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AN ANALYSIS OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis  
Department of Systematics  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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May 1991

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

For many years church denominations have been trying to dialogue with other church bodies to see whether they can come to an agreement in areas of doctrine and practice. This has also been true of the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church. In September of 1983 twenty-four representatives of the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church, after having met and dialogued for some years, released a 24,000 word document entitled Justification by Faith.<sup>1</sup> In six rounds of earlier dialogue, starting in 1965, representatives from the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church had considered the Nicene Creed, Baptism, the Eucharist, the Ministry, Papal Primacy, the Teaching Authority of the Church, and Papal Infallibility. Summaries and joint statements which illustrate the degree of consensus or convergence have been released in these areas.<sup>2</sup> These summaries and joint statements have become important for dialogue between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church and for wider ecumenical discussions.

In the introduction to the document Justification by Faith, there is the affirmation in which it is said that

both Roman Catholic and Lutherans can wholeheartedly accept.

It reads as follows:

Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God's merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God's promise and saving work in Christ. This excludes ultimate reliance on our faith, virtues and merits, even though we acknowledge God working in these by grace alone.<sup>3</sup>

The document also speaks of consensus and convergence on the important doctrine of justification by faith. This is the same doctrine that separated the two church bodies during the time of the Reformation. Since then Lutherans and Roman Catholics have been representing two different directions in doctrine and practice, that is, the interpretation of Scripture, the Liturgy, theology and pastoral practices. From the time of the Reformation to the present, the doctrine of justification by faith alone has repeatedly emerged as the crucial point of confrontation between the two church bodies.

In Lutheran circles, justification by faith alone is the chief article of Christian doctrine. In briefest of terms, the doctrine of justification by faith has to do with how sinners are made pleasing and acceptable to God, namely, not by any human efforts but by having the righteousness of God freely and unconditionally imputed to those who have faith in Christ. For Lutherans of the Reformation, justification by faith was essential in order to battle Pelagian work righteousness and to bring consolation to consciences

terrified by a religion of the law.<sup>4</sup> Faith was emphasized as the only means of receiving Christ's righteousness, so that justification became entirely the work of God's grace. Luther therefore made a sharp break with medieval and Augustinian models of justification. Luther taught that God forgives and justifies people by God's grace alone, through faith, on account of Christ alone. There was no longer in Lutheran theology the Augustinian ideas of a progressive transformational model of justification under the power of grace.

In Roman Catholic theology today, justification by faith is rarely spoken of. When it is mentioned it usually is done so as a comment on the Protestant position.<sup>5</sup>

James McCue notes, for instance, that in constructing an "Outline of a Dogmatic" Karl Rahner, S.J., who is well aware of justification motifs, does not include justification as a doctrinal theme to be treated. Avery Dulles, S.J., points out that in Richard McBrien's two volume, 1,200-page Catholicism, justification appears as a word on three pages, each a reference to the old Catholic/Protestant controversy.<sup>6</sup>

In the Roman Catholic teaching, the central issue in justification, namely, how we can be made pleasing to God so that we can attain Him, is dealt with in the area of grace. The Roman Catholic Church is concerned with acknowledging the free unmerited grace or God-life by which the believer now lives a life beyond the powers of even the most noble of humans, and secondly, acknowledging the full range of gifts God has given, including our merits.<sup>7</sup>

The dominance of justification by faith in the Lutheran Church and its almost complete absence in the Roman Catholic Church has made communication between the two church bodies somewhat difficult. Even the Lutherans do not agree among themselves on a contemporary statement on justification.<sup>8</sup> Also, there seems to be a difference between the time of the Reformation and modern times in the doctrine of justification by faith as taught in the two church bodies. In order to ascertain if there is a convergence and a consensus on this doctrine of justification by faith, it is necessary, first of all, to see what position these two church bodies took in their earlier histories. The first section of the thesis will focus on the doctrine of justification by faith as taught in the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. This will include the time period from the Diet of Augsburg in June of 1530 to the Council of Trent which ended in 1563. The second section of the thesis will review the doctrine of justification by faith in Lutheran and Roman Catholic documents between 1972 and 1983. The three documents that will be reviewed are The Gospel and the Church (Malta Report - 1972), All Under One Christ, (1980), and Martin Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ (1983). The third section of this thesis will review, analyze, and critique the most recent document, Justification by Faith, Lutherans - Roman

Catholics in Dialogue - VII (1983). This will be done in order to ascertain whether in their historic concerns and thought patterns the participants in this dialogue understand the importance of justification by faith in the same sense as the Reformers did, and if there is indeed today a convergence and a consensus in their biblical exegesis and theology on this important doctrine of justification by faith.

A critical evaluation of this topic is practical today for a variety of reasons. Many Lutherans today earnestly desire a consensus on the gospel with the Roman Catholic Church. This desire is often misdirected by a lack of crucial information on the respective Lutheran and Roman Catholic teachings on justification today. The responsible pastor must provide the doctrinal information that is lacking. A restatement of the Roman Catholic position of Trent by the Lutheran pastor will not usually satisfy the questions of those who have witnessed what appear to be basic changes in the Roman Catholic Church in our generation.

Beyond this particular pastoral concern, it is also vital to understand the present status of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic dialogue and precisely how, if at all, the substance of their respective teachings on justification has changed in the last four hundred years. This will help members of both churches from assuming that there is a basic



agreement on the gospel and on the doctrine of justification by faith. An evaluation of this topic will help both churches to understand the theological agenda and method of those who claim a consensus which has eluded their forefathers for four centuries. Such an understanding will provide important insight into the present theological condition of both communions as well.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, ed., Justification by Faith--Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 1-381.

<sup>2</sup>Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, ed., Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I-III. Nicene Creed, Baptism, Eucharist (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968).

Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, ed., Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV. Eucharist and Ministry (New York: Published jointly by Lutheran World Federation and Catholic Bishop's Conference, 1970).

Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, ed., Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue V. Papal Primacy and the Universal Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, ed., Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI. Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980).

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, Dialogue VII, 16.

<sup>4</sup>James B. Madson, "U.S. Lutheran--Roman Catholic Dialogue: Justification by Faith," The Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 27 (September 1987): 68.

<sup>5</sup>Killan McDonnell, "Lutherans and Catholics on Justification," America 149 (December 3, 1983): 345.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>"Helsinki - 1963," Lutheran World 11 (1964): 1-36.

CHAPTER II  
THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH -  
LUTHERAN REFORMERS AND THE  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Justification by Faith in the  
Augsburg Confession

Martin Luther's bold stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521 gave the impetus to a number of ecclesiastical reforms which led to significant differences in faith, customs, and ceremonies. Charles V, alarmed by the spread of the evangelical teachings among the churches of Germany, summoned a diet to convene in April of 1530 at Augsburg. The express purpose of this diet according to the preface of the Augsburg Confession was:

to allay divisions, to cease hostility, to surrender past errors to our Savior, and to display diligence in hearing, understanding, and considering with love and kindness the opinions and views of everybody . . . so that we all may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church, and unity, even as we all live and do battle under one Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The Elector of Saxony had commissioned a number of theologians, namely Luther, Melanchthon, Jonas, and Bugenhagen, to prepare a document to treat various articles of the faith. The result of their writing was the Torgau Articles and later two other statements of Lutheran doctrine, the

Schwabach Articles and the Marburg Articles. The final document, written by Philip Melanchthon, was called the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Confession was read in German by Christian Beyer, on June 25, 1530, before the Emperor and others who had gathered in Augsburg.

The Augsburg Confession, written in Latin and German, was not considered by the Reformers as a set of new doctrines or teachings, but rather as the correct understanding of Scripture for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The Reformers wanted to keep pure the original teaching of the Christian faith. The Confession itself was meant to correct not only the abuses of tradition, but also how the church was misusing the Gospel. The Reformers summarized this under the heading "Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone."

Article IV of the Augsburg Confession deals with the specifics of justification by faith. It reads from the Latin translation:

Our churches also 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 on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight (Rom. 3,4).<sup>2</sup>

Melanchthon's statement here in Article IV is formulated in such a way as not to offend the Roman Catholic theologians. The emphasis of Melanchthon was focused on faith and Christ.

Two other articles of doctrine are also important for the whole discussion on justification by faith. The first of these is the article on original sin, Article II of the Augsburg Confession. There it is said that original sin is the total corruption of our whole human nature. Man by nature is without fear, love, and trust in God. He is without righteousness and is inclined only to evil and is spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God. Earlier, the Schwabach Articles had said:

. . . original sin is properly and truly sin, and not only a weakness or defect, but such a sin as would condemn and eternally separate from God all men who come of Adam, if Jesus Christ had not interceded for us, and assumed this sin, together with all sins which proceed from it, and by His suffering made satisfaction for it, and thus entirely abolished and blotted it out in Himself; as in Ps. 50 and Rom. 5 it is clearly written concerning this sin.<sup>3</sup>

The Augsburg Confession article traces the history of human sin back to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. The extent is also noted when it says that all men who are born in the course of nature have this sin in them. As a result of this sin, mankind is condemned to eternal death, but a remedy is also given and that is rebirth through the water of Baptism and the Word, the Good News of the Gospel of Christ.

The errorists mentioned in this article are the Pelagians. Pelagius was a fifth century person who taught that man is not sinful by nature and that he could be saved by an act of his own will aided by God's grace. The other

reference is to the semi-Pelagians who had attacked the doctrine of man's entire spiritual inability to acquire his own salvation and his absolute need of grace. This was directed primarily against the Roman Church.

The other article that is also important in this discussion is Article VI of the Augsburg Confession. This article deals with the area of New Obedience. It is a decisive statement on the relationship between justification and sanctification. The Roman Church had accused the Reformers of being entirely hostile and opposed to good works. This article declares the necessity of good works as a fruit of faith when it says:

Our churches also teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits and that it is necessary to do the good works commanded by God. We must do so because it is God's will and not because we rely on such works to merit justification before God, for forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith, . . . whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, not through works but through faith alone, and he shall receive forgiveness of sins by grace.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the Schwabach Articles had stated earlier in regard to faith and good works:

. . . doing what is good; towards God, by praise, thanks-giving, prayer, preaching and teaching, and towards neighbors by love, serving, aiding, counseling, giving and lending and by suffering every sort of evil, even unto death, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Article VI states that only those works that are to be accounted good are those which God has commanded us to do and are in accordance with His will, but they do not merit justification before God. Neither at the beginning of a

person's life as a Christian nor anywhere along the way do good works become the basis of man's fellowship with God.

According to Article IV of the Augsburg Confession, justification takes place "propter Christum per fidem" (for Christ's sake, through faith). It is faith that brings about justification, a faith that lives by looking at Christ, who by His death has made satisfaction for our sins, and which is worked by the Holy Spirit. The article on justification has its foundation in the act and work of Christ, in His sacrifice and reconciliation for us. The article also introduces the working of the Holy Spirit who is given through the office of Word and Sacrament in the church. Article IV becomes the very heart and connecting link of the Confession, at the center of which stands the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has been, therefore, called the chief article of the Augsburg Confession.

Luther in his lectures on the Psalms in 1513-1515 already had condemned the view that without the grace of God and solely by human powers a person could love God above all else and fulfill the works of the law. Luther knew the Psalms well. He had lectured on them and he had taken seriously the prescription of his monastic order to read in the Psalter daily. In his comments on Psalm 77, Luther wrote:

God's work and His strength is faith. This makes people righteous and produces all virtues; it chastises, crucifies, and weakens the flesh, so that it should not have its own work or strength but that the work of God should

be in it. And thus it saves and strengthens the spirit. But when this happens, then all who do this become God's work and God's strength allegorically.<sup>6</sup>

Commenting on Psalm 85, verse 11, Luther wrote:

For the fact that Christ came and was born was sheer promise and not merit. And by this very thing we are now justified, namely by His coming. It is not that we first became righteous and deserving, and by this fact God was truthful, that He sent Him. . . . The fact that he says "from heaven" means that the righteousness of Christ does not come from us. . . . This truth comes to us so that we might be righteous . . . and come to life.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that yet at this time Luther's conception of justification and the relationship between Law and Gospel was not totally worked out. Luther's final discovery of the nature and meaning of justification and its relationship to sanctification was still in the future. U. Saarnivaara states that "had his doctrine remained as it was brought forth in the lectures on the Psalms, the Roman Church might have excommunicated him on the basis of certain 'errors,' but the Council of Trent would never have found it necessary to pronounce its anathema against a 'Lutheran' doctrine of justification."<sup>8</sup>

Saarnivaara also states that the teaching of Luther in his first lectures on the Psalms were important for three reasons. First, Luther understood justification as a change of heart in man, that is, as a gradual renewal. Therefore for Luther, man could never reach the point where he could say that he was already righteous. Secondly, Luther does



not yet possess a clear understanding of imputation. Thirdly, Luther does not yet possess a proper distinction between Law and Gospel. He is still in the phase of his development in which he does not make a distinction between Moses and Christ except to time and perfection.'

Luther began lecturing on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (1515-1516) almost immediately after he had given his final lecture on the Psalms. It is during this time that a deepening insight into the meaning of justification can be found. It is also during this time period (1516-1517) that Luther rejected the Augustinian-Catholic theory of the fourfold sense of Scripture and began to interpret the Scriptures according to their literal meaning. This severed one of Luther's significant bonds with the past. Saarnivaara states

Not until he rejected the formula of the fourfold meaning of Scripture was Luther free to study the real, literal meaning of the message of the Bible. What he discovered in the tower of the Wittenberg monastery was the literal meaning of the words of Paul. Then for the first time Luther saw into the heart of the Gospel without the spectacles of traditional formulas. He saw that in its literal sense the Bible teaches justification by imputation. . . . This thought Luther never surrendered. It continued to occupy a place in his general conception of Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Saarnivaara also states that toward the end of the year 1518 Luther's conception of justification became apparent. It is at this time that the deepest meaning of the term justification was shown as the gracious imputation of God which was appropriated through faith. This came about because of

Luther's discovery of the true meaning of Romans 1:17, along with his rejection of the fourfold meaning of Scripture, and as its inevitable consequence, the surrender of Mysticism. The basic difference between Luther's pre-Reformation and his later doctrine of salvation is to be found in the conception of the nature and essence of justification. Justification by faith was not a gradual process of renewal or becoming righteous. It is rather the bestowal of the righteousness of Christ by imputation. God justifies the sinner by forgiving his sins and reckoning him innocent and blameless for the sake of the atoning work of Christ. It is by faith that a sinner receives this gift from God. Justification by faith centers on what God has done for the sinner.

Luther rejected anything that made a person believe that grace depended on the work of that person. The Augsburg Confession stated the rejection of justification by one's own merits, works, or satisfactions; otherwise, it was no longer the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ that was decisive, but the satisfaction which human beings were able to accomplish. The Reformers strongly maintained that we are justified by grace for Christ's sake through faith. We stand justified "coram Deo"; pure grace, no merit.

The Augsburg Confession in Article IV states that justification takes place "by grace," that is freely, purely, gratuitously, without merit. All these words express

the same thought: that it is God alone who forgives sins and creates salvation. The source of justification originates and flows from the grace of God. God's grace is His boundless unmerited love. Justification also takes place "for Christ's sake." Thus it is the merit of Christ which is important, not our merit. The Son of God is the only true propitiation for sins. He is the only savior, mediator, and advocate that we as human beings have. Christ is the one who by His death on the cross has made satisfaction for our sins. We are also justified through "faith." Article IV uses the Scripture references of Romans 3:28 and Galatians 3:14 and understands faith as the opposite of the righteousness of the law. God's grace and faith go together. Through faith we receive the grace of God; we receive His righteousness. Through this same faith the promise of God becomes a reality for me and in me. Faith is the realization that for Christ's sake I have attained the righteousness promised through Christ. Luther and the Reformers made faith the only way by which men could receive God's grace. This faith could only be bestowed and received. It makes God rather than man the origin and center of salvation. Because faith is trust in the atonement of Christ, faith honors Christ and clings to Him and to Him alone.

The nature of justification in Article IV is twofold: the reckoning to one's account of the righteousness

of Christ, and secondly, that for Christ's sake the believers' sins are not taken into account. We are received into favor by God. It is God's act and it thus removes a believer from among nonbelievers into the category of the righteous or saved. It is not that he is righteous, but God sees Christ to whom the believer clings and attributes to him Christ's righteousness. Justification thus is an act of God which remits the sins of a believer and brings him into fellowship with Him, for Christ's sake.

What the Augsburg Confession says about the connection between faith and justification is clear. The doctrine of justification is the doctrine of faith. It is for Christ's sake that we are justified and it is for Christ's sake that our sins are forgiven. Righteousness before God is where the forgiveness of sins results. We are not justified before God by our own strength, merits or works, but we are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith which believes that sins are forgiven. This faith God imputes for righteousness before Himself.

#### The Roman Catholic Confutation

Charles V, upon hearing the Augsburg Confession, still hoped that doctrinal consensus might be achieved between the Roman Catholics and the Reformers. He selected twenty Confutators from the Roman Catholic position and asked them to prepare a response. Under John Eck they produced a document and presented it to the emperor on

August 3, 1530. This document is called the Confutatio Pontificia, or more commonly called the Confutation. The Confutation accepted parts of the Augsburg Confession and rejected others. It rejected Article IV on justification by faith of the Augsburg Confession.

