

10-1-1957

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Recommended Citation

Luecke, Richard (1957) "Truth in the Inward Parts: A Sermon for Three Speakers on Justification by Faith," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 28, Article 54.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol28/iss1/54>

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Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXVIII

OCTOBER 1957

No. 10

Truth in the Inward Parts

By RICHARD LUECKE

A Sermon for Three Speakers on Justification by Faith¹

CENTER. We wish to talk a little, first, about the Christian Gospel, and what it means to say that we are "justified by faith."

There are many ways to talk about the Reformation of the sixteenth century; but for us now, at this hour and in this place, let us say that this is what the Reformation was about.

¹ This sermon was presented at the Reformation Festival vespers in the Princeton University Chapel on Sunday, November 4, 1956. "Right," "Left," and "Center" refer respectively to speakers standing in the pulpit, at the lectern, and at the head of the chancel stairs.

The sermon seeks to address the Gospel, understood as "justification by faith through grace," to a particular yet current and popular campus attitude or pose. It speaks to the concern for "truthfulness," or for personal integrity and freedom, where all traditional statements are in question, and shows the "point of contact" — and the "point of conflict" — between Christ and that. It does not attempt to treat the other side of the coin, namely, the concern for the "truth of statement" in the Scriptures and then in the Confessions and in theology — also essential emphases of the Reformation.

The service was held at a time when the appearance of a politically controversial figure before a student debating society had stirred a widespread discussion of academic freedom and authority. The Aquinas chaplain had raised the issue of "church and university" by insisting that the trustees and administration should exercise authority on the basis of certain "higher truths" which are actually universally accepted only in the Roman Church. Secular groups on campus were for subjecting the voice of the church, and all dogmatic authorities, to free discussion among scholars and students. Therefore the particular applications of "justification by faith" to the relationship of church and society, and of church and university, in the closing sections.

So important is the truth behind this phrase, "justified by faith,"
that one of the apostles said: "There is no other Gospel."

This Martin Luther said again:
that where this truth is held, there is the church;
that while it held him fast, he did not leave the church
— the church left him.

He could even say about the day he stood alone at Worms:

"That day I *was* the church."

The claim is that this truth is the discovery, and rediscovery,
which must bring a reformation to the church
not just in 1520, but in every year;
and, indeed, in every day to human lives like yours
and mine.

The trouble with the formulation "justified by faith"
is that its words sound strangely in our ears.

Men do not talk much now of "sin" and "grace."

Such words appear to beg the question,
implying "God" and "what God wills" and "what God does"
(what possible experience can give sense to words like that?).

Today we ask more frequently a question about "truth" and "meaning":

Where in terms of our experience can we find a truth that matters,

a truth "relevant for life"?

Where, if anywhere, is to be found

that truth which gives the meaning to our days and years,

and which illuminates our nights

(even our nights of wondering about the truth)?

To my right is one who has an answer, who (as it seems to some of us)

has *all* the answers.

To my left is one who has no answer, who sometimes
(as it seems to us)
no longer cares.

RIGHT. The truth is ours if only we are willing to accept it!
It comes to us in propositions resting on authority,
statements received, preserved, and passed down by
our fathers.

These propositions are forever true and cannot be
gainsaid.

For with them is a record of God-filled events:
Exodus and Sinai;
Constantine and Gregory;
Valley Forge and Gettysburg.

"How odd of God to choose the Jews?"

Or Rome?

Or this God-favored land?

— Odd first of all to us! And yet He did.

In proof of this we have the witness of our fathers,
their sacred writings, and our way of life.

"Abraham is still our father; we have Moses and the
prophets;
we are free, having never been in bondage yet to
any man . . . !"

"Holy church is still our mother; therefore we possess
the truth,
and those who learn are safe with her . . . !"

"The founding fathers brought forth a new nation;
with it the way of life for us—and for all men;
for her we live or die, and wait to see her cities gleam,
undimmed by human tears . . . !"

The race, the church, the nation, is our mother.

Through her we *have* the truth.

And it becomes a heresy or treason now to raise again
the question.

LEFT. Then heretic or traitor I must be!

I deplore your view of truth, and of its source,
not only on the ground of its inequity to *me*
(how shall I, apparently abandoned as a child,
choose among those mothers which you named?);
but chiefly on the ground that it destroys *your*
freedom.

Where has freedom flown when a man may not examine
the propositions which he holds, the ways of life
which he pursues?

When there is enforced or out-of-hand rejection
of other statements, other ways of life?

Those propositions which you call the truth, if taken so,
prove not to be a truth which liberates.

They become instead tools of suppression,
prevent the honest search for truth,
and split the minds of seeking men
between a loyalty to group and sincerity to truth.

