Hence the sacramentals derive their efficacy entirely ex opere operantis. This efficacy is nevertheless very special in that it owes its power not to the opus operans (i.e., the pious acts) of the faithful alone, but also the opus operans (i.e., the intercession) of the Church." ⁹ Even though it is true that only the minority of Catholic theologians teach that the sacramentals work ex opere operato, yet their very nature detracts from faith. The sinner is led to believe that through these little works he is justified.

Closely related to the sacramentals are the little devotional exercises which Catholics are encouraged to do. These exercises or devotions are said to merit for the individual special merits and graces ex opere operato. Thus certain indulgences are attached to the recitation of each Pater Noster and Ave Maria. Nothing could more nearly approximate the heathen vain babblings in their idol worship. Nothing could be farther from the simple worship which was common among the believing disciples at the time of the New Testament. An example of these heathen superstitions and practices can be found in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "Among the twelve promises of the Sacred Heart made by our Lord to the saint in favor of those who adopt this devotion are: 1. 'I will give them all the graces nec-

9. Joseph Pohle, The Sacraments, A Dogmatic Treatise, Vol. I, p. 117 f.

essary for their state of life.' 2. 'I will give peace in their families.' 3. 'I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.' 4. 'I will bless the homes in which the image of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honored.' 5. 'I promise thee in the excess of the mercy of My Heart, that its all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Communion on the first Friday of every month for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance, and that they shall not die under My displeasure, now without receiving their sacraments, and that My Heart shall be their secure refuge at that last hour.'" 10 Jesus does make special promises of grace and blessing to His children, but this He does in His gospel through faith. The Bible does not know of a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by which we might merit ex opere operato the blessings of these promises.

Many practices of the Romanists remind us very much of the heathen practices in lands where the Redeemer is unknown. One such practice is that of attributing certain blessings and miracles to the wearers of the Scapular of Mary. Here we see the ex opere operato as the full grown beast who has come to destroy. For here little or nothing is said of faith, but only the work itself is considered. Whosoever dies clothed in Mary's Scapular shall not suffer the fires of hell. On the Saturday following the person's

10. Francis Cassilly, op. cit., p. 290 f.

death, an angel will come to deliver the soul from purgatory and take it to heaven.¹¹ This is purely the doctrine of men which has been ascribed to God. God knows nothing of such a way to salvation. Let us hear more of these benefits which the Catholics ascribe to the Scapular ex opere operato. "Those who wear the Scapular have a deeper and fuller participation than non-wearers of the Scapular in all the prayers, Masses and works of satisfaction of other members of the Confraternity of the whole Church. ... But this communication of benefits within Mary's family is not all. Popes Clement VII and Clement X declared that Scapular wearers participate in a special manner in the fruit not only of the spiritual works of the Carmelites, to whom they are united as a Confraternity, but also in all the good done throughout the whole Church. ... Those who do appreciate the power of Mary in the Scapular against Satan, have often, through the mere pressing of the Scapular to their lips, been able to cause the most violent temptations to melt away. They know that due to their devout wearing of the Scapular with its presence of Mary, Satan dare not come near them."¹² If we had not seen the Imprimatur and the Nihil Obstat at the head of this book, we would not believe that the Romanists are capable of such heathenish practice.

11. John Mathias Haffert, Mary in Her Scapular Promise, pp. 12 ff.

12. Ibid., pp. 69. 72. 129.

But the teaching is there. And after all, we really shouldn't be so alarmed to find it among their writings. For it is only a continuation of their error in maintaining the ex opere operato of the Sacraments. They have abolished the sola fide in the Sacraments. The result is that the Scriptures and faith are relegated to the background and the entire religion becomes a religion of works. Thank God that Luther restored the importance of teaching the sola fide!