The Confutation denied that "men are born without fear of God, without trust in God."<sup>11</sup> It also declared that concupiscence is not a sin. The Roman Catholics maintained that concupiscence does remain after baptism, and it may be called a "sin" as St. Augustine referred to it, in the sense that all are born children of wrath. Such language, they said, applied only to adults, and not to infants, and then it only refers to actual sin.

With regard to justification, the Confutation asserted that it was indeed a Pelagian error to say that one can merit grace by one's own powers alone, without the grace of God. There was also agreement that the Holy Spirit is given by Word and Sacraments, as by instruments. But, in the area of faith the Roman Catholics said:

The mention, however, that they make of faith is approved so far as not faith alone, which some incorrectly teach, but faith which worketh by love, is understood, as the apostle teaches aright in Gal. 5:3. For in baptism there is an infusion, not of faith alone, but also, at the same time, of hope and love.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Confutation stated that faith works through love which is infused. Justification is not to be attributed to faith alone, since to the Roman Catholics that presumed a depreciation of love, a denial of merits, and a prohibition

of good works. John Eck contended that of the two, faith and love, love is more necessary than faith for justification. Melanchthon insisted that the word "caritas" (love) turned one's thoughts to human ability rather than to God's work in a person. The Confutation described the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith as:

. . . diametrically opposite the truth of the Gospel, by which works are not excluded on this account. Their frequent ascription of justification to faith is not admitted, since it pertains to grace and love. St. Paul certifies to the princes and the entire Church that faith alone does not justify.<sup>13</sup>

The Confutation also rejected Article XX of the Augsburg Confession dealing with faith and good works. The Reformers said that good works do not merit the remission of sins. The Roman Catholic Confutation rejected this position. It stated:

Nor by this do we reject Christ's merit, but we know that our works are nothing and of no merit unless by virtue of Christ's passion. . . . Christ . . . has given us an example that as he has done we also should do, John 13:15. He also went through the desert by the way of good works, which all Christians ought to pursue, and according to his command bear the cross and follow him.<sup>14</sup>

John Eck contended that excluding good works from justification would destroy the "Catholic" way of salvation which was based on virtue and merit. If Christians would accept the teaching that faith alone is sufficient for salvation and that works were not necessary, then the conclusion that John Eck came to was that the Christian would do no good works and consequently would not acquire merits. Without merits,

there would be no salvation. From Eck's perspective, then only faith which does good works on account of love is able to justify. The principle of faith alone threatened the core of "Catholic" soteriology.

Thus the differences remained and the emperor insisted that the theologians from both sides meet so that they could overcome the impasse. No such agreement could be reached and the conflict between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics intensified.

#### Justification in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Charles V endorsed the Confutatio and wanted the Lutherans to subscribe to it also. Not surprisingly, they refused to comply. Melanchthon was once again commissioned to defend the Lutheran cause. In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, he argued that in the controversy with the Roman Catholic Church the main doctrine of Christianity was involved, namely the doctrine of justification by faith. The Apology became not only a refutation of the Confutatio, but also a defense and an elaboration of the Augsburg Confession, presenting theological proofs for the correctness of its teachings. The document states that those who hold to the Augsburg Confession hold to the correct and true Gospel. In rebutting the condemnation of the Roman Catholics, Melanchthon provides a Christological interpretation of what is named as the chief article of Christian doctrine.

F. Bente, who was a Lutheran confessional historian and scholar, says that in the Apology, as well as in the Augsburg Confession:

. . . Everything springs from, and is regulated by, the fundamental Lutheran principle of Law and Gospel, sin and grace, faith and justification.<sup>15</sup>

The Apology again emphasizes the fact that men do not receive the forgiveness of sins because of their own merits, but freely for Christ's sake, by faith in Him. This, when properly understood, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need. The Apology argues that the opponents only focus on the doctrine of the law and by it they seek forgiveness of sins and justification.

Here the scholastics have followed the philosophers. Thus they teach only the righteousness of reason - that is, civil works - and maintain that without the Holy Spirit reason can love God above all things. . . . In this way the scholastics teach men to merit the forgiveness of sins by doing what is within them, that is, if reason in its sorrow over sin elicits an act of love to God or does good for God's sake. Because this view naturally flatters men, it has produced and increased many types of worship in the church, like monastic vows and the abuses of the Mass; someone has always been making up this or that form of worship or devotion with this view in mind. To support and increase trust in such works, the scholastics have declared that by necessity - the necessity of unchanging order, not of compulsion - God grants grace to those who do this.

In this point of view there are many vicious errors that would take a long time to enumerate. . . . If we merit the forgiveness of sins by these elicited acts of ours, of what use is Christ?<sup>16</sup>

The Confutatio affirmed that original sin is truly sin, but the Roman Catholics could not agree with the definition of original sin as being without the fear of God and



without trust in God. Also, the Roman Catholics disagreed with the statement in the Augsburg Confession that concupiscence remains after baptism. The Apology showed that original sin is a lack of power to do good deeds and it is also an inclination to do evil. Original sin is not just a defect or a condition in mankind. This was directed against Zwingli who had called original sin a disease or condition. Secondly, the Apology said that concupiscence remains after baptism. Augustine had taught that, as did St. Paul in Romans 7:7, 23. The Roman Catholic Church wanted to call concupiscence not a sin but only a burden. The Roman Church was accustomed to the Latin term "fomes" -- a dry tinder always ready to burst into flame. By this they meant an inclination which was essentially physical, fleshly.<sup>17</sup> Luther taught that the guilt of concupiscence remaining after baptism is removed by Christ's merits, yet the Christian must always struggle against concupiscence. It is only through Christ, whose merits are applied to the sinner by the washing of water by the Word of God, that he, being regenerated, may be cleansed from sin and renewed through the Holy Spirit. The material remnant of original sin remains even in those who are baptized. St. Paul, who was washed and sanctified through Baptism, yet complained that the radical nature of sin still dwelled in his flesh, and that it does so in such a way that

it begets in him all kinds of concupiscence in the fact that it takes him captive under the law, which is in his

members, so that he must continually through the Spirit fight with himself against the indwelling sin and pray that for the sake of Christ, God the Heavenly Father would not impute those natural sins.<sup>18</sup>

St. Paul also points out that the effect of Baptism is twofold, namely regeneration and renewal. Sins are washed away in remission through Baptism by the Word of God, so that they are not imputed, if they who are baptized remain in Christ through faith. Their guilt is taken away by the merits of Christ. This remission is not half or partial, but full, perfect, and complete. Also, in the place of the loss of original righteousness, the Holy Spirit begins renewal by crucifying and mortifying the original depravity with its actions. But

this benefit of renewal is not perfectly completed in this life so that that corrupt root of original depravity is completely taken away and uprooted out of our nature in this life. But the Holy Ghost works, continues, and increases that mortification and renewal, which has been begun, through this whole life in those who have been reborn.<sup>19</sup>

The remnants of original sin in the baptized are in themselves not a good thing, but an evil thing and in conflict with the divine law of God. It is truly and in itself sin, even as St. Paul says in Romans 7:17. Therefore,

it is a thing damnable in itself and worthy of eternal death, if God would want to test it according to the statement of the Law, according to the strictness of His judgment, if it were not that it is not imputed from damnation to those who by faith are and remain in Christ Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

Melanchthon noted that the Roman Catholic Church argued for a distinction between "meritum congrui" (merit

ascribed to works done before infusion of grace) and "meritum condigni" (the merit or works performed after the infusion of grace). In this distinction, he saw a stress on the righteousness of reason, which could only lead a person to despair. The righteousness of reason, used as a basis for the remission of sins, involved four errors: that one can merit pardon; that one is justified by works; that one can by nature love God; and that one can be sinless.

Melanchthon said that by nature one cannot love God and that everyone was guilty of sin and could not merit pardon from God by keeping the law. But, justification is a free promise, given by God so that a sinful person could obtain pardon and peace through faith. The adversaries, he said, teach only the merit of works.

In the Apology Melanchthon also stated that justifying faith is not just mere knowledge of history, but is the "firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification."<sup>21</sup> It is not only knowledge, but also consent and trust. It is the assent to the promise of God in which the remission of sins is freely offered. In this, three things must be remembered: the promise is given by God, the promise is free, and the merits of Christ are the price and propitiation. Justifying faith accepts God's offer of mercy, for "faith does not justify or save because it is a good work in itself, but only because it accepts the promise of mercy."<sup>22</sup>

Faith comes through the means of grace when Law and Gospel are preached. First there is the terror of the heart, then there is the consolation of the Gospel. It is this faith in Jesus Christ that justifies. What does to be justified mean? It means:

to make unrighteous men righteous or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous. For the Scripture speaks both ways. Therefore we want to show first that faith alone makes a righteous man out of an unrighteous one, that it receives the forgiveness of sins.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the Apology of the Augsburg Confession maintains that the forgiveness of sins is the same as being justified. Faith alone justifies because we receive the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit by faith alone. The Roman Catholic Church was opposed to the word "alone." The Roman Church had condemned the Lutheran Confessors at Augsburg precisely on the point of "sola fide." It was not by faith alone, the Roman Church stated, but rather by faith which works through love. But the Apology maintains that it is by faith alone, for the very reason why Christ was given for us is so that we might believe that we are justified because of Him, and not because of ourselves. Against the Roman Catholic Confutation, the Confession maintains:

If faith receives the forgiveness of sins on account of love, the forgiveness of sins will always be unsure, for we never love as much as we should. In fact, we do not love at all unless our hearts are sure that the forgiveness of sins has been granted to us. If our opponents require us to trust in our own love for the forgiveness of sins and justification, they completely abolish the Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins.<sup>24</sup>

Love cannot justify, only Christ.

The exclusion of good works from the doctrine of justification is necessary because works, whether they occur before one is justified or after, cannot bring God's verdict of righteousness to a person. The inclusion of good works would necessarily deny the value of Christ's vicarious atonement. We do not receive the forgiveness of sins through love or on account of love, but on account of Christ by faith alone. Faith alone, looking to the promise and believing with full assurance that God forgives because Christ did not die in vain, conquers the terrors of sin and death. Melanchthon stated that if someone doubted that his sins were forgiven, he insulted Christ. The Apology states that our works obscure the glory of Christ when we try to offer them to God as a price and a propitiation, thus giving to our works the honor that belongs to Christ alone. Secondly, there is no peace of conscience in a person because he does not know when he has done enough works to please God. Thirdly, it is said that people never attain the knowledge of God, for in their anger they flee from his judgment. It is only through faith that we have the assurance that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. The reason that Christ, and not our works, is to be the Propitiator is clear, for only Christ, the Mediator can be pitted against the wrath and judgment of God.<sup>25</sup> Melanchthon makes it clear:

They imagine that good works, done with the help of a "disposition" of love, are a worthy righteousness that please God of itself and earns eternal life without needing Christ the Mediator. If we want to please God because of our works and not because of Christ, what else is this but a transfer of Christ's glory to our works, a destruction of his glory as mediator?<sup>26</sup>

Thus the relationship between Christ's vicarious work and justification and faith is clearly seen. It is at the heart of the Apology. The Apology showed that the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith was taught in the Scriptures and affirmed by the ancient church. This doctrine of justification by faith was a contrast to that of the Confutation and the Church of Rome. They taught that justification was based on meritorious works "de congruo" or "de condigno," which were based on human reason. Justification became an inclination which was also meritorious. But neither left a place for Christ or faith. Neither was scriptural. Love, which was truly the fulfilling of the law was, however, something that an unregenerated person could not do. There was no wavering on this main doctrine of the Church on the part of the Reformers. Having grasped what was basic in the doctrine of justification, the Apology repeatedly declares it.

#### The Formula of Concord

The period of time between the Apology of 1530 and the adoption of the Formula of Concord in 1577 was marked by theological strife, ecclesiastical confusion, and political turmoil. After Luther's death in 1546, the emperor, Charles

V, had wanted to crush the Reform movement and to reduce the Lutherans to obedience to the Pope once more, not by theology, however, but by force. He forced the Augsburg Interim of 1548 in which he wanted to regulate the affairs of the Church until the religious controversies would be finally settled by the Council of Trent. In the ecclesiastical confusion of the Augsburg Interim, in regard to the doctrine of justification by faith, it was taught that justification also embraced renewal, clearly omitting the "sola fide" of the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Interim also declared that when God justifies a man, He does not absolve him only from guilt, but that he is also made better by the imparting of the Holy Spirit. This for the Roman Catholics was an essential part of justification. The Holy Spirit "cleanses his heart and incites through the love of God which is shed abroad in his heart."<sup>27</sup> The Augsburg Interim taught also that a man is absolved from the guilt of eternal damnation and renewed through the Holy Spirit, and thus an unjust person became just and that the love of God was infused, along with faith and hope, into that person. The Augsburg Interim stated that "we are truly justified by the infused righteousness which is in man; for this righteousness consists in faith, hope, and love."<sup>28</sup> The Augsburg Interim thus negated most of the important theological truths of the Augsburg Confession.

Because of the lack of success in enforcing the Augsburg Interim, church and governmental leaders called for a compromise which would be more favorable to both the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans. This compromise became known as the Leipzig Interim. The Leipzig Interim became a unionistic document that sacrificed many of the same Lutheran principles as the Augsburg Interim did. Bente notes that Tschackert was correct when he maintained that in the articles of justification "the fundamental thoughts of the Reformation doctrine were catholicized" by the Leipzig Interim.<sup>29</sup> Once again the Lutheran "sola fide" was omitted in the article of justification. The entire doctrine was presented in such a fashion as to allow the Roman Catholic Church to interpret it in the sense of their own doctrine of "infused righteousness." Faith was added also to the other virtues of hope and love, and good works were declared necessary for salvation. Justification by faith was so changed that it meant:

. . . that man is renewed by the Holy Spirit, and can fulfill righteousness with his works, and that God will, for His Son's sake, accept in believers this weak beginning of obedience in this miserable, frail nature.<sup>30</sup>

Other important doctrines of the Lutheran faith were also changed or passed by in silence.

There were two other controversies that also drastically affected the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. The Majoristic Controversy arose when George Major



of the University of Wittenberg declared and taught that good works were necessary for salvation. The second controversy was the Osiandrian Controversy, when Andrea Osiander interpreted the doctrine of justification as involving only the divine nature of Christ and his union with the believer. It was acknowledged that a person is justified by faith in Christ. But is it by his divine nature or is it by his human nature that the necessary merit is provided? Osiander had said that Christ, who dwells in the believer, by his divine nature provides an abundant righteousness in comparison with which a man's sin is like a drop in the ocean. Therefore, one is justified by infusion rather than imputation, by the sanctifying presence of Christ instead of his saving merits. In contrast, Francesco Stancaro, an Italian professor, had said that Christ is our righteousness only according to his human nature.<sup>31</sup>

When Osiander and others challenged the doctrine of justification by faith as presented by Melanchthon in the Augsburg Confession and in the Apology, the opportunity arose for the authors of the Formula of Concord to restate the Lutheran position with even more clarity. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 had recognized the legal right of the churches of the Augsburg Confession to exist within the empire. The Peace of Augsburg extended equal rights to the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans in the empire; no other Evangelicals were recognized. Each lay prince determined

which of these two faiths would be professed in his territory. This principle is usually defined as "cujus regio, ejus religio." Thus the Lutherans acquired full legal establishment. The result of this can be seen later in the Formula of Concord which became the theological answer to the discord and disunity of the Lutherans in the empire. The Formula of Concord would purify the Lutheran Church from Romanism, Calvinism, unionism, synergism, and other errors.

Osiander drove a wedge between the atonement of Christ and justification. He said, "For this reason it cannot, properly speaking, have been, nor be called, our justification, but only our redemption and the atonement for us and our sins."<sup>32</sup> Justification became an act of internal purification of sin:

Therefore the other part of the office of our dear and faithful Lord and mediator Jesus Christ is now to turn toward us in order to deal also with us poor sinners, as with the guilty party, that we may acknowledge such great grace and gratefully receive it by faith, in order that He by faith may make us alive and just from the death of sin, and that sin which is already forgiven, but nevertheless still dwells and inheres in our flesh, may be altogether mortified and destroyed in us. And this, first of all, is the act of our justification.<sup>33</sup>

Justification was not the forgiveness of sins, rather it was the indwelling of the essential righteousness of Christ, that is, his righteousness by which he was righteous according to his divine nature.

Osiander's position was unique, but it was not in agreement with Luther, the teachers of the Augsburg Confession, nor even with Rome! The Formula made it clear that

justification and forgiveness of sins are identical. It stated:

. . . concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accord with the summary formulation of our Christian faith and confession described above, that a poor sinner is justified before God (that is, he is absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life) without any merit or worthiness. . .<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the Formula restated the Lutheran positions, already thoroughly taught in the Apology, on the relationship between atonement and justification and the consequent view of faith as pure receptivity.

Faith is a gift of God whereby we rightly learn to know Christ as our redeemer in the Word of the Gospel and to trust in him, that solely for the sake of his obedience we have forgiveness of sins and grace, are accounted righteous and holy by God the Father, and are saved forever.<sup>35</sup>

"To know Christ as our redeemer" and "to have forgiveness of sins" are here identified as the same thing, thus there is an organic unity between Christ's atonement and justification, that is, the one is the necessary correlative of the other. This is why the Formula also, as the Apology, gave faith a purely receptive role.

For faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold on and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the Gospel.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, there is no difference between justification as taught in the Apology and as taught in the Formula of Concord.

Only faith can accept the promise of God. Three elements in

this discussion always belong together: the promise itself, the fact that the promise is free, and the merits of Christ. This is accepted by faith. Faith justifies only because it clings to promised mercy. The Apology had already noted:

When a man believes that his sins are forgiven because of Christ, this personal faith obtains the forgiveness of sins and justifies us.<sup>37</sup>

Justification effects two realities: 1) absolution from sin; and 2) the adoption as a child of God by grace through the obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Justifying faith also produces good works. But faith never receives forgiveness of sins on account of good works nor any other kind of deeds that a person could do.

The Formula pointed out very carefully that:

the contrition that precedes justification, and the good works that follow it do not belong in the article of justification before God. Nevertheless, we should not imagine a kind of faith in this connection that could coexist and co-persist with a wicked intention to sin and to act contrary to one's conscience. On the contrary, after a person has been justified by faith, a true living faith becomes "active through love" (Gal. 5:6). Thus good works always follow justifying faith and are certainly to be found with it, since such faith is never alone but is always accompanied by love and hope.<sup>38</sup>

Are good works meritorious? The Lutheran Confessions would say: yes, but they do not merit justification. Good works do bring spiritual rewards both in this life and in that which is to come. Even faith is itself a good work. It does not justify as a good work, however, but only because faith lays hold on the merits of Christ in the promise of the gospel.<sup>39</sup>

The Formula clearly lays out the order of salvation: first comes the Word, then is begotten faith which lays hold on the merits of Christ, whereupon a person is justified, and good works follow. In this discussion, however, it clearly and carefully distinguishes from what precedes and from what follows in justification. The doctrine thus serves two purposes, to console the believer and to honor Christ. Moreover, it is clearly recorded that the righteousness of Christ whereby we are justified is neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ by itself, but only the obedience of the person who is God and man at the same time. Faith looks to the person of Christ and to Christ alone, for faith is the only means by which a sinner accepts Christ and in Christ obtains the righteousness which counts before God, since for the sake of Christ alone faith is reckoned for righteousness.

Thus the Third Article of the Formula of Concord rejects the error of Stancarus as well as that of Osiander. Against the latter it maintains that the active and passive obedience of Christ is our righteousness before God, and over against the former, that this obedience was the act of the entire person of Christ, and not of His human nature alone. It also rejects some of the Romanizing errors concerning justification in the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims.

The Council of Trent

The Council of Trent restated and defined the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. Twenty-five sessions were held at Trent in three periods of time: 1544-1547, 1551-1552, and 1562-1563. Its decrees on justification were decisive for the subsequent development of the Roman Catholic Church's theology. The Decree of the Sixth Session, the Eighth Topic entitled "Concerning Justification," is preceded by a treatment of the need that mankind has for Jesus Christ, and his saving action in their lives. This was focused on in the doctrine of original sin. The Council of Trent stressed the desperate plight of man when he is left to his own resources, and then insisted on the efficacy of the measures that God has provided in Jesus Christ by way of remedy. The Council of Trent stated that original sin is a condition which affects the whole human race and that such sin and the punishment due to it are remitted by the grace of God in baptism. Mankind needs the universal redemption of Christ, who came to repair fallen men and whose grace is to be applied to individual persons in justification. Trent stated that "unless they were born again in Christ, they would never be justified."<sup>40</sup> Trent said that all men, except Christ and the Virgin Mary, come into the world, not as just, but as sinners. The universal reign of sin involves man's inability to be what he should be under God. Human sinfulness means forfeiture of the supernatural life of

grace. It also means congenital debility for doing what is right, or concupiscence. No man is just of himself; justification is a gift to man from God. Justification itself

. . . is not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inner man through voluntary acceptance of grace and of the gifts by which an unjust person becomes a just one and an enemy becomes a friend, that he may be an heir according to the hope of eternal life.<sup>41</sup>

In the minds of the fathers of Trent, whatever is truly and properly sin is taken away and is not merely brushed over or not imputed. Trent said,

If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred through Baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted or even assents that the whole of that which has the true and essential nature of sin is not taken away but that it is only marked out or not imputed, let him be anathema!<sup>42</sup>

But in their teaching this does not mean that concupiscence does not remain:

This holy synod confesses and understands that there remains in the baptized concupiscence, or a tinder, which indeed, since it has been left in order that we may combat it, cannot harm those who do not consent to it but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ. . . . This concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin in the sense that is truly and properly sin in the regenerate: but because it is from sin and inclines to sin.<sup>43</sup>

Thus Trent said that concupiscence comes from sin and leads to sin, but it is not by its mere presence a sin before it is freely consented to by the individual. Trent taught both the reality of the remission of sin and its imperfection because of the remaining concupiscence.

The inner man is made holy and is renewed through the voluntary reception of God's grace and gifts. In justification men are reborn and are given justifying grace so that they, as unjust persons, may become friends, heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Grace and charity are infused into man, and inhere in him. The formal cause of this is

the righteousness of God, not that by which He is Himself righteous but that by which He makes us righteous, or that by which we, being endowed by Him are renewed in the spirit of our mind and are not only reputed to be, but are truly, called and are righteous, receiving the righteousness in us, everyone his own, according to the measure which the Holy Spirit imparts.<sup>44</sup>

This insistence is aimed at excluding the Protestant view of forensic justification without an objective change in man. To be justified forensically means that justification comes to a sinner from without by the judgment of God, by His imputation and by His reckoning. Melancthon said in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession that forensic justification meant to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous and to do so on account of someone else's righteousness, namely Christ's, which is communicated to him through faith.<sup>45</sup> Trent restated the position that a man was not only considered just, but he truly is said to be just and is just. Chemnitz said concerning Trent

that the justification of the ungodly before God to life eternal is not solely the remission of sins but also the sanctification of the inner man. And they maintain that the only formal cause of justification is the righteousness donated to us by God, by which we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, so that we are not only reputed



to be, but truly are called, and are, righteous, receiving righteousness in ourselves, which they say is the love inhering in us, which the Holy Spirit works in us through the merit of the passion of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Chemnitz's conclusion was that Trent taught that justification was based on renovation.

The reception of God's grace and gifts is voluntary. It includes a free movement on man's part, a free movement toward God in faith, hope, and charity. On grace that is given in justification, the Council decreed several points of doctrine. The first is that grace is given in varying degrees to various persons, depending on the good pleasure of the Holy Spirit and on each person's disposition. This teaching, they said, sets aside on the inequality of grace which was the error of Pelagianism and also the error of Protestantism which claimed equal grace for all. Second, grace is capable of increasing and is meant to increase. It actually grows by good and meritorious works which the just do in keeping with the commandments of God. Rome speaks of justification as a process in which sanctifying grace is infused into the soul. This sanctifying grace makes the soul intrinsically pleasing and holy in the sight of God and also enables the soul to do good works, which are truly meritorious in the sight of God. Man is not fully justified before God, until, with the help of sanctifying grace, every trace of sin is removed from the soul. A certain preparation is said to be necessary before

the process of justification can begin. This is described by the Council of Trent

Now they (adults) are disposed unto the said justice, when, excited and assisted by divine grace, conceiving faith by hearing, they are freely moved towards God, believing those things to be true which God has revealed and promised, and this especially, that God justifies the impious by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and when, understanding themselves to be sinners, they, by turning themselves, from fear of divine justice whereby they are profitably agitated, to consider the mercy of God, are raised unto hope, confiding that God will be propitious to them for Christ's sake. . .<sup>47</sup>

It is important to note that it is man that performs all these steps by his own free will without any assistance from God. The steps of faith, fear, hope, love and hatred of sin necessitate a free will in man. Rome said in the teachings of the Council of Trent that all men had lost their innocence in the prevarication of Adam, having become unclean, and that they now were under the power of the devil and of death, but that free will "attenuated as it was in its powers, and bent down, was by no means extinguished in them."<sup>48</sup> Thus the Council said that even in the state of unbelief, man is able to decide for God and do works that please Him. By its doctrine on free will, the Council of Trent repudiated the Protestant view of justification by faith alone. The Council also taught that grace can be lost, and is actually lost, by every mortal sin, and not only by just the sin of infidelity.

The Council of Trent also enumerated, with the help of Scholastic causal categories, several other causes of

justification besides the formal cause. It said that the final cause is the glory of God and Christ, and life eternal. The efficient cause is God Himself in His gratuitous mercy. The meritorious cause is our Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed man by His passion on the cross. The instrumental cause is Baptism which is the sacrament of faith. Thus, in this teaching, it is noted that the whole Trinity is involved in the doctrine of justification. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all mentioned as having a role in man's justification, although the stress is on created grace. This grace of justification, according to the Council, entails a new relation or union with the Trinity.

Justification in the doctrines of the Council of Trent imply the true remission of sin or removal from the state of sin. God cannot consider one as just or as a non-sinner without making him just. As God gives grace, so God alone forgives sins. The infusion of grace and God's gifts, according to Trent, means therefore the restoration of a sinner before God. Through grace, with faith, hope, and charity, man effectively looks to God for his salvation. Justification is the changeover in a repentant sinner in which God moves him from a state of sin to the state of grace. God's action consists of forgiving sin and infusing grace; man's cooperation entails the recession from sin through contrition and accession to grace and God through living faith--or faith, hope and charity in one's life. The

sinner cooperates with this grace, at least in the sense of not sinfully rejecting it. Influenced by God's grace and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the believer believes the truth of God's revelation and God's promises. Thus the initiative comes from God's grace and not from man's free will, yet it requires man's free cooperation. The Council of Trent thus taught that in justification the unmerited grace of God touches the sinner's heart and calls him to repentance and faith. The sinner may, of his own power, then either accept or reject this grace of God. If he accepts it and turns to God, he receives, through baptism, full forgiveness of his past sins. Secondly, the sinner, by the renewal of his inner nature, is himself transformed into an intrinsically just man. As a just man he is able to do good and perfect works, which fulfill the demands of God's law, render satisfaction for sin, and merit rewards of God, including eternal life. This means that the Roman Catholic believer still lives under the burden of the law, because he is constantly trying to do the deeds of the law in order to merit the rewards of God so that he can be justified. His life is one of trying to please God in his attempt to fulfill the demands of the law, rather than living under the joy of the good news of the Gospel which tells him that Jesus has already fulfilled the entire law by His death on the cross, and that the works of man contribute nothing to man's salvation. The works of man such as mortification of

the flesh, fasting, prayers and deeds of merit (including material merit, such as feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, redeeming the captives, etc., or spiritual acts of merit, such as instructing the ignorant, comforting the sorrowful, patiently enduring insults, forgiving human frailties, etc.) have no merit before God as the Scriptures clearly testify that it is through faith alone in Christ's merit that a man is justified. Man's imperfect works can claim no merit before Him (Luke 17:10). Living under the fear and burden of the law does not claim any merit either before God. Thus, by the end of the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church were going in divergent directions in their respective teachings on justification by faith.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 15.

<sup>2</sup>The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 30: 1-31.

<sup>3</sup>The Augsburg Confession - A Collection of Sources, J. M. Reu, ed. (Concordia Seminary Press, 1966), 41.

<sup>4</sup>Book of Concord, 31-32: 1-3.

<sup>5</sup>Reu, 42.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Amer. Ed., vol. 11: Psalms (1513-1515), trans. and ed. John W. Dobbstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>8</sup>Uuras Saarnivaara, Luther Discovers the Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 70.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>11</sup>Reu, 350.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 352.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 359.

<sup>15</sup>F. Bente, Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 44.

<sup>16</sup>Tappert, 108-109; 9-12.

<sup>17</sup>Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies in the Lutheran Confessions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), 147.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Chemnitz, Ministry, Word, and Sacraments - An Enchiridion, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 63.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Book of Concord, 114: 50.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 114:56.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 117:72.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 123: 110.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 135: 204-205.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 156: 316-317.

<sup>27</sup>Bente, 96.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Allbeck, 262.

<sup>32</sup>Bente, 156.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>34</sup>Book of Concord, 540-541: 9.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 541: 11.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 541: 13.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 113: 45.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 474: 11.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 541: 13.

<sup>40</sup>Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. Fred Krammer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 1:457.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 458.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 335.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 459.

<sup>45</sup>Tappert, 154: 305.

<sup>46</sup>Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent,  
1:515.

<sup>47</sup>J. Waterworth, Council of Trent (London: C. Dolman,  
61, New Bond Street, 1848), 33.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 31.



CHAPTER III  
THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN  
LUTHERAN - ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCUMENTS  
(1972-1983)

The Gospel and the Church  
(Malta Report) - 1972

In order to determine how the doctrine of justification by faith is understood and represented in Justification by Faith - Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Dialogue - VII, it is, first of all, necessary to examine the three documents which have been issued in the dialogues between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics between 1972 and 1983. The first document that was issued was The Gospel and the Church, or more commonly known as the Malta Report.<sup>1</sup> The Malta Report was issued by the Joint Committee of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic study commission which was appointed by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. Under the theme, The Gospel and the Church, this Joint Commission discussed the theological questions which were of essential significance for the continued improvement for the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church.

The Malta Report is composed of an introduction and

four sections. Each section focuses on the relation between the Gospel and (1) tradition, (2) the world, (3) the office of the ministry, and (4) the unity of the church. For this examination, it is necessary only to focus primarily on the Gospel and tradition, because they present the scope of the discussion and the consensus reached about the doctrine of justification by faith.

The introduction of the Malta Report explained the origins of the document and explained how the Joint Commission understood and met its task. It stated that both the Lutherans and Roman Catholics were convinced that the traditionally disputed theological issues between the two church bodies were still of importance, but that these appear

in a different light "through the emergence of the modern world" and because of new insights in the natural, social and historical sciences and in biblical theology.<sup>2</sup>

In view of these insights the Joint Commission agreed to engage in a serious discussion of theological issues and thus to "identify and eliminate misunderstandings and causes of irritation."<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the Joint Commission did not deal with the theological controversies of the sixteenth century as such, but rather the Joint Commission was to "examine once again the confessional differences in the light of contemporary biblical theology and church history as well as of perspectives opened up by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>4</sup> For such purposes the term "gospel" became a key

term in the dialogue; hence the theme of the document, The Gospel and the Church. The members of the Joint Commission were convinced that within the framework of their theme they had

achieved a noteworthy and far-reaching consensus. This consensus extends not only to the theological understanding of the gospel of its basic and normative importance for the church and of its christological and soteriological center but also to closely related and highly important points of doctrine which until now have been controversial.<sup>5</sup>

The Joint Commission did not see the remaining differences, that is, the understanding of apostolic succession, papal primacy, and so forth, as a hindrance to church fellowship.

Working with the limitations of the dialogue, the introduction calls attention to the fact that the Roman Catholics can quote the Second Vatican Council and other recent statements of their magisterium, while the Lutherans were confined to their sixteenth century confessions. In the dialogue this made it "difficult to present authoritatively the diversity, freedom and strengths of the actual life and witness to the faith in today's Lutheran churches."<sup>6</sup> The introduction of the Malta Report also mentions that the document has no binding character for the churches, but that it would contribute to the clarification and improvement of relationships between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church.

The first section of the Malta Report centers on "The Gospel and Tradition." It is stated in the report that the

ultimate separation between the Lutherans and the Catholics at the time of the Reformation was over the issue of the right understanding of the Gospel. Because of the change in the historical situation, as well as theological methods and ways of stating questions, it was necessary for the Joint Commission to determine whether the unity of the church today can be a unity which is based on the truth of the Gospel. In order to determine how Lutherans and Roman Catholics understand the Gospel today, it was necessary to ask how the primitive church's kerygma (preaching) was related to Jesus' proclamation. There was a consensus among the Joint Commission that "the gospel rests fundamentally on the witness to the Easter event. What God has done for the salvation of the world in Jesus Christ is transmitted in the gospel and made present in the Holy Spirit."

The Joint Committee also discussed the criteria for the church's proclamation. The conclusion reached was that neither "sola scriptura" nor formal references to the authoritativeness of the magisterial office were sufficient, but that the Holy Spirit establishes the Christ event as an act of salvation, and this then becomes the criteria. Since there also was a concern for a single truth that remains constant throughout the diversity of traditions, the Joint Commission asked what the foundation and the center of the Gospel was which the church's manifold testimony tried to convey and unfold in ever-different historical situations.

According to the Malta Report the foundation and center of the Gospel "is constituted by the eschatological saving act of God in Jesus' cross and resurrection."<sup>8</sup> All proclamation of the church strives to explicate the meaning of this message.