What you really seek is not the truth but *safety*
in a race or church or nation of identical twins:
Where every deviator is a heretic or a "security risk,"
where books must be indexed or burned,
where intelligence itself is suspect,
where persuasion turns to persecution,
crackerbarrels become powderkegs,
and coexistence turns to coextinction!

This is not freedom.

Look to your history, you will see
it is not even safety.

And the consequences of your view give me reason to
attack it, finally,
even in the name of truth.

CENTER. Remember here the words of Jesus:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it
and was glad.

If you were his true children, you would do as he did;
but instead you seek to kill Me. . . .

Therefore you are really children of another father,
the father of the lie, in whom there is no truth,
who was a murderer from the beginning. . . ."

Truth present or disclosed in this or that God-filled event
or stated in a text which men have hallowed
— even though this text *be* that event—
never can become *our* truth merely by inheritance,
but only by some new participation.

Tradition and its statements *without this*
bring along demonic bondage
—demonic in its claim, its pride, its hurtfulness.

LEFT. It's too late now to talk at all of "truths received,"
of revelations having as their signature the name
of God.

I'm sure you've heard: the gods are dead!
— The gods which in the past gave sanction to the
pale-gray virtues,
common morality, and our homey sentiments,
gods held and dispensed by priestly men,
gods in a box.

To be sure such gods sometimes appear today:
sometimes in tablet boxes, from which doses may be
taken
for relief of headaches;
sometimes in boxes wrapped in bunting, from which
they are produced
to bless the nation's or the party's previous intents
and purposes;
sometimes in school lunch boxes, where loyalty to
God, to nation,
and McKinley High get all mixed up in one moist
sandwich.

— Nevertheless they're all quite dead.

Whether we celebrate their death with grief or with relief
(I celebrate it without undue grief),
we must proceed with all deliberate speed to lay
their ghosts.

The old authorities are gone, the wells of value all
dried up.

Man simply *is*, with little certainty of what he is or what
he ought to be.

We must *choose* what we will be, without sure guidance
from the past
or firm hope for the future.

This is our "dreadful freedom": we *must* choose
(no choice at all is still decision).

This is our "anguish": for in choosing for ourselves
we choose partly for all men and for the world.

Our feeling of "abandonment": for the gods who used
to choose
such things for men are now all dead.

And our "despair": because no choice of ours will matter
very much;
the consequence of any choice will soon run itself
into the ground.

There are no answers; there is only Pilate's question,
"What is truth?"

He alone is true who asks but does not answer.

Please do not raise the old rejoinder that "no answer" *is*
my answer.

My truth is in my question and my questioning.

CENTER. At the moment of this question, Jesus said:

"Everyone who is *of* the truth hears My voice."

"He who is of God hears the words of God," He said;

"the reason why you do not hear them is that you are
not *of* God."

The question "What is truth?" was proper once, is proper
now, for every man.

Within the depth of every honest doubt the search for
truth is still alive,
and the need for being true is still affirmed.

One who asks in earnestness is grasped and led by truth
as yet unstated,
rejects all idols, trusts what is above, beneath them.

And in another moment he will prize, as do few others,
that revelation which alone enables this,
and all statements which express it.

RIGHT. Do not be deceived!

In a moment we will see him wash his hands of all
concern for truth!

Such is the fate, if not the intent,
of all who ask anew the question "What is truth?"

No man can bear for long the freedom he describes —
it leads to madness
or returns him soon again to carelessness for truth
or to indifference.

Look at the exponents of his views!

His literary lights describe their "dreadful freedom"
while seated at their ease in coffee houses.

His teachers occupy endowed, upholstered chairs,
while lecturing about the unlecturability of life.

His novelists write books for cultivated readers,
his dramatists write plays for a theatergoing set,
who are willing to pay well for cool and detached
glimpses
at a way of life at once too hot and cold to be
embraced.

So there he sits with other undergraduates
— all of them dressed in Brooks Brothers flannels
and cordovan shoes,
all of them cinches for membership soon in the
chamber of commerce,
all sipping at coffee or something just a bit stronger—
and talks late in the night about "anguish," "despair,"
and the "meaninglessness of existence"!

What is *really* the attitude there is only a mixture,
a muddling through:
a little bit of what he calls *my* dogmatism
— at least in matters where agreement is in fashion
(as in matters economic or political);
a little bit of what he calls *his* skepticism

— at least in matters where conformity is *not*
in fashion
(as in matters of religion);
and a shrewd method of juggling the two, which
postpones for now,
and forever if need be, the issue of truth.²

One thing is certain: the truth is not made by *our*
acceptance,
nor unmade by *our* rejection of it.

It is *we* who are made or unmade by *truth!*

One is not "true" who, though he does not perpetrate,
will still *abide* a crucifixion.

You ask, "What is truth?" — Do you think that asking
this question will hide you?
avert that judgment which fell on the one who first
asked it?