The implications of the ex opere operato extend even into that act of prayer in which we find ourselves most intimately drawn to God. Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. He taught us to pray for our spiritual needs, for our earthly needs, and for the forgiveness and warding off of sin. He nowhere teaches though that we must pray for the dead. He rather teaches that after the death of our friends we can no longer help them with our prayers. Either they have entered eternal life by means of their faith, or else they have been damned to eternal perdition because of their unbelief. In spite of this, the Romanists would have us pray for those who have died, and they teach that these prayers bring their benefits ex opere operato. The Bible teaches us to pray only to God, for He only can hear us and give an answer to our prayers. The Romanists pray also to the saints in heaven, and again these prayers bring graces ex opere operato. The official Catholic statement for these doctrines are taken from the Profession of the Tridentine

Faith. "I firmly hold that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful. Likewise that the saints reigning with Christ are to be honored and invoked, and that they offer up prayers to God for us, and that their relics are to be had in veneration." 13

For a Lutheran, a prayer is a true prayer only when it is spoken in faith. There is no merit in the act itself. Matthew 21, 22: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Again for Luther it is the sola fide. Veit Dietrich, who shared Luther's solitude at Coburg, wrote to Melancton: "My dear Philip, you do not know how concerned I am for your welfare, and I beseech you for Christ's sake not to regard as vain the Doctor's (Luther's) letters to you. I cannot sufficiently admire that man's unique constancy, joy, confidence, and hope in these days of most sore distress. And daily he nourishes them by diligent contemplation of the Word of God. Not a day passes in which he does not spend in prayer at least three hours, such as are most precious for study. On one occasion I chanced to hear him pray. Good Lord, what a spirit, what faith spoke out of his words! He prayed with such reverence that one could see he was speaking with God, and withal with such faith and such confidence as is shown

13. Philip Schaff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 208 f., Canon VIII.

by one who is speaking with his father and friend. . . . Standing at a distance, I heard him praying in this manner with a loud voice. Then my heart, too, burned mightily within me, when he spoke so familiarly, so earnestly, and reverently with God, and in his prayer insisted on the promises in the Psalms, as one who was certain that everything he prayed for would be done." ¹⁴ Luther could teach the sola fide for he himself had an implicit faith in the Triune God.

As we have previously suggested, the teaching of the ex opere operato error is even more serious than it might otherwise be because it is misunderstood by the laity. But in spite of all their erroneous doctrines concerning the Sacraments and other ex opere operato practices, the Catholics still teach that Jesus the Son of God suffered and died on Calvary. They teach that He arose again from the dead and that He has gone to prepare a heavenly mansion for us. If the Catholic laity would take that portion of the Catholic teaching, and if they would then die trusting in the sole merits and atonement of Jesus, we can rest assured that they would enter eternal life. But the sad part is that the work-righteousness teachings of Catholicism are so predominant that the laymen soon believe that good works and mere ceremonies are sufficient for salvation. He begins

14. As quoted by F. Bente, Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, p. 38, 49.

to rely upon the life that he has led to be his assurance of heaven. This is perhaps the greatest danger of the ex opere operato teaching -- that many laymen who are ignorant of the true teaching of Scripture have accepted the way of good works rather than the way through Calvary. Luther opened heaven's door for all, but only after he had first pointed them to the cross. They must come to heaven's door sola fide -- trusting alone in the merits of their Savior from sin.

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We are grateful to Luther for restoring the sola fide
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V. Conclusion

The sola fide is a vital dogma in the foundation of our faith. It was not a new doctrine with Martin Luther. It seemed to be new to the masses because it had been suppressed for so many years. It was really the teaching of Jesus which was resurrected and brought to the attention of the common people by the Reformer. Jesus stressed the sola fide as opposed to the ex opere operato in His Sermon on the Mount. We find this especially in Matthew 6, 1 to Matthew 7, 12. In this section, he treated of such subjects as benevolence, alms, prayer, fasting, and admonition. In each instance he stresses the vanity of mere services and vain repetitions. He says that even the heathen are capable of such actions. But what He demands of His Christian disciples is faith. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 3, 11. Jesus can be our foundation sola fide.

We are grateful to Luther for restoring the sola fide to its correct position. We who have inherited this blessing of the Lutheran Church have the obligation of preserving

this Scripture doctrine for posterity. Sinners can learn the true way to eternal life only as long as God's Word remains among them so that sola fide they can accept Jesus as their Savior. The gulf between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on this controversy is as wide today as it has ever been. We shall continue to oppose the error of the ex opere operato as long as the Bible continues to teach Hebrews 11, 6: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." We shall continue in the foot-steps of Martin Luther to teach the importance of the sola fide as long as the Bible continues to teach Romans 10, 9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." As long as we have the Bible on our side, and that shall be until the end of time, it is our obligation to continue to teach the sola fide and to forever reject the Roman Catholic ex opere operato.

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