The search for the center of the Gospel made it necessary for both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics to define how they understood justification by faith alone. The Malta Report said that "a far-reaching consensus is developing in the interpretation of justification."<sup>9</sup> Two extremely compact statements in the report point out this consensus. The Lutherans and the Roman Catholics each replied to the criticisms that were addressed to them concerning the doctrine of justification by faith at the time of the Reformation. To the main Reformation reproach about "justification by works," and the giving up of "the gratuitousness of the gift of salvation," the Roman Catholics replied:

Catholic theologians also emphasize in reference to justification that God's gift of salvation for the believer is unconditional as far as human accomplishments are concerned.<sup>10</sup>

To the chief reproach formulated by the Roman Catholic Church, namely that justification was reduced to something purely forensic in the Reformation Churches, with no real renewal of the person, the Lutherans replied:

Lutheran theologians emphasize that the event of justification is not limited to individual forgiveness of sins, and they do not see in it a purely external decla-

ration of the justification of the sinner. Rather the righteousness of God actualized in the Christ event is conveyed to the sinner through the message of justification as an encompassing reality basic to the new life of the believer.<sup>11</sup>

In this sense justification can be understood as expressing the totality of the event of salvation, although it must be articulated ever anew as an important interpretation of the center of the Gospel. The Malta Report also points out that the event of salvation can be expressed comprehensively in other representations derived from the New Testament, such as reconciliation, freedom, redemption, new life and new creation. Therefore, the Joint Commission stated that a

far reaching agreement in the understanding of the doctrine of justification appears possible, although there is a question as to whether the Lutherans and Catholics assign the same role to this doctrine of justification and if they have the same regard for its consequences for the life and teaching of the church.<sup>12</sup>

There are several other statements about justification in the Malta Report that are significant. In the third section entitled "The Gospel and the Office of the Ministry," it is stated

Lutherans and Catholics share the conviction that we owe our salvation exclusively to the saving act of God accomplished once for all in Jesus Christ according to the witness of the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

This statement established a necessary connection between God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ and our salvation. It stresses the importance for Christ and Christ alone in providing for the sinner's justification.

Another statement concerning justification,

although the word "justification" is not used, is found in the section of "The Gospel and the Unity of the Church," where it is said that the Lord's Supper "is the reconciling acceptance of men through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> Even though the report expresses a Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper in this section of the document, it is significant that the report uses the phrase "reconciling acceptance" to describe the reality of the justification event.

Upon close inspection, the Malta Report reflects a compromise between the Lutherans with their high regard for justification by faith as "the main article of the Christian faith," and the critical view which regards justification as one of many representations of the core of the Gospel. The Malta Report takes for granted that the Lutherans and Roman Catholics are in agreement on the "story" of the Gospel. The divergence between the two church bodies does not concern the story of the Gospel, a story of God's deeds for our salvation, but the divergence is focused on the meaning of the Gospel, that is Christ's specific promise and offer of forgiveness of sin and righteousness. The divergence concerns itself more properly with the reception and use of the Gospel, in the proper and limited sense of the word.<sup>15</sup> The Malta Report concentrates on the understanding of the Gospel in the wide sense of the term and thus tries to state that both Lutherans and Roman Catholic theologians have the same

understanding of the Gospel and even of its center, God's eschatological act of salvation in Jesus' cross and resurrection. This gives a false impression of the meaning of the Gospel, for the Formula of Concord states that the difference between the broad (wide) and narrow senses of the Gospel consists simply of the fact that the "Gospel" in the broad sense includes the Law.<sup>16</sup> This means that the Gospel in the narrow sense is the whole revealed evangelical doctrine of salvation, everything in Scripture except the demands of the Law. The broad sense of the Gospel is not just merely generalized statements about Christ and grace; it includes the specific assertions of the Gospel in the narrow sense. Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church are not in doctrinal agreement about the Gospel in the broad sense, that is, they do not agree on the relationship of Law and Gospel. Nor are the Lutherans and Roman Catholics in agreement on "the center of the Gospel," which, if it means anything at all, must include the concept of imputed righteousness as the sole basis of justification.

The Malta Report does not say specifically that justification occurs because of Christ, as the Lutheran confessions repeatedly state. The report does say that there is a necessary connection between God's act in Christ and our salvation, but there is no agreement among the churches that justification occurs because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The Malta Report does not say



that it is through faith that people become righteous, since it is by faith that people accept and receive the gifts of righteousness and salvation offered and imparted by Christ. Even though the report refers to the life of a new believer that results from God's righteousness, "it does not at all discuss the justifying nature and function of faith in Christ. Thus the report avoided the question that brought about the Reformation."<sup>17</sup> The report stated that there was agreement between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics in that justification is God's unmerited doing and that justification effects new life. The question which the commission avoided was "how God's action involves man's action as well."<sup>18</sup> The Joint Commission also did not discuss the specifically Lutheran question as to how the righteous person can be treated as such even though he is imperfect in his new life and still has sin (*simul justus et peccator*).

The Malta Report shows, however, that Lutherans and Roman Catholics can work together, especially in the area of contemporary exegesis and other areas of common concern. The report encouraged a climate of mutual understanding and created favorable conditions between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics so that the two churches could continue to work together in their understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. This working together can be seen in the next document, All Under One Christ, the partial recognition of the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church by the

Roman Catholic Church.

All Under One Christ - 1980

On February 23, 1980, in Augsburg, Germany, the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and of the Lutheran World Federation issued a statement in view of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession entitled All Under One Christ.<sup>19</sup> All Under One Christ expresses the Joint Commission's stand on the possibility of a Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession and the implications this might have for better relations between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

All Under One Christ is composed of three sections. The first section describes the realignment that has taken place between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church since Vatican II and the ensuing reappraisal of the Augsburg Confession as the embodiment of the ecumenical resolve and catholic intention of the Reformation. The second section contains the measure of agreement reached by the Roman Catholic Church in its reexamination of the Augsburg Confession: a qualified recognition of its catholicity, a basic consensus on the doctrinal articles of the first section of the Augsburg Confession (Articles I - XXI), a broad consensus on the second section of the Augsburg Confession (Articles XXII - XXVIII), and an inventory of open questions and problems yet to be resolved. The third

section of the document encourages both Lutherans and Roman Catholics to articulate anew and confess together their common Christian faith rediscovered by their joint investigation of the Augsburg Confession.

The first section of All Under One Christ expresses the fact that there was a division between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church since the time of the Augsburg Confession, but that the situation now is considerably different from that in 1530. The Holy Spirit through the years has led to a greater unity and a deeper fellowship between the two church bodies. Since the Second Vatican Council, "striking convergences have been achieved and agreements reached on important controversial questions" that had earlier divided the two churches.<sup>20</sup> This convergence has led to greater co-operation and practical fellowship in a variety of forms between the two church bodies. After centuries of being apart, the Joint Commission felt a new sense among them that they were "all under one Christ."<sup>21</sup> The Augsburg Confession was used as a basis for the document All Under One Christ because of its content and structure which reflected the ecumenical purpose and catholic intention of the Reformation, and in the fact that the Augsburg confession is still a confessional document that is normative and binding for the Lutheran Church. It was expected that an agreement on the catholicity of this binding confession would enhance the reception of former

agreements and help them to acquire a "binding authority" as well.<sup>22</sup>

The second section of All Under One Christ is important for this study because of the amount of agreement in doctrine that the Roman Catholic Church has reached with the Lutheran Church by its reexamination of the Augsburg Confession, especially on justification by faith. The statement says,

The express purpose of the Augsburg Confession is to bear witness to the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Its concern is not with peculiar doctrines, nor indeed with the establishment of a new church (Confessio Augustana, 7:1), but with the preservation and renewal of the Christian faith in its purity -- in harmony with the ancient church, and "the Church of Rome" and in agreement with the witness of Holy Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

This conclusion is reinforced by recent Biblical and patristic studies, and by historical studies which have thrown new light on the conditions in the church, society, and even economics. These studies have illustrated how political and economic factors contributed to the division and estrangement at the time of the Reformation between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. Also, new research into the doctrinal history of the middle Ages, the time of the Reformation, and on the Roman Catholic Confutatio have brought to light new insights and findings and show that the division and the estrangement was not as deep as previously thought.

On the topic of justification by faith All Under One Christ states that

a broad consensus emerges in the doctrine of justification, which was decisively important for the Reformation (Confessio Augustana, 4). It is solely by grace and by faith in Christ's saving work, and not because of any merit in us, that we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to good works.<sup>24</sup>

And

the salvation accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection is bestowed on, and efficaciously appropriated by, humanity in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the Holy sacraments through the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the Joint Commission can state that both Lutherans and Roman Catholics have recovered a common understanding in basic beliefs that point to Jesus Christ, the living center of our faith.<sup>26</sup>

Upon closer analysis, All Under One Christ does not describe the role of Jesus Christ in salvation beyond saying that He is the One through whom God worked salvation. Silence is maintained concerning Jesus as Mediator and Propitiator whom the Augsburg Confession depicts as moving God the Father to justify the person who regards and trusts Him as such. There is silence also on Christ's being the believer's righteousness as the Augsburg Confession states so clearly.<sup>27</sup> In the statement on justification, the document of All Under One Christ speaks of "Christ's saving work," but it does not specify in what that work consists of, consequently, it remains unclear to what exactly faith believes concerning Christ. The Augsburg Confession specifically says that justifying faith believes that on Christ's account men are accepted and absolved from their sin, just

as the Gospel encourages us to believe.<sup>28</sup> The Augsburg Confession also says that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for all men's sins, and insists that Christ must by faith be regarded and resorted to as God's only cause for accepting the person who believes this.<sup>29</sup> God accepts and adopts us because of Christ.

All Under One Christ also states agreement in a clear understanding that justification is not the result of merit, since it holds that it is "not on the basis of merit" that we are accepted by God and we receive the Holy Spirit, but the Joint Commission does not explain what merit means in this context. Is it our merit or is it God's merit or some other kind of merit by which we are saved? For the Lutheran Church, faith looks to the merits of Christ alone, and not in anything man can do for himself. Man entrusts his salvation solely to Christ. For the Roman Catholic Church the Council of Trent stated and taught that eternal life (and therefore ultimate and final acceptance by God) is earned by merit, not that produced purely by man's own powers (though that also has a function), but that which is earned by the cooperation of divine grace and human effort.<sup>30</sup> Before a person produces this kind of merit, God gives him infused grace and the Spirit so that he can earn merit and eternal life. This means that God at the beginning accepts him even though the human merit he has earned without grace in preparing for justification is not good

enough to deserve the first installment of grace. If that first installment of infused grace would come to him as an infant in baptism, no merit of any kind has been earned, and God accepts the infant anyway. But when the process of justification has been begun, the person must continue to add his works and their merits to the initial acceptance by God, or he will be lost. Man still has the power of free will for it was not completely extinguished in the fall into sin, therefore, he is able to turn toward grace and cooperate with it.

The Joint Commission's document, All Under One Christ, represents a consensus between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics that is not as profound and deeply rooted as the Joint Commission assumed and proclaimed. Only a "broad consensus" was reached on the topic of justification by faith. Total agreement has not been reached, but the points of divergence have been clearly shown and stated. The Joint Commission had hoped that in the light of the present consensus answers to the still unsettled questions and problems could be found. Working together on this document

points the way to a confession of our faith here and now, with Catholics and Lutherans no longer divided and in opposition to each other, but bearing witness together to the message of the world's salvation in Jesus Christ and proclaiming this message as a renewed offer of the divine grace today.<sup>31</sup>

The continued hope of the Joint Commission is that the recognition of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic Church would go a long way toward dispelling prejudice and

also would result in ecclesiastical responsiveness, and perhaps future reconciliation in the Holy Spirit between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ - 1983

The Joint Commission of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church issued the document entitled Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ on May 6, 1983, in view of the approaching 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birthday celebration.<sup>32</sup> This document tries to convey what Roman Catholics and Lutherans can say together on Luther's person and role in light of the present historical situation. This was deemed necessary because of Luther's crucial influence on the history of the Church, of society, and of modern thought. This document gives a Roman Catholic image of Martin Luther and how his image has changed in the Roman Catholic Church since the sixteenth century.

The first section of the document calls attention to the historical factors which caused the conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church at the time of the Reformation and how today there is a reconciliation and a consensus in the central truths of the faith between the two church bodies. Luther is now being honored by the Roman Catholic Church as a "witness to the gospel, a teacher in the faith, and a herald of spiritual renewal."<sup>33</sup> Also, with the Roman Catholic limited acceptance of the Augsburg Confession, the document says this "facilitates the



common affirmation of fundamental perceptions of Luther."<sup>34</sup> These fundamental perceptions include Luther's call for church reform, to listening anew to the Gospel, and to recognizing one's own unfaithfulness to the Gospel and to witness credibly to it.

In the second section the Joint Commission describes Luther's witness to the Gospel which was arrived at by his intense study of the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments. The document maintains that Luther rediscovered the Biblical message of God's mercy. This Reformational rediscovery consisted in recognizing that God's righteousness is, in the light of Romans 1:7, a bestowal of righteousness, not a demand that condemns the sinner. In this insight the message of the Bible becomes one of joy, one of good news. The rediscovery of the Gospel opened for Luther the gate of paradise because a man lives by the mercy granted to him by God through Jesus Christ. Thus the doctrine of justification of the sinner through faith alone became the central point of Luther's theological thinking and of Luther's exegesis of the Scripture. Luther discovered anew that for those who suffered under the dominion of the law and from human ordinances, and who were tormented by their failures and by concerns for their eternal salvation, could gain assurance through faith in the Gospel of the liberating promise of God's grace.<sup>35</sup>

Although the opposing views and teachings of the

doctrine of justification by faith could not be accepted by either the Lutherans nor the Roman Catholics at the time of the Reformation, and was obscured and nullified by later polemics, today it is possible for the Roman Catholics to say in this document that the doctrine of justification by faith is "a legitimate form of Christian theology."<sup>36</sup> It is also in this section that the document refers back to the earlier document of All Under One Christ, where it was stated that a consensus between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics on the doctrine of justification by faith had been achieved. The doctrine of justification by faith was defined as a sinner being saved solely by grace and by faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit in him so that he is accepted by God and receives the Holy Spirit who renews his heart and equips him to do good works.<sup>37</sup>

Section three of Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ discusses the topics of conflict and schism in the church. The Joint Commission explains why and how Luther's legitimate concerns are being met in the Roman Catholic Church today. The document cites the example of especially German speaking areas where the Roman Catholics have recognized that Luther's reform efforts were valid. It was stated that there is in this century an intensive Catholic re-evaluation of Luther and of his Reformational concerns, especially in his attempt to reform theology and the abuses which were found in the church of his time. The document

states that Luther's

fundamental belief - justification given to us by Christ without any merit of our own - does not in any way contradict genuine Catholic tradition, such is found, for example, in St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>38</sup>

This quotation is reflective of the attitude that the Roman Catholic Church has towards Luther today.

The document about Martin Luther concludes in section five with a list of items that one may learn from Martin Luther. Among the items that pertain to this study are that Luther calls people to a faith which consists of absolute trust in God who in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son has shown Himself to be gracious to people and that grace needs to be understood as a personal relationship of God to human beings. This grace is unconditional and frees people from the fear of God's wrath and for service to one another. God's forgiveness becomes the only basis and hope for human life.

The document, Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ, does not achieve a total consensus on the doctrine of justification by faith. The Joint Commission, after asserting to Luther's rediscovery of Christian righteousness, fails to make mention of Luther's assertion that it is through faith in Christ that God gives and we receive His righteousness. The document also omits the fact that faith in Christ is itself Christian righteousness. The document also speaks of justification through faith alone and des-

cribes faith as trusting that God is gracious in Christ, but the document does not refer to the justifying function of faith which consists in apprehending and regarding Christ as our only righteousness.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ, like the two previous documents, The Gospel and the Church, and All Under One Christ, does not solve all the problems and conflicts between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. All three documents are deficient in their view of faith. They operate with a contemporary theology and fail to relate this contemporary theology properly to the Reformer's understanding of faith and righteousness. This, then, results in an unclear role of Jesus Christ in justification. In these three documents, it is already apparent that the Lutherans are beginning to make concessions in their doctrinal positions which were held to uncompromisingly in the sixteenth century and by later orthodox Lutherans. The doctrines of "sola Scriptura" and "sola fide" are beginning to be added to by the Lutherans in favor of a more compromising position with the Roman Catholic Church so that there indeed may be a convergence and consensus among the two church bodies. Progress, however, has been made in these three documents. There is a continued need to look more specifically at Luther and the Lutheran Confessions to determine the role of Christ in justification and also of faith's specific role in justification so that

there truly may be a total consensus on this important article of the Church's theology and its place in the life of a Christian in the dialogues between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"The Gospel and the Church--Malta Report," Lutheran World, 19 (1972), 259.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 260: 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 260: 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 261: 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 261: 16.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 263: 24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 263: 26.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 264: 28.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 267: 48.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 271: 72.

<sup>15</sup>Nestor Beck, The Doctrine of Faith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 149.

<sup>16</sup>The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 558: 3-6.

<sup>17</sup>Beck, 150.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>"All Under One Christ--Lutheran/Roman Catholic Statement on the Augsburg Confession." Ecumenical Trends 9-10 (June 1980-1981), 84-89.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 85: 6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 85: 8.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 86: 14.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 86: 15.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 86: 17.

<sup>27</sup>Book of Concord, 42: 9.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 30: 1-3.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>J. Waterworth, Council of Trent (London: C. Dolman, 61, New Bond Street, 1848), 30.

<sup>31</sup>"All Under One Christ," 88: 28.

<sup>32</sup>"Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ." One in Christ 19 (1983), 291-297.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 292.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>"All Under One Christ," 86: 14.

<sup>38</sup>"Martin Luther - Witness to Jesus Christ," 295.

<sup>39</sup>Beck, 169.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DIALOGUE IN CONTEXT - JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (COMMON STATEMENT)

#### Reflections and Interpretations

After having analyzed the doctrine of justification by faith at the time of the Reformation and the three documents on the same subject formulated by the Lutherans and Roman Catholic Church between the years 1972 and 1983, it is now appropriate to evaluate the document Justification by Faith - Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Dialogue VII, or as it is more commonly called, the Common Statement. Some believe that the Common Statement shows a nearly complete agreement on the doctrine of justification by faith among the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics, while others say that there is a wide difference still remaining among the church bodies in this teaching. A close study of the Common Statement requires and demands a cautious evaluation. There still remains a wide divergence on this important doctrine of the church between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics.

The Common Statement says that many of the difficulties of the past have arisen because of contrasting concerns and thought patterns of the Lutherans and the Roman



Catholics. Both churches' understandings of justification by faith will be described and interpreted to see whether these patterns "may be complementary, and, even if at times in unavoidable tension, not necessarily divisive."<sup>1</sup> The Common Statement says that the Roman Catholic concerns are most easily expressed in

the transformationalist language appropriate to describing a process in which human beings, created good but now sinful, are brought to a new life through God's infusion of saving grace.<sup>2</sup>

The Lutheran way of speaking, on the other hand, is

shaped by the situation of sinners standing before God (coram deo) and hearing at one and the same time God's words of judgment and forgiveness in law and gospel.<sup>3</sup>

For Lutherans, the attention is focused on the paradoxical relation of God to the justified, not on a continuous process of God's transforming work.

The Common Statement lists six different concerns and thought patterns and gives an analysis of contemporary Lutherans and Roman Catholic thoughts in each of these areas. These six areas are (1) forensic justification, (2) the sinfulness of the justified, (3) the sufficiency of faith, (4) merit, (5) satisfaction, and (6) the criteria of authenticity. Each of these topics will be discussed to determine what the Lutherans and Roman Catholics teach concerning them, and to see if there is agreement among the two church bodies on that particular teaching.

## Forensic Justification

The Common Statement says Lutherans describe justification as

the imputation to sinners of a righteousness which is that of Christ himself (*iustitia aliena*), received in faith. Justification therefore is the forensic act whereby God declares the sinner just; it is an act performed outside of us (*extra nos*) by which faith is accounted as righteousness.<sup>4</sup>

For Lutherans, God's declaration is efficacious. Lutherans affirm the reality of sanctification and good works, but they are regarded as fruits rather than parts of justification itself. Lutherans with their doctrine of imputed righteousness safeguard the unconditional character of God's promises in Christ.

The Roman Catholics agree that

God's saving will has no cause outside himself, and that therefore salvation in its totality, as an effect of that will, is unconditional. But they see this totality as including a number of elements, some of which are conditional upon others.<sup>5</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church agrees with the Lutherans that the truth of the gospel is saving truth, and that Christology must be seen not statically but dynamically as God's deed for us and for our salvation. But the Roman Catholics do not want to trace everything to justification considered simply as a forensic act. They also want to include concepts such as the remission of sin, adoption, redemption, regeneration, healing, sanctification, reconciliation, new creation, and salvation.<sup>6</sup> The Roman Catholic's fear of organizing all of theology around only forensic

justification is that it would unintentionally encourage a certain "disregard of the benefits actually imparted through God's loving deed in Christ."<sup>7</sup> Lutherans, on the other hand, fear that the Roman Catholic emphasis on the non-forensic aspects of justification would cause believers to rely on their own resources. Each tradition wishes to guard against what the other sees as weaknesses and is convinced that they can do so within their own framework of theology.

The Common Statement thus says that the differences between the two churches are the result of different approaches to the relationship between the remission of sins and the transformation wrought by grace. The Roman Catholics have looked upon the infusion of grace as a cause of the forgiveness of sins and sanctification. They see the Lutherans as too narrowly focused on the consolation of terrified consciences. Lutherans, however, see God's justifying act of forgiveness as the cause or constant power of renewal throughout the life of the believer.

Upon closer inspection into the teaching of forensic justification, one sees, according to the Lutheran theologians of the Reformation, that the entire controversy between them and the Roman Catholic Church hinged on the one crucial issue of the nature of justification. Both churches responded to the question, what does it mean to stand justified before God? For the Lutherans, B. Mentzer offers a typical definition of justification as

an act of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an act which forgives the sinner all his sins, imputes to him the righteousness of Christ and receives him into everlasting life. It is an act of pure grace, love and mercy, performed because of the most holy obedience which our Mediator Christ rendered to the entire divine Law and because of the full satisfaction He made. The sinner is justified who through the ministry of the Gospel truly believes that Christ is the Redeemer of the whole world, and he is justified by grace without his own work or merits.<sup>8</sup>

Robert Welsh makes the observation that Martin Luther in his rediscovery of St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from the law, gave birth to the Protestant doctrine of forensic justification.<sup>9</sup> Welsh states that the word "forensic" indicates that justification pertains to the law court, that it is a legal or juridical verdict. Welsh sees the principle elements of forensic justification as

1. Justification is the verdict of the judge. To justify means to declare righteous, not to make righteous. Thus, justification is not to be confused with the Holy Spirit's work of inner renewal and sanctification.
2. Justification is based on the righteousness of Christ imputed (reckoned, accounted) to the believer, not on the righteousness which the Spirit works in the heart of the believer.
3. Justification by faith does not mean justification because of faith, as if faith were either the ground or contributing cause of salvation. Faith is therefore the instrumental means of salvation and not its meritorious cause.

Justification is kept strictly forensic in order to give glory to Christ's finished work and to comfort troubled consciences, says Welsh.<sup>10</sup>

Justification for Lutherans is an act or judgment of God which entails a verdict of acquittal and an imputation

of Christ's obedience to God's law. In later Lutheranism, justification was commonly defined as embracing (1) the forgiveness or non-imputation of sins, and (2) the imputation and gift of Christ's righteousness (obedience).

The forensic picture of justification is spoken of very clearly by B. Mentzer when he says

The basis which merits our justification is Jesus Christ the God-man who in both of His natures is the one Mediator and Redeemer of the entire human race. . . . He also sustained the punishment which we deserved by our sins, He suffered and died in our place, as the whole Gospel history abundantly testifies. This entire obedience of His, both in what He did and what He suffered (which is commonly termed active and passive obedience), is called the righteousness of Christ, i.e., the righteousness which avails before God, and the righteousness of the Gospel, i.e., the righteousness which is revealed in the Gospel, and the righteousness of faith, i.e., the righteousness which is apprehended by faith and counted for righteousness to us who believe.<sup>11</sup>

Luther and those that followed him maintained the fundamental biblical assertion regarding man as a fallen and guilty creature because his initial creation in the divine image of holiness and righteousness had been utterly perverted by his disobedience. The justification of the sinner before God can only occur by an act of imputation or reckoning. Richard Klann asserts that

the person and saving work of Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the realization in history of God's grace for sinners. By His redeeming obedience under the Law and the perfect satisfaction for sin rendered to God alone, Christ is the only Mediator between God and man.<sup>12</sup>

The good news of God's righteousness in and on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ is the renewing and

creative Word of Life by which the sentence of guilt is removed, the powers of sin and the rule of Satan is overcome, the sinner is forgiven and restored to the household of God through the gift of faith. In this reconciliation in Jesus Christ the sinner becomes a new creation and is given new life with God (2 Cor. 5:17).

Robert D. Preus says that there are, of course, no problems in the doctrine of justification by faith in and of itself. This doctrine presents God's revealed answer to all the major problems of sinful mankind. The problems concerning this doctrine arise from people in the church who have tended

to obscure the brilliant light of justification by grace, to mitigate the doctrine, to deny it, to corrupt it, to ignore it, or to relegate it to the vast limbo of meaninglessness.<sup>13</sup>

As Christians and as Lutherans contend to confess and to teach the gospel of justification there are some major assaults within the church against it. Preus says that the first and major assault against the article of justification is to define justification as something other than a divine forensic act of acquittal. Preus states that the Lutheran Confessions are concerned with the same problem. He quotes the Formula of Concord where it states that

this article of justification by faith is "the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine," without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ. . . . Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously. . . that a poor sinner is justified before God (that is, he is

absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life) without which any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness.<sup>14</sup>

Preus continues to say that the Reformers (Lutheran) had a very clear idea of what it meant to be justified and that they held firmly that their entire doctrine was dependent upon and centered in the fact that justification was "a divine, gracious, forensic act of acquittal and a corresponding imputation of Christ's righteousness (the obedience of His "doing and suffering,")".<sup>15</sup> This meaning of justification centers on the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the "justitia aliena" which was "extra nos" in every sense.

Preus also states that

the correct understanding of what justification is would exclude as incompatible all aberrant notions concerning infused grace, fides formata, human merit, and the like; and would solicit, as the Gospel always does, the response, the only possible response, to a verdict (or promise), the response of sola fides.<sup>16</sup>

F. Pieper says that all soteriological teaching must be based upon the historical, accomplished fact of the objective reconciliation or justification of all sinful mankind, namely that through Christ's vicarious satisfaction God has reconciled mankind unto himself. Pieper says

All three terms, "by grace," "for Christ's sake," "through faith," affirm "that all our righteousness is to be sought outside the merits, works, virtues, and worthiness of ourselves and of all men," a truth

acknowledged among all the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>17</sup>

God through Jesus Christ forgives men of their sins.

The Roman Catholic Church has always been willing to grant that justification is in a sense a forensic act of God, although only partially so, for they say that God will on judgment day render a forensic verdict concerning everyone who has ever lived. But this is no concession to the Lutheran understanding of this doctrine. The Council of Trent still makes the Catholic position very clear when it states that if anyone should say that a man is justified either without the righteousness of Christ whereby He has gained merit for us or that through this merit we become righteous formally, let him be anathema.<sup>18</sup>

The Council of Trent affirmed that the merits of Christ's atonement were the basis of our becoming righteous before God and that they are actually communicated to us, but only as love is also infused into a person, and never by a gracious divine reckoning. The second part of Canon X utterly devastates the heart and core of Luther's evangelical understanding of justification. The doctrine that the merits of Christ, His righteousness, become mine, and that my righteousness before God in its very nature is all that He had done for me by His living and suffering is condemned. This position of Rome from the Council of Trent has not been changed in the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of all the changes in that church, especially since Vatican II. Foren-



sic justification when it is spoken of is always done in the light of this Roman Catholic understanding of it, and not in the Lutheran understanding. The attempt to merge and synthesize the two understandings of justification is an impossible undertaking. Preus makes this very clear when he says

the justitia aliena, which is imputed to me and which alone constitutes my righteousness before God, is exclusive and absolutely rules out anything in me (love, works, qualities, virtues - yes, even faith) which would prompt God to adjudge me righteous.<sup>19</sup>

Forensic justification, by its very nature, takes place absolutely outside of man, and excludes the doctrine that justification is as a whole or in any part a process taking place in man whereby he becomes progressively more righteous. The whole purpose of Christ's vicarious work of obedience is that it might be imputed to me and to all sinners. At present there is no consensus between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church on the forensic aspect of the doctrine of justification by faith.

The next topics may be summarized more quickly.

#### Sinfulness of the Justified

The Common statement asserts that for Lutherans the sinfulness of the justified is revealed simultaneously with the forensic act of justification. Therefore, even those who are justified still see themselves as in a true sense as sinners (*simul iusti et peccatores*). The renewal that takes place is a life-long struggle against sin both as unright-

eousness and self-righteousness. The Common Statement says that because

God's justifying act is itself the attack on the sin it exposes, original sin and its effects can no longer reign in those who continue to hear and trust the justifying proclamation. Sin nevertheless remains, and is in need of continued forgiveness.<sup>20</sup>

The Roman Catholics hold that the sanctifying action of God's Holy Spirit removes the guilt of sin and thus renders the justified pleasing in God's sight. The concupiscence which remains is not truly and properly sin in those who are born again. Therefore the Roman Catholic Church can say that it is possible for those who are justified to avoid mortal sins, which involve the loss of the Holy Spirit. God's grace enables the person to avoid venial sins as well, although a lifelong success in this struggle can be achieved only by a special divine favor. The Holy Spirit's action does not exempt believers from lifelong struggle against sinful tendencies, for concupiscence and other effects of original and personal sin remain in the justified, who must pray every day for God to forgive them.

Lutherans are afraid that the Roman Catholic doctrine of inherent righteousness may cause the Christian to be anxious or complacent and consequently not rely totally on God's promise of mercy. The Roman Catholic Church fears that the Lutheran position would lead to a neglect of good works or that the believer would not give praise and thanks to God for the transforming effects of his redemptive action

in their lives. The common Statement notes that to describe this transformation, the Roman Catholics sometimes appeal to the concept of divinization which stresses that the "inherent righteousness of believers is primarily God's gift of himself, i.e., primarily gratia increata and only secondarily gratia creata."<sup>21</sup> Lutherans do not ordinarily use this language of divinization, but they do speak of "the believer's participation in the glory of the resurrected Christ and of the continuously operative presence in the believers of the Holy Spirit."<sup>22</sup>

The conclusion in this section of the Common Statement is that by calling attention to the common elements within different thought patterns it is difficult

for Catholics to accuse Lutherans of diminishing the importance of sanctification or of the Holy Spirit and at the same time makes it difficult for Lutherans to accuse Catholics of overlooking the abiding effects of sin in the baptized. Nonetheless, the divergent ways in which the two traditions usually talk about the sinfulness of the justified are symptoms of continuing differences in their concerns.<sup>23</sup>

The Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith without the works of the law led to a mode of thinking about Christian life and experience markedly different from the traditional Augustinian and medieval transformationist models. Instead of a progressive transformation under the power or grace, the imputation of an alien righteousness received in faith implies a simultaneity; the justification is complete in the imputing of it so that the believer is simultaneously a righteous person and a sinner. All notions

of change and growth in the life of a Christian therefore receive a quite different cast. The very imputation of Christ's righteousness also reveals to the believer the depth and persistence of his sin. Lutherans teach that when the sinner is justified, God does not count his sin against him, but forgives him, and also God imputes to him the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 5:18-19). When the sinner is justified, he is forgiven all his sin; no sin remains unforgiven (Matt. 9:2). Sin, therefore, is not merely the failure to do good works or the despair over such failure, but it is the human propensity to trust in one's own righteousness. For Lutherans, the Roman Catholic's philosophical distinction between venial and mortal sins conflicts with the Scriptures, which teach that every sin as such merits the wrath of God and is therefore mortal. The Roman Church teaches that sins, in their own nature, vary in degree of gravity, the weightier ones meriting eternal death (mortal sins: pride, envy, anger, dejection, avarice, gluttony, lust), while the lighter ones only weaken grace and can be satisfied by temporal punishment (venial sins). The character of a sin for the Roman Church is held to be determined by the amount of deliberation involved and the degree of wrong committed (theft, e.g., being mortal or venial according as to the amount stolen, large or small). Only mortal sins require the sacrament of penance. The guilt of venial sins can be removed by good works. For Lutherans, all sin

needs to be forgiven. This forgiveness of sins is available to all who by faith appropriate to themselves Christ's righteousness offered in the means of grace. Scripture when referring to the cause of justification sometimes mentions Christ (Rom. 3:22) or Christ's righteousness (Rom. 5:18) or Christ's death and blood (1 Cor. 2:2) or His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 10:9) or His name (1 John 5:13), and so forth. But all these phrases express the same truth, namely, that a sinner is justified on account of Christ's vicarious suffering and death, which God freely offers to all men in the Gospel. Lutherans contend that it is contrary to the Scripture and the Gospel to teach that although Christ by His work has earned forgiveness for all, that there are still certain conditions which God demands of people before He will pronounce them righteous. The guilt of sin cannot be removed by doing good works or by a person's own faculties or abilities. Justification is then not an infusing of righteousness, but an imputing of righteousness. From this it also follows that justification is not a gradual process, but an instantaneous act. It must also be clearly distinguished from the inner renewal which accompanies and follows it. As a declarative act of God, justification includes the full and free forgiveness of all sin. The whole dark account that the law charges against the sinner is blotted out and there is then neither guilt nor condemnation for the justified. Also, as a declarative act, justification in-

cludes the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The justified is not simply released from the penalty of sin, but he has a positive and perfect righteousness, even the righteousness of Christ. He stands in the sight of God as being free from sin as Christ Himself is, and he is also regarded as holy and is pleasing to God as Christ is.

#### The Sufficiency of Faith

In the Common Statement it is acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church can say that a person is justified by faith or even by faith alone, as long as it is understood that by this the Roman church means that nothing prior to the free gift of faith merits justification, and that all of God's saving gifts come through Jesus Christ alone. The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that the indwelling Holy Spirit brings about in the believer not only assent and trust, but also a loving commitment that issues in good works. Therefore, in Roman Catholic theology, it has been customary to say that faith, to be justifying, must be accompanied by love (*fides caritate formata*). The Common Statement says only when love "qualifies faith does faith unite believers perfectly to Christ and make them living members of the body."<sup>24</sup> Also, when a Roman Catholic consents to sin and allows this sin to reign in him, it is possible for him to be outside the realm of righteousness even while he continues to believe and hope in Christ. In

this sense, therefore, faith can exist without love and without justifying grace.

Lutherans believe, without any difficulty, that faith which justifies is living and operative. Faith alone justifies because it clings to Christ and the promise of the Gospel. Love comes from such faith, but it is among the works of the law which do not justify a person. Lutherans are dissatisfied with the Roman Catholic teaching of infused faith (i.e., faith as a gift produced in the soul by God) which can be dead and sterile. When a distinction is made between a dead and a living faith, Lutherans feel that the Roman Catholics teach by implication that there is room for the believer to move himself from a state of sin to a state of righteousness, thus in effect justifying himself. Lutherans are also concerned when the Roman Catholics speak of a person actively cooperating in his own justification. Even though the Roman Catholics say that this

cooperation is itself a gift of grace and that the love which makes faith live is totally God's gift, Lutherans find that thinking in terms of such a process is liable to Pelagian distortions.<sup>25</sup>

The Roman Catholic teaching that more is needed than faith alone, for Lutherans, seems to tempt Christians to rely on their own activity rather than on the saving work of Christ and His cross.

The Common Statement indicates that the past controversies about the sufficiency of faith alone were aggravated by differences in terminology, especially that of

late medieval Scholasticism and also the then prevalent tendency to interpret the Bible in the light of Scholastic problems and concepts. In recent times the approach to exegesis and the shift from Scholastic to more modern categories of thought (personal and existential rather than physical and metaphysical) have "greatly narrowed the differences."<sup>26</sup> However, the Common Statement says that the theological differences between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics regarding the relation of faith to love have yet to be worked out, but both sides see that faith without trust in Christ and loving obedience to Him is incomplete.

There appears to be an impasse again in this section between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics in the area of the sufficiency of faith. Lutherans believe and teach that faith is the instrument by which the grace of God is appropriated to the individual and through which he is justified and brought into a life-giving relationship with his God. Luther's insistence upon the sola fide was well motivated because the Roman Catholic Church was indeed willing to concede that a sinner is saved by faith, but they refused to admit that he is justified solely by faith. The Roman Church understood that by this expression the Reformers did not mean to exclude from justification God's grace, Christ's merit, and the means of grace as God's means of conferring the righteousness which Christ by His vicarious satisfaction had secured for the world, but they knew that by the use of



this term the Lutherans meant to define faith merely as a receiving means of the righteousness of Christ offered to the sinner in the Gospel, and to this definition they persistently objected. When the Roman Catholic Church declared that a sinner is saved by faith, they defined faith as a virtue or good quality implanted into the sinner by God (gratia infusa), so that salvation by works would be included in their definition. The sola fide of Luther and the Reformers served the purpose of denying this Semi-Pelagianistic error. For the Lutherans this served as a reminder that on the positive side, the sola fide affirmed that faith saves merely as an instrument, and on the negative side, that in the article of justification, faith must not be considered as a good work or quality.

Chemnitz reminds us that sola fide excludes chiefly three things from the matter of justification.<sup>27</sup> The first is that neither repentance, nor good intent, nor renewal, nor virtues, nor good works, are a merit or efficient cause of our justification or reconciliation, but the merit is to be ascribed to Christ alone and the cause alone to the free grace of God for the sake of Christ. Secondly, no good works whatever, but only faith is the means and instrument by which we apprehend, receive, and apply to ourselves the merit of Christ and the grace of God. Thirdly, Chemnitz reminds us that renewal, sanctification, virtues and good works are not our justification and reconciliation, or form

any part of it, but they consist completely in the free imputation of the righteousness of Christ and in the remission of sins for Christ's sake, whom we apprehend alone by faith (Rom. 4:5-7).

Faith's role in justification and its relation to its object is affirmed repeatedly by Lutherans, that is we receive forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake through faith. This doctrine of justifying faith of the Lutherans was rejected by Trent when it stated in Canon XIII of Session VI that

if anyone saith, that it is necessary for everyone, for the obtaining the remission of sins, that he believe for certain, and without any wavering arising from his own infirmity and indisposition, that his sins are forgiven him; let him be anathema.<sup>28</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church denies that justifying faith is trust and receptivity, but teach that justifying faith is an act of man which can be considered a good work (formed by love). Robert Preus says that the Lutherans of the post-Reformation period and up to the present time have countered this Roman Catholic teaching in three ways.<sup>29</sup> First, he says that the Lutherans teach that man's receiving the grace of God in faith is itself a gift of grace, and that the absolution that forgives, works the very faith to receive the forgiveness of sins. Secondly, he says that faith's role in justification is purely instrumental, that faith is an organon leptikon, like the empty hand of a beggar receiving a gift, that it alone is the appropriate vehicle to

receive reconciliation, forgiveness, Christ and His merits. Thirdly, justification is per fidem, not propter fidem, that is faith justifies by virtue of its object. From the above material, it is apparent that Lutherans and the Roman Catholics do not have a consensus on this aspect of justification by faith. The Roman Catholics have changed faith from an instrument apprehending God's grace to a good work for which man is responsible, whether it be a decision, an acceptance, or a feeling which man must produce and thus make himself worthy or acceptable to God. Such an understanding of faith is the result of an emphasis and insistence on faith out of its context. In scripture, Christ is the object of faith. Faith clings to the promises of Scripture and through them relies on Christ. Faith appropriates to the individual what Christ has merited, that is, God's favor, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Thus it is through faith, and faith alone, that the sinner is justified and declared righteous.

#### Merit

Both the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church can say that a Christian does good works. For Lutherans, good works are the result of being justified; they do not merit justification. For Lutherans, merit is also associated with the Law, and not the Gospel. The Common Statement says that for Lutherans

good works of the justified are meritorious "not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other spiritual and

physical rewards in this life and in that which is to come."<sup>30</sup>

Roman Catholics believe that the good works of the righteous "give a title to salvation itself in the sense that God has covenanted to save those who, prompted by grace, obey His will."<sup>31</sup> Meritorious good works presuppose grace and bring to fruition what God's grace has initiated. They are meritorious because the Holy Spirit is present and active in those who do such good works.

Lutherans say that to view merit in this manner can lead to legalism that "derogates from the unconditional character of God's justifying word."<sup>32</sup> Lutherans use words like reward, new obedience, and good fruits to express the concept of merit in their theology, and thus avoid the language of merit when speaking of justification and faith. The Roman Catholic Church agrees that there is a tendency for legalism in their concept of merit, but that the abuse of this doctrine does not invalidate the doctrine itself. For Roman Catholics, in crowning our merits God crowns His own gifts. Meritorious works, for the Roman Catholics, are not an accumulation of spiritual treasures for oneself, but these works presuppose a charity that proceeds from God and goes out to God. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that for the assurance of their final perseverance and salvation, one must not trust in his own merits, but rather hope in God's continued mercy.

The conclusion of the Common Statement in this

section is that the

essential intentions behind both the Catholic doctrine of merit ex gratia and the Lutheran doctrine of promise may be compatible, but the two sides have difficulty in finding a common language. The differences of language here again reflect differences in concern.<sup>33</sup>

Lutherans are concerned about the unconditional promises of God addressed to people and on preventing Christians from relying on their own resources. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, have a preoccupation with insuring that all of God's gifts are acknowledged. The Common Statement says that both concerns reflect aspects of the Gospel, but that the tension still remains between the two church bodies.

Upon further study, the term merit is understood by the Roman Catholic Church as that ordination of a man's good act whereby this act is rendered worthy of receiving a reward.<sup>34</sup> The Roman Church distinguishes between condign merit and congruent merit. The distinction stems from the different bases on which the title to a reward rests.

Condign merit has a title arising from a concept of justice, thus it is merit to which reward is due in justice, while congruent merit is based on the liberality of the one who gives a reward. Accordingly, good works of the regenerate, in so far as they proceed from free will, are meritorious de congrui; in so far as they are done in the state of grace, they are meritorious de condigno. Generally the Roman Catholic Church holds to the Thomistic position of merit that sees the presence of sanctifying grace as the founda-

tion for the proportion existing between the meritorious act and the reward that man attains. Grace makes a man's acts proportionate to the reward, and thus it is the basis in justice for the concept of condign merit.

Both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics recognize the fact that the pre-Reformational Catholic Church was characterized by an overemphasis on good works or on work righteousness as the way that was pleasing to God and to obtain eternal life. Thus for Lutherans of the Reformation, forgiveness of sin, grace, and justification cannot be merited -- this teaching thus became the matrix of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Justification and eternal life could not be merited. For Lutherans, the talk of merit can lead to legalism: I did this good work, therefore God owes me something. This would derogate from the free, unconditional nature of God's gifts to mankind. Although Lutherans do teach that works do not contribute to justification, they do insist that the one who is justified should be active in good works.

The Roman Catholics thought that Luther's concept that faith alone is the source of continuing justification rendered all works after justification as completely useless. Thus the Council of Trent in Session VI, Chapter 16, deals specifically with merit, the fruit of justification.<sup>35</sup> The Council stated that merit is a valid concept and is based on the Scriptures. They insisted that the

reward for the meritorious action is certain because God in His justice will not forget the promise He made to reward Christians. The Council says that merit must be proposed first as a grace, or a gift, and then as a reward given for good works. Thus the Council implies two conditions for meriting: (1) God's willingness to accept man's works as worthy of a reward (implicit in the fact that God ordained the economy of meriting), and (2) the goodness of the meritorious act. The reward given will truly be a crown of justice. The man who is justified has all that he needs in order to be regarded as having fully satisfied the divine law and as having truly merited eternal life by his works.

Chemnitz reminds us of the difference between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church when he states

The basis of papistic doctrine is that man in this life can fulfill the law of God. Hence also some of them teach that by his good works man can earn and obtain righteousness and salvation before God; others, in order not to appear to lend support to such crass error, teach that Christ alone indeed earned righteousness and salvation for us, but if we want to partake of it we need faith and good works, by which together the righteousness and salvation procured by Christ is applied to us.<sup>36</sup>

The Scriptures repeatedly state that our righteousness and salvation does not consist either in our renewal or in our powers or good works, but in the free reconciliation and adoption through, and because of, Christ (Rom. 4:6-7). The Roman Catholic doctrine of merit robs Christ of His honor and gives it to men, and leads them into despair and doubt.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification in which they say that the unmerited grace of God touches the sinner's heart and calls him to repentance and faith, and then the sinner may, of his own power, accept or reject this grace, is contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. But this is only the first part of their doctrine of justification. The second part is that the sinner, by the renewal of his inner nature, is himself transformed into an intrinsically just man. As a just man, he is able to do good and perfect works, which fulfill the demands of the Law of God, render satisfaction for sin, and merit rewards of God, including eternal life. The Council of Trent said in Session VI, Canon 32, that if any one saith that the justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ does not truly merit the increase of grace, eternal life and the attainment of that eternal life, let him be accursed.<sup>37</sup> This teaching means then that Jesus does not really save people, but enables them to save themselves, and is contrary to what the Scriptures teach that we are saved through faith in Christ's merit, while our own imperfect works can claim no merit before Him (Luke 17:10). This is also the argument of the Book of Romans and the Book of Galatians. The Roman Catholic doctrine of merit has two causes for justification: God's initiative and human effort. The Roman Catholic Church can say, on one hand, that there is only one cause for justification, and



that is God Himself. Thus they also can speak of justification by faith alone, because they teach that justification is a completely free gift and that no human effort prior to God's gift can merit justification. For the Roman Catholics all of God's saving gifts come through Christ alone. But, on the other hand, once these free gifts have been received, then the justified sinner can cooperate with them and merit eternal life. The sinner's cooperation and contributions are in themselves gifts also. Thus K. McDonnell can say:

Therefore, merit, too, comes under grace and is not a second, independent cause of salvation. St. Augustine said, "When God rewards our merits, He crowns His own gifts." Catholicism proclaims, to use Rahnerian language Christ's grace has been victorious in sinful believers, the grace of the Spirit has been poured out and the Spirit truly dwells within, transforming the believer and the acts performed. "To minimize God's gifts is not a way of magnifying the giver," say Catholics.<sup>38</sup>

When Roman Catholics speak of salvation, they are thinking of the end process. When Lutherans use the word "salvation" they are thinking of it as something accomplished when the believer accepts Christ as Savior and Lord. Roman Catholics cannot boast that they have already been saved in the sense that they cannot be lost. That would lead to a wrong attitude before God.

It is quite apparent that the Roman Catholic Church has arranged its theology around the basis of merit. The Roman Church does not let its members trust in the all-sufficient merits of Christ alone for it teaches them not only that they themselves can merit eternal life, but that

they can also have recourse to the merits of the saints, and that they can earn merits which then can be applied to others who are in need. Many difficulties need to be addressed before there can be consensus in this area of the doctrine of justification by faith between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church.

### Satisfaction

This particular theme has been less prominent in recent discussions between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. In the sixteenth century both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics were in agreement that Christ through his sufferings and death gave full satisfaction for all sin, original and personal. Lutherans also taught that good works, which are the fruit of repentance and faith, also include such things as the mortification of the flesh, that is, the amendment of life and the forsaking of sin. The Common Statement asserts that the Lutherans could agree with the statement ascribed to St. Augustine that

true satisfaction means cutting off the causes of sin, that is, mortifying and restraining the flesh, not to pay for eternal punishments but to keep the flesh from alluring us to sin.<sup>39</sup>

The Roman Catholics taught that believers who were living under the grace of God could participate in the sufferings of Christ, in his expiation of their sins, and in his intercession for the spiritual needs of others. They could fill up what was lacking in Christ's sufferings. The Catholic

Church based this teaching on the Biblical text of Col. 1:24 which says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." While this doctrine was abused many times in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, most Roman Catholics agree that since the Council of Trent many of the abuses have been corrected. According to the Common Statement, many Roman Catholics generally hold today that the sufferings of penitent sinners and of the innocent can be prayerfully applied, in union with the satisfaction given by Christ, to beseech God's union and pardon. When this teaching is properly applied, the doctrine of satisfaction can give a Christian meaning to suffering and solidarity with the communion of saints.

The Common Statement agrees that this doctrine of satisfaction needs further study, because it has far reaching implications for many other doctrines, such as the sacrament of penance, masses for special intentions, indulgences, and purgatory. All these areas need further study to determine whether and how far Lutherans and Roman Catholics can agree in these matters.

There is indeed a need for more study in this area by both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. Lutherans say that

it is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: that, although Christ by His work has earned

forgiveness for all, there are still certain conditions which God demands of people before He will pronounce them righteous.<sup>40</sup>

This is directly contrary to what the Roman Church teaches concerning purgatory. For the Catholic Church the doctrine of purgatory is that those who die in a state of grace, but have not been fully absolved in this life of the temporal punishments remaining after absolution, must suffer for them in purgatory before they can go to heaven. The length of this suffering depends on the amount of unexpiated sin. This time of punishment can be shortened, however, through the assistance of the living by prayers, masses, or indulgences. For Lutherans this doctrine of purgatory has led to a denial of the all-sufficient satisfaction of Christ and the substitution of man-invented works as a means of satisfying the justice of God. There is no agreement between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics on the doctrine of satisfaction, because for Lutherans, Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection paid the entire price for man's salvation. With the Roman Catholic teaching of satisfaction, the believer has to add to that which Christ has already accomplished, thus the believer contributes by his own works to the salvation that Christ has already accomplished for him. For Lutherans Christ has made the full satisfaction for the forgiveness of sins, while for the Roman Catholics Christ's satisfaction plus their own complete that which is necessary for salvation. The two views

are in direct opposition to each other, thus once again there is no agreement between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics in this area of doctrine.

#### Criteria for Authenticity

The Lutheran Reformers were concerned to find a critical principle by which to test what was authentically Christian. This was needed because the Church was rampant with superstition and corruption. According to the Common Statement, the principle of justification by faith, understood as the correlative of the sole mediatorship of Christ, was accepted as the article by which the Church must stand or fall. Lutherans say that this principle has continuing validity since the tendency of a Christian is to rely upon his own resources and that potential is always present. This principle does not erode the fullness of the apostolic heritage and of the means whereby this heritage is to be mediated in any given time or place.

The Roman Catholic Church does not like to use one doctrine as the absolute principle. Roman Catholics insist

that the gospel cannot be rightly interpreted without drawing on the full resources within the church. To speak of "Christ alone" or "faith alone," they contend, could lead, contrary to the intention of the Lutherans themselves, to the position that the grace of Christ is given apart from the external word of Scripture, Christian preaching, the sacraments, and the ordained ministry.<sup>41</sup>

Lutherans recognize the importance of the means of grace and the danger of fostering individualism in the church. They recognize also the importance of the sacraments, the canonical Scripture, ritual, devotion, the ordained ministry, and the liturgical tradition in the church. But Lutherans continue to question the role of the papacy and magisterial infallibility, the teachings of Mary and the cult of saints, because they detract from the principle that Christ alone is to be trusted for a person's salvation.

Lutherans emphasize justification by faith alone as their criterion for authenticity because of their reliance on God's unconditional saving promises. Roman Catholics are concerned about protecting the fullness of God's gifts as they are granted through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Both traditions agree that the church is always subject to criticism and judgment in light of the gospel.

This last area of the criteria of authenticity still remains a problem area between the two churches. For Lutherans justification by faith is the article upon which the church stands or falls, and is used as a criterion or corrective for all church practices, structures, and theology. It is the heart of the Gospel because the Gospel message is the proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith. All aspects of Christian life, worship, and preaching lead to or flow from justifying faith in this

Gospel, and anything which opposes or substitutes for trust in God's promises alone needs to be abolished. The claim of the Lutheran confessions, especially the Augsburg Confession and the Smalcald Articles, is that this criterion is the primary basis for correcting the abuses and false theological teachings of the day.

From the above information it is apparent that Lutherans and Roman Catholics can share in each others' concerns in regard to justification by faith and can do so to some degree by acknowledging the legitimacy of the contrasting theological perspectives and structures of thought, but when particular aspects and applications of the doctrine of justification are made, then the outlook seems irreconcilable between the two churches. The Common Statement says that in order to move beyond that impasse it is necessary

for both sides to take seriously the concerns of the other and to strive to think jointly about the problems. It is to such an effort that we now turn, first, by looking at the biblical data on justification, and, second, by summarizing and reflecting on the convergences of past and present.<sup>42</sup>

The Common Statement is hopeful that by looking at the biblical data and by summarizing and reflecting on the convergences of the past and present that a consensus and a convergence on the doctrine of justification by faith can be obtained. It could not be obtained by looking at the previous six areas, for upon close inspection of each of these areas, there were many points of theology that could not be agreed upon by both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics.

Perspectives for Reconstruction

## Biblical Data

This section of the paper presents perspectives for reconstruction. It begins with a discussion of the biblical materials which have brought both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics to a new understanding of the biblical views of justification! The Common Statement reports that considerable attention had been given to the study of the biblical passages that have a bearing on the doctrine of justification, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. The Common Statement claims that in the examination of this evidence certain convergences and even outright agreements between the two churches were apparent. The report noted that this could be attributed in part to "the encouragement given by church authority to Catholic interpreters in the last fifty years to make use of the historical-critical methods" of Biblical interpretation, which the Protestants had been using for some time.<sup>43</sup> By using the historical-critical method of interpretation the context of each book or passage and the theology of each individual writer can be emphasized, therefore the readers were encouraged to avoid misusing isolated verses out of context as "proof texts," in the bad sense of that term, thus respecting the meanings of the biblical authors without adding their own prejudices. Much attention was given in the Common Statement to those passages that focused on



righteousness/justification by faith, and its relation to the love and good works that are expected of every Christian. The Common Statement says that

Catholics have come to acknowledge that "righteousness/justification is more prevalent in NT teaching than has normally been suspected in earlier centuries or among earlier commentators, and that it is an image of prime importance for our expression of the Christ-event or even the Gospel," and Lutherans acknowledge that this theme has more nuances and, some would say, limitations in expressing the gospel than has been generally supposed in their tradition.<sup>44</sup>

The Common Statement lists seven areas of new emphasis and insights brought out in the Biblical study. The first of these recognizes the Old Testament as providing a proper setting for discussion of righteousness/justification. The Common Statement sees that the terms righteousness and justification have a rich background and a wide variety of uses. It sees the terms "righteousness" and "justification" as being drawn from the juridical, forensic (law court) settings and that they are employed to describe the right relationship of human beings to God or to one another, and the mode or process by which such a relationship comes about. Thus the term "righteous" may denote a human being as innocent or acquitted before a judge's tribunal. When predicated of human beings, righteousness is "understood as justice in ruling or judging, ethical uprightness, covenantal loyalty, obedience to the Torah, or forensic innocence."<sup>45</sup> When predicated of God, righteousness is understood as his fundamental uprightness, and especially

his gracious salvific activity which is manifested in a just judgment.

The second area of discovery is in the possibility of discovering the earliest Christian use of righteousness/justification terminology. The words justification and righteousness were seemingly used in creedal summaries or confessions of faith that are now contained in both the Pauline and the pre-Pauline materials. Therefore the Common Statement can say that the use of the Old Testament imagery was used to show that because of Christ's death and resurrection man could stand as righteous before God's tribunal. Thus Paul was not the first to formulate the meaning of the Christ event in terms of righteousness/justification. Paul, however, did sharpen the meaning of these terms, especially in Galatians, Romans, and the Book of Philippians. The Common Statement says that

he related the process of justification to "grace" and set forth the theme of "justified through faith", not by works of the law, though he insisted on "the obedience of faith."<sup>46</sup>

The third area of consideration is that of the Pauline data itself. A number of new insights are mentioned in the Common Statement's discussion. The first new insight was the understanding of what Paul meant when he said "the righteousness of God . . . through faith for faith" (Romans 1:17). This is understood more fully today because of the better background and understanding of the Old Testament, and also because of a deeper study into pre-Pauline litera-

ture. The Common Statement sees the righteousness of which Paul speaks as both a gift from God, and in some passages, as an attribute or quality of God, a power exercised on behalf of sinful humanity to save and justify.<sup>47</sup> The authors of the Common Statement feel that the distinction of the righteousness of God as an attribute of God and also as his power present in his gifts to people, should be helpful in overcoming some of the divisive issues of the sixteenth century. At that time some of Paul's texts were interpreted in polemical debates about sin and grace, faith and good works, and were often translated into categories other than his own and categories which were mutually exclusive.

A second way in which there has been a new understanding is that the authors of the Common Statement see justification as relating to other themes and images which are also used to describe God's salvific activity toward man. The authors of the Common Statement see righteousness/justification complemented by other images which express aspects of God's activity in a nonforensic terminology that refers to a personal and corporate transformation, that is, expiation, redemption, reconciliation, adoption, glorification, and new creation. These images point to

dimensions of God's saving activity that cannot easily be denoted by forensic terminology, even though the forensic emphasis may be needed for their proper interpretation.<sup>48</sup>

A third way in which this study is helpful is that Paul related more clearly righteousness/justification to

grace and faith, more so than had previously been done before him. It is realized today that Paul's statements about the appearance of human beings before God's tribunal have to be understood in the larger context of his insistence on God's gracious justification offered to all men and women through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul's eschatological outlook enabled him to speak both judgment in accordance with works and justification by faith apart from the works of the law. Thus some protestant interpreters have come to understand more fully in Paul a judgment based on works and some Roman Catholics with the likelihood that this need not be understood as contrary to justification by faith, says the Common Statement.

In the fourth area there is a greater agreement between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics because of their modern scholarly approach to those portions of Scripture which they see as products of Paul's pupils or the Pauline school. The Common Statement declares that the emphasis "on justification by faith becomes less pronounced in the changed situations of the Deutero-Paulines and Pastorals."<sup>49</sup> In these letters there is a greater emphasis on the effects of justification in the lives of people rather than in the mode by which believers are justified. Thus the conclusion is that because of the methods unavailable in the sixteenth century, it can be shown today that Paul's doctrine was further developed in these non-Pauline letters.

The fifth area of insight is that of the full survey of other New Testament writings on righteousness/justification, that is, the Synoptics and Acts, the Johannine literature, Hebrews, and the epistles of Peter. The Common Statement says that all of these give further support to the overall trends noted previously, that is righteousness terminology and expressions of the concept of justification are more prevalent than has often been suspected, but the usages vary, differing from that of St. Paul's.

The sixth area of a better exegetical understanding of the Scripture is the Book of James, especially James, chapter 2:14-26, which speak of faith and works. This section of James argues that justification is not by faith alone, but also by works that complete it. This section of Scripture seems to contradict St. Paul's statements, but the Common Statement recognizes that for Paul "works" regularly means "works of the law" and "faith" means a faith which "works itself out through love."<sup>50</sup> For Paul, this is not a dead faith, but includes an allegiance to God in Christ and the inescapability of good deeds flowing therefrom. Therefore the agreement was made between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics that James does

not directly attack Paul's concept of faith or justification by faith, although it may be difficult to reconcile James' overall understanding of law, works, and sin with Paul's teaching on the same themes.<sup>51</sup>

Paul's theology and the theology of James can be used together in the area of justification by faith.

The topic of merit is the seventh area of discussion. The whole concept of merit as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation was another of the divisive areas in the sixteenth century. The Common Statement acknowledges that there is no single term in the original texts of the Bible to the word "merit" but it can be related to the idea of recompense or retribution that God gives to people. Using biblical data, the Latin theological and liturgical tradition interpreted

the immeasurable riches of Christ's work as his "infinite merits" and compared them with the lesser or non-existent "merit" of merely human or Christian works, in Lutheran and Protestant hymnody the merits of Christ, in contrast to human lack of merits, are often mentioned.<sup>52</sup>

The Common Statement states that there is no easy way to transfer our human ethical schemata (including those of natural or commutative justice) into the divine judgment, but we cannot overlook this aspect of biblical teaching, though it must always be set within the framework of God's merciful action on behalf of mankind in Christ.

The overall conclusion of the Common Statement is that the Pauline image and concept of righteousness/justification is the central and dominant image for the Scriptures. It expresses what God has done in Christ and thus the good news of the Gospel. There is also a stress in the Bible, although not as great, on the consequent deeds of the righteous Christian and on the recompense that awaits him. The classic formulation of the doctrine of righteous-

ness/justification is to be found in St. Paul, who writes of justification as simply by grace and through faith without any additions or qualifications. Paul believes in a faith that is centered in Christ and a forensically conceived picture of justification as of major importance, although it is by no means the only biblical or Pauline way of representing God's saving work. The Common Statement summarizes that

it becomes clear from the exegetical findings we have summarized that the biblical witness to the gospel of God's saving work in Christ is richer and more varied than has been encompassed in either traditional Catholic or Lutheran approaches to justification. Both sides need to treat each other's concerns and way of interpreting Scripture with greater respect and willingness to learn than has been done in the past.<sup>53</sup>

The authors of the Common Statement have summarized this section on biblical data and still have come to no agreement between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. Justification by grace through faith is central to both the Old and the New Testaments. It is the key to understanding all of Scripture. Scripture deals with justification primarily through the three word groups presented, that is those words which mean justification or righteousness per se, those denoting reconciliation, and those expressing forgiveness. Both the Old and the New Testaments clearly teach justification as a forensic act, that is the fact that God declares His people righteous and is favorably disposed toward them. Justification is presented as a declaration of the righteous God upon sinful human beings. Lutherans and

the Roman Catholics have not come to agreement on this basic foundational teaching of the Scripture. Even the word groups that denote reconciliation support the forensic aspect of justification. In order to declare man righteous, God must have laid aside His anger against sinners and thus be reconciled and favorably disposed toward man. The two concepts go hand in hand and complement each other. Justification is a unilateral act on God's part, not conditioned by man's interpretation of the Biblical literature on the basis of a historical reasoning which by definition is a procedure unable to deal with supernatural intervention and operations. The use of the historical-critical method obscures the Spirit's connection with the history of the Bible's origin and at the same time emphasizes the human factors in the production of the sacred literature in such a way that the Bible is virtually reduced to a product of merely human thought and experience. This takes away the unity of the Scripture and makes it inoperative to say that the Bible interprets itself. This method of biblical interpretation proposes that each unit of the Bible must be understood wholly in light of its use through various states of oral and written transmission. It also renders the Bible less useful as the absolute and final authority for all that the church does and teaches in the name of God. Missouri Synod Lutherans reject and oppose that which is injurious to the Gospel, any view of the Bible, or a method of inter-



pretation in which history is related to the production of the sacred writings in such a way as to diminish their divine authority. The Scriptures are God's very own inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word for all matters of doctrine and practice.<sup>54</sup>

#### Growing Convergences

In addition to biblical studies and the interpretation of Scriptures, other factors have contributed to the growing convergence between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. The convergence that is claimed is attributed also to the widespread disappearance of non-theological sources of division, such as many of the abuses of the sixteenth century. There has also been the separation of the churches from the struggle for worldly power, influences on theology from various phases of modern thought, liturgical renewal, the need for reform and renewal in both communions, and cooperation in these common undertakings. There has been a willingness on both sides to admit their shortcomings and a need for continual reformation. Both churches have also been affected by modern biblical studies and intellectual developments in the humanities, social studies, and the natural sciences. The Common Statement can claim that both churches are at home with each other like never before.

What has emerged from the present study of the Common Statement is a convergence although not uniformity on justification by faith considered in and of itself, and a significant though lesser convergence on the applications of this doctrine as a criterion of authenticity for the church's proclamation and practice. Both the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans acknowledge the need to test the practices, structures, and theologies of their particular church to see if they help or hinder the proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith. The Common Statement says that this does not necessarily mean that agreement must be reached on the applications of that criterion, that is, which practices, beliefs, and structures pass the test. The Common Statement also says that for the Roman Catholic Church greater union between churches is possible even though there is not a complete explicit adherence to all Roman Catholic dogmas. Lutherans also do not see it as church-dividing if other churches have different teachings and if such teachings can be understood and used in ways consistent with justification by faith.<sup>55</sup> This statement may be accepted by some Lutherans, but as will be pointed out later, Biblical and confessional Lutherans do not and can not agree with this broad and sweeping acceptance of doctrines that take away from the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Common Statement concludes this section

by stating that it is in the thought patterns of the respective churches that many of the problems and difficulties still exist. It is felt that both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics can acknowledge the legitimacy of the other's concerns, and even though they may be serious, need not be church-dividing.

Despite the fact that the Common Statement recognizes many unresolved issues and points in need of further dialogue, it claims convergence and agreements on the following statement regarding justification (which I have abbreviated).<sup>56</sup> (1) Christ is the source and norm for the Christian life, individual and corporate, and the only basis for eternal life. (2) Righteousness is the prerequisite of salvation. (3) All humans are sinners in need of justification; they cannot merit it, even the beginnings in repentance come from grace. (4) Creatureliness and the capacity for choice remain even when ruled by sin. (5) Justification is totally God's own work; it is both declarative and a making righteous, it is no "legal fiction." (6) The gospel comes with power for salvation through Scripture, proclamation and sacraments. (7) Justification involves a trustful response to the gospel. (8) Justifying faith does not exist without hope, love, and the issue of good works. (9) Although sin does not reign in the justified, they fall when relying on themselves. (10) The eternal reward for the righteous is a gift. (11) Works performed in grace by the

justified will be recompensed. (12) The priority of God's redemptive will in salvation is expressed by the doctrine of predestination. The conclusion of the whole statement is a declaration of the way God's creative graciousness works through Christ in history to bring about faith, love, and hope for ourselves and all humanity. The members of the Joint Commission in the Common Statement declare their belief that they have reached a necessary fundamental consensus on the Gospel. They do admit, however, that for Lutherans

such an affirmation is not fully equivalent to the Reformational teaching on justification according to which God accepts sinners as righteous for Christ's sake on the basis of faith alone; but by its insistence that reliance for salvation should be placed entirely on God, it expresses a central concern of that doctrine.<sup>57</sup>

And for the Roman Catholics it states

it does not exclude the traditional Catholic position that the grace-wrought transformation of sinners is a necessary preparation for final salvation.<sup>58</sup>

Lutherans and Roman Catholics can recognize each other as sharing a commitment to the same Gospel of redemptive love received in faith. The Common Statement quotes the Malta Report when it says

The event of salvation to which the gospel testifies can also be expressed comprehensively in other presentations derived from the New Testament, such as reconciliation, freedom, redemption, new life and new creation.<sup>59</sup>

The Common Statement thus can say that this affirmation can then serve as a criterion for judging all church practices, structures, and traditions precisely because its counterpart

is "Christ alone." This fundamental consensus on the gospel was necessary so that the credibility of their previous statements on baptism, the Eucharist, and on forms of church authority could be maintained. The Joint Commission in the Common Statement believed that they had reached such a consensus with this document even though many issues on which the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church diverged during the sixteenth century are still unsolved. The agreement is one in substance regarding the divine action and human receptivity. There is agreement "that is God in Christ alone whom believers ultimately trust," but there is no demand for a particular way of imaging God's saving work. The consensus is in the attempt to hear the language, the imagery, and the thought patterns of the other tradition, instead of insisting upon one's own formulations as the only legitimate ones. However, at the same time, many of the theological problems and differences were not resolved.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, ed., Justification by Faith--Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 1-381.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>8</sup>Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy," The Springfielder, 29 (Spring 1965): 28.

<sup>9</sup>Robert K. Welsh, "Justification by Faith: The "Critical Principle" for Ecumenical Theology," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 23,3 (Summer 1986): 507.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Preus, 28.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Klann, "Contemporary Lutheran Views of Justification." Concordia Theological Quarterly 45 (1981): 286.

<sup>13</sup>Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," Concordia Theological Monthly 3 (July 1981): 163.

<sup>14</sup>The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 540: 6, 9.

<sup>15</sup>Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," 162-164.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2: 523-524.

<sup>18</sup>The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent, ed. J. Waterworth (London: C. Dolman, 61, New Bond Street, 1948): 45.

<sup>19</sup>Preus, "Perennial Problems," 165.

<sup>20</sup>Anderson, 51.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. by Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971): 79.

<sup>28</sup>Waterworth, 46.

<sup>29</sup>Preus, "Perennial Problems," 172-173.

<sup>30</sup>Anderson, 54.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>34</sup>The Catholic University of America, ed. New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), s.v. "Justification," by P. DeLetter. See also Kilian McDonnell, "Lutherans and Roman Catholics on Justification," America 149 (December 3, 1983), 346.

<sup>35</sup>Waterworth, 42.

<sup>36</sup>Chemnitz, 81-82.

<sup>37</sup>Waterworth, 48-49.

<sup>38</sup>Kilian, 346.

<sup>39</sup>Anderson, 56.

<sup>40</sup>Theses on Justification, Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis (May 1983): 8.

<sup>41</sup>Anderson, 58.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>54</sup>"A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation." A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (March 1973): 19.

<sup>55</sup>Anderson, 69.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.



## CHAPTER V

### CONSENSUS: AT WHAT COST?

The Common Statement on Justification by Faith is disappointing for a number of reasons. It is not because it does not present the respective churches' positions on justification, for it does. Nor is it because it gives us an inaccurate picture of the historic cleavage between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics, for it does not. The Lutheran position is clearly stated. Likewise, the Roman Catholic doctrine is accurately presented. What is disappointing is that justification became merely an image of a deeper concern or "gospel." Turning this fundamental Christian truth into a metaphor introduced an ambiguity which satisfied both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics and made it possible for them to agree in substance regarding the divine action of God and human receptivity. The Common Statement documents impressively how much it is the result of modern biblical studies, historical studies, including Luther research, and theological constructions whose categories are different from those of scholasticism and Lutheran orthodoxy. What was the substance of the agreement between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics? They did not

agree on a real atonement or a real justification. Rather, they agreed with one another's concerns and intents. The consensus in the Common Statement cannot be more concrete than this. What was the cost of this consensus?

The Lutheran Confessions clearly state that it is faith in Jesus Christ that justifies, and that God reckons our faith as righteousness in His sight because of Jesus Christ. It is through faith alone, "sola fide," that we are justified. This interpretation of justification was disputed by the Catholic theologians in all of the documents that were discussed in this paper. According to the Catholic point of view, faith alone can never justify, but only faith that is active in love. When St. Paul says in Romans 4:3,9 that faith is reckoned to us as righteousness, the Roman Catholics understanding still insisted that this was a reference to faith active in love and good works. On the other hand, the Lutheran Confessions show why faith alone makes men righteous before God and is reckoned as righteousness.

In the area of justification, man finds himself in a penitential situation. His heart is harassed by God's demands of the Law, and his conscience is anxious because he is unable to meet these demands and as a result experiences divine wrath. The promise of God's forgiveness for Christ's sake changes everything. Through the Word of promise the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and faith then

restores his heart and brings about the new birth and good works which follow; on the basis of Christ's righteousness God declares him to be righteous. This was the Lutheran position. The Roman Catholics insisted that justification implied the real remission of sins and not merely their non-imputation for punishment, despite the persistence after Baptism of concupiscence. They also taught an interior renewal by the infusion of grace and gifts, and, finally, their theology supposes man's voluntary acceptance of this grace and gifts, a free cooperation that prepared one's self for justification through faith, hope, repentance and love. Justification is the changeover in a repentant sinner in which God moves him from a state of sin to the state of grace; man's cooperation entails recession from sin through contrition and accession to grace and God through living out the Christian life in faith, hope and charity.

Lutherans of the Reformation and Lutherans who hold to the Lutheran Confessions have problems with this view as presented by the Roman Catholic Church. The first is the relation between God's action and man's cooperation; secondly, between the two aspects of God's justifying action: remission of sins and infusion of grace; and thirdly, between the two components of man's cooperation: contrition and faith-hope-charity. There is also the concern of good works and merit. Both theologies agree in saying that good works must be the fruit of justification. Lutheran theology

denies their meritorious value in terms of justification, while Roman Catholic theology and doctrine affirms it. The difference resulting from the views on man's free will is that the Lutherans insist that man is incapable of doing any salutary act by himself, a point with which the Roman Catholic Church agrees, but adds that with the help of divine grace man is able to do good, the meritorious value of his good works being rooted in the grace of God.

For Lutherans, justification and sanctification (renewal) must be clearly distinguished but never separated from each other. God never justifies man without renewing him, and He never renews him without justifying him. Man is justified wholly for the sake of Christ. Christ has merited for man and prepared for him the righteousness which God bestows upon him. Man is also justified by the imputation, or reckoning, of this righteousness and pardon, prepared and earned by Christ, for the benefit of the sinner. Man is therefore justified when he appropriates and receives by faith this forgiveness of imputed righteousness. This faith does not justify because it is a new quality in man, but because it lays hold of the promise of grace and relies on the mercy of God alone. Justification, for the Lutherans, is not a gradual process, but an instantaneous act of God whereby He pronounces the sinner free from guilt. The sinner appropriates at once the full forgiveness and complete righteousness of Christ. From that moment on he is

totally righteous, that is, guiltless and blameless, in the sight of God. In effect, God does not want to see or remember his sins for the sake of the propitiation performed by Christ. Lutherans believe and teach that God not only forgives sins and reckons the sinner righteous, but that God also renews him and makes him righteous in his heart and life. At times, Martin Luther called this the "second justification," the "first justification" being the justification by faith, by the imputation of God. For Lutherans, the right distinction between Law and the Gospel is bound inseparably with the doctrine of justification. The Law is to work conviction of sin in the human heart and so prepare him for the reception of the grace of the Gospel. The Gospel does not demand any works on the part of the sinner. It is the good news of Christ and His redemptive and atoning work in behalf of his people. It is through the Gospel that God reveals and imparts the forgiveness of sins or justifying grace. By means of the Gospel, God pronounces His gracious imputation, His judgment of acquittal. In renewal, the relationship of the believer to the Law is then different. The Law is written in his heart by the Spirit of God, so that he is renewed or transformed both inwardly and outwardly to conform to the Law. The Spirit creates in him the right attitude toward God and his fellow man. This renewal, however, will be complete only in the future life. The Lutheran Confessions say,

For not everything that belongs to conversion is simultaneously also a part of justification. The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith which accepts these in the promise of the Gospel, whereby the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to us, and by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, adoption, and the inheritance of eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

God counts the sinner righteous by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. Any deviation from this model buries Christ, burdens the conscience, and takes away from the comfort of the Gospel. This justification is never partial, but always complete and perfect. Sins are either forgiven, or they are not forgiven. Here there is no halfway state, for when God says "acquitted," then all sins are wiped off the slate.

At the root of the problem lies what is perhaps the deepest division between the two church bodies: the very concept of man and God, of the creature and the Creator. The gulf between man and God cannot be bridged by anyone except God Himself. The Roman Church says that after the divine initiative has worked its miracle in man, he is able with the help of God's grace to cross the bridge, while the Lutheran Church says that God is always the one that keeps coming to the man. God's all and man's nothingness is a way to sum up the Lutheran view of justification by faith and grace and Christ alone: God doing all and man doing nothing. Without agreement in this area of man's relationship to God, there can be no agreement in the area of justification. Evidently, from the evidence given above, there is no convergence, nor is there a consensus in this important area

of the doctrine of justification by faith. Rather there is a divergence in their teachings. At this point in the history and in the teachings of the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church there is a breach on the doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls. Justification by faith is more than just a doctrine of the Church. By it all theology, worship, and practices are to be ordered, purified and judged. Justification, emphasizing God's unconditional gift, is the test, the criterion by which all doctrines and practices are probed to see whether they direct people to the promises of God, whether they promote reliance on God alone, or whether they induce people to rely on their own efforts and resources. Lutherans need to continue to apply this justification test to the doctrines and teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. If they promote reliance on God alone, then there can be agreement; if not, then agreement does not exist.

C. B. Braaten makes the comment and raises the question:

What sense does it make to say that Lutherans and Catholics enjoy consensus on the gospel but hold irreconcilable differences on justification, particularly in light of the insistence that the right preaching of the Gospel, normed by the article of justification by faith alone, determines whether the church shall stand or fall?<sup>2</sup>

The writers of the Common Statement struggle over terminology also as they do not claim agreement, but rather only consensus and convergence (surely not the *magnus consensus*

of the Augsburg Confession). They admit continued tension in many areas of doctrine, yet they propose that many of the positions of the two churches may be complementary rather than contradictory. There are still many areas open for dispute, that is, merit, purgatory, penance, indulgences, the cult of saints, and so forth. Does this mean that the real testing of the agreement will also come in these areas? Is there the implication that there can be substantive theological agreement on the doctrine, but when applied to these practices, the agreement can no longer be maintained? Or does it mean that the Lutherans and Roman Catholics can achieve a major theological understanding, but still disagree concerning these other doctrines of the church?

Another problematic area for Lutherans and the Roman Catholics in this dialogue is in their failure to keep what Martin Chemnitz termed the "krinomenon" constantly in mind. Chemnitz said

For this is the chief question, this is the issue, the point of controversy, the krinomenon; namely, what that is on account of which God receives sinful man into grace; what must and can be set over against the judgment of God, that we may not be condemned according to the strict sentence of the Law; what faith must apprehend and bring forward, on what it must rely when it wants to deal with God, that it may receive the remission of sins; what intervenes, on account of which God is rendered appeased and propitious to the sinner who has merited wrath and eternal damnation; what the conscience should set up as the thing on account of which the adoption may be bestowed on us, on what confidence can be safely reposed what we shall be accepted to eternal life, etc.; whether it is the satisfaction, obedience, and merit of the Son of God, the Mediator, or, indeed, the renewal which has begun in us. Here is the point at issue in the controversy, which is so



studiously and deceitfully concealed in the Tridentine decrees.<sup>3</sup>

There can be no substantial agreement between the two church bodies until both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics recognize that the anathemas of Canons XI and XII of the Council of Trent are totally opposed to the Scripturally based doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Common Statement on Justification by Faith has helped to clarify some positions and remove some unwanted caricatures, but these Canons of Trent are still an insurmountable obstacle to true union between the two churches. Canon XI:

If anyone says that a man is justified either solely by the imputation of Christ's righteousness or solely by the remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured out into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and stays with them or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God; let him be anathema.<sup>4</sup>

And Canon XII:

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for the Christ's sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema.<sup>5</sup>

Orthodox Lutherans are not willing to compromise their belief and their teachings on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, especially just for the sake of the outward peace and unity of the Church. They hold fast to their convictions and do not waver. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession said:

Although our opponents arrogate to themselves the name of the church, therefore, we know that the church of Christ is among those who teach the Gospel of Christ,

. . . The judgments of our opponents will not bother us since they defend human opinions contrary to the Gospel, contrary to the authority of the holy Fathers, and contrary to the testimony of pious minds.<sup>6</sup>

The confessional Lutheran position that church fellowship can be established only on the basis of agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles" is rejected by the Common Statement.<sup>7</sup> This is done at times very clearly, and at other times, it is called into question frequently by the Common Statement.

Another difficulty the Common Statement met was that of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible and its normative authority for the Church. By its use of the historical-critical method of looking at the Scriptures, it was possible for both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics to make a consensus and a convergence. The use of the historical-critical method posed a problem for the Lutherans at Helsinki in that they were no longer sure of the biblical foundation for the doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>8</sup> Just the reverse of this was true for the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics who engaged in this dialogue. Without the use of the historical-critical method, the Scriptures themselves posed the biggest obstacle to convergence and consensus in the doctrine between the two church bodies, not only on justification, but in other related topics as well. This method of biblical interpretation enabled the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic scholars to find in the Scripture differing "theologies" among the different biblical writers. The

hermeneutical principle of the unity of Scripture had prevented Lutherans in the past from finding such differences. The Common Statement seems to attribute the differences between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics to the differences which are present in the Bible itself. The historical-critical method has created a norm for doctrine other than the Scriptures. But the new norm itself is subject to change, depending on the current theological concern. Since the Common Statement cannot norm the doctrine of justification by Scripture, for that would have prevented their consensus, it chooses "the unconditionality of God's promises in Christ," or other phrases that are similar. But concerns change, and with them the norm by which the current imagery of justification must be judged.

The cost of consensus is also that of confessional fidelity, as already has been mentioned. The Lutheran Confessions regard the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner as a real imputation of a real righteousness. One cannot deny this reality while retaining loyalty to the Confessions. Robert Preus states that

The fourth assault against the doctrine of justification is to deny its reality, or, what is the same thing, to define it merely formally.<sup>9</sup>

Preus makes the statement that "to be justified" means to make unrighteous men righteous or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous, for the Scriptures speak both ways. The Scriptures are clear when

they say that a man becomes righteous when God justifies and imputes Christ's righteousness to him. It will not do to claim an underlying agenda for the doctrine of forensic justification and claim that one can reject this "image" and still hold fast to the underlying truth. The Lutheran Confessions cannot be understood this way, for they are firmly grounded in and based upon the written word of God. The Lutheran confessors stated their confessional commitment clearly when they wrote in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

By the help of God's grace, we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences.<sup>10</sup>

The confessors did not wish to be judged by their Lord on the basis of anything else but the sure and real promises revealed to them from God's Word.

Lutherans continue to strive to confess the truths and doctrines of their symbols in the same sense as they were written if they want to be called confessional Lutherans. The Lutheran Confessions clearly state, as we have shown, that the doctrine of Rome as taught by Trent and the other documents that we have analyzed, and those of the Lutheran Church could well become mutually exclusive on the very heart of justification itself. There cannot be a doctrinal consensus on justification between those who hold to Trent and those who hold to the Lutheran Confessions. One side must fall, and in the case of the Common Statement,

neither side has been faithful to its respective confession. Lutherans have lost much more in their failure than the Roman Catholics, for they have lost the article on which the Church stands or falls.

The final and the most tragic cost of the consensus and the convergence of the Common Statement is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ could be lost, for there is no saving act of God in Christ, apart from His atoning work and the reality of His gracious reckoning to the sinner of Christ's righteousness. For this doctrine gives abundant comfort to the penitent sinner, the comfort of the Gospel. For the doctrine of Christ and of justification is the gospel itself. In the article of justification there is the assurance and the peace that a troubled sinner needs. The doctrine of justification by faith alone

is the most joyous of all doctrines and the one that contains the most comfort. It teaches that we have the indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God. . . This doctrine brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors. It is not in vain, therefore, that so often and so diligently we inculcate the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins and of the imputation of righteousness for Christ's sake, as well as the doctrine that a Christian especially in time of temptation. . . . Therefore when the Law accuses and sin troubles, he looks to Christ; and when he has taken hold of Him by faith, he has present with him the Victor over the Law, sin, death, and the devil - the Victor whose rule over all these prevents them from harming him.<sup>11</sup>

This doctrine of justification by faith alone gives this kind of security and certainty to the believer.

Even though the dialogue on justification by faith did not settle all the questions and controversy between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics, it has served the purpose of having the two churches talking together about what is most important. John F. Hotchkin, one of the Roman Catholic representatives on the joint dialogue committee wrote:

When we started to dialogue twenty years ago, neither the Lutherans nor the Roman Catholics ranked justification by faith as a subject needing priority attention. Six volumes of reports and published papers later, we reassessed the situation. By then, we spotted that in our discussions of every other issue, this teaching was always lurking just beneath the surface. . . So at last, it seemed right to bring the subject up to the surface and be explicit about our present agreement on it.<sup>12</sup>

This is indeed a correct assessment, for the doctrine of justification by faith is that by which the church stands or falls. If the doctrine of justification by faith is taken away, so too is the Gospel of Christ. Philippi, a nineteenth century converted Jew, wrote:

He who takes away from me the atoning blood of the Son of God, paid as a ransom to the wrath of God, who takes away the satisfaction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, vicariously given to the penal justice of God, who thereby takes away justification of sins only by faith in the merits of this my Surety and Mediator, who takes away the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, takes away Christianity altogether, so far as I am concerned.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps modern man has lost much of the terror of God's wrath from which the Reformation teaching on faith as confidence in the reality of Christ's atonement and consequent proclamation of the forensic verdict of justification found such urgency, but the truth is still here. There is a

continued need to teach and to preach that people are justified freely by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The pastor, as the shepherd of God's people, has this responsibility to convey the message of justification, the message that God has received people back into His favor and has reconciled people to Himself because of Christ's atonement. This message is transmitted and proclaimed through God's Word and the Sacraments of the Church and produces and maintains faith, which in turn leads to sanctification. Our righteousness before God is not built on our works or merits, but we are justified freely by grace alone for the sake of Christ apprehended by faith. When the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church agree on this basic and fundamental doctrine completely, without any qualifications, then there will be truly a consensus and convergence between them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 543: 25.

<sup>2</sup>C. B. Braaten, "No Breakthrough Whatsoever," Dialog 23 (Autumn 1984): 245.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 468.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 460.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Book of Concord, 168: 400.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 616: 31.

<sup>8</sup>"Helsinki - 1963," Lutheran World 11 (1964), 1-36.

<sup>9</sup>Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," Concordia Theological Monthly 3 (July 1981): 173.

<sup>10</sup>Book of Concord, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Amer. ed., vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians (1534) (Chapters 1-4), ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 133.

<sup>12</sup>John F. Hotchkin, "Reflections on Dialogue and Justification," Ecumenical Trends 13-14 (April, 1984): 63.

<sup>13</sup>Preus, 169.



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