Will not even history say about you — if any are present
to hear —
that finally there was no washing your hands of the
issue of truth?
Reminding your children — if any — only of what
you did, or did not do,
with the truth you *received?*

CENTER. Twofold, then, is the temptation:
to sacrifice freedom for a truth which is not truth,
or to sacrifice truth for a freedom not freedom;
— to find truth too soon, or postpone it forever.

With this bag of tricks we all are seduced.

We all are concluded in error.

As clear as any perception of what it means to be true
is our awareness of failure to be it.

We have not in fact "the pureness of heart to seek that
one thing."

² There is some rhetorical dependence here and elsewhere in this section on a sermon by Paul Tillich entitled "What Is Truth?" in *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pages 63—74.

Accepting the counsel to "be," we have not "the courage to be."

We acknowledge a truth or a trueness
which, for fear or for favor, we make into a lie
— *even while* we construct by our arts a golden calf
to take its place.

For while we accept or while we reject, our minds are
turned
not outward toward truth, but inward on self;
and so we distort in the interest of self.

By no resolution of mind can we break this circle of
mind upon self.

What is needed is not our resolve but a rescue!

*How shall a man be justified, be rectified, made right,
made true?*

This was the question which drove the reformer to strip
through
each semiassurance suggested by others— including
the church of his day,
each easy neglect proposed by himself.

In the depth of his anguish, aloneness, despair, his tossings
with guilt
— implied in them, causing them —
still lived and stirred the One who is true.

The source of his deepest unrest became the only source
of its cure.

It was here that for him Jesus Christ came alive,
through whom came truth *and* grace.

The Word of Forgiveness came home to him here,
where no other could come.

And the Spirit of Truth returned with that Word of
Forgiveness!

In no other way, but through grace and forgiveness
by God,
was the self set aside.

No effort by self, no self-striving, self-seeking, could ever
have done this.

He rediscovered the Gospel as "justification by faith,"
as final acceptance through "grace alone,"
acceptance accepted by "faith alone."

LEFT. So God is to be resurrected after all!
Brought back to mollify awareness of some guilt,
postulated by some wish for cleansing or forgiveness!
How soft of God! Like some indifferent king or some
indulgent father,
to forgive time and again his foolish subjects, or the
weakness of his children.

How soft for us! To have our cake and eat it too!
This is folly to the wise, courageous man,
and a shallow end of human dignity.

RIGHT. How soft indeed! At least we both agree against this
central fellow.
Though each in separate ways: you oppose him in the
name of high humanity;
I oppose him in the name of high religion!
His doctrine is a scandal to the pious.
Are we to be religious without effort?
Are all our Godward efforts now in vain?
To what purpose is God's grace, if not to help us try
a little harder
to *become* religious and *achieve* perfection?

CENTER. We may, of course, reject the grace of God; but let us
not misunderstand it.

This forgiveness, this acceptance, is not soft, not
shrugging or indifferent;
but prizing us, encompassing our whole dilemma—
even our rejection,
providing a new stance—the only one in which
the problem of the self is overcome,
and raising to the utmost the requirement in human
life,
while it forgives.

- It finds its basis and its statement in the Cross!**
How strange at first, the way of Christ with us — but
then, of course, how true!
- A man is grasped and held by faith when he leaves mere**
faithfulness
and believes in God.
- A man learns how to love his brother when he drops**
pretensions to be loving
and learns that he himself is loved.
- A man is freed for open and constructive work within**
the world
when he knows he is not saved by working.
- A man learns how to face the facts and seek the truth**
when he learns that his success does not depend on
what he finds.
- A man is freed from all "religiousness"**
in the moment he is reached by true religion.
- One of you wants *less* religion; one of you wants *more*.**
If we once allow the grace of God, we find He gives
us both!

JUSTIFICATION AND JUSTICE

- LEFT.** **All these ancient questions of religion leave me somewhat**
tired.
- They only lead to so much talk, and so much loss of time**
which might otherwise be given to the problems
which we have in hand:
to social problems crying for solution, and to actions
needed in the state.
- Such detached preoccupation with the questions called**
"religious"
seems opposed to public welfare.
- One flees into the little lighted house of faith and**
repudiates the world
to listen to the voice of God.
- It's only one step further then to talk about "the right**
to suffer,"

to say that private charity's the thing,
that sacrifice should do the duty of the craft of justice.

The time has come to end all that, to subordinate religion
to society.

The "free society" must become the new religion.

The voice of the people must become the voice of God!

RIGHT. But action for society presupposes knowledge of man's
highest end.

The church is bearer of such knowledge and safeguarder
of that end.

Government must then subserve the church
and make its work one aspect of the process of
salvation.

The sword is given to the state to use for one who holds
both swords.

Rulers must be judged for piety, for loyalty to church and
to tradition

— that the voice of God may rule the rulers!

CENTER. You confuse in separate ways what must be held distinct:
justification, which is the gift of God to men,
and *justice*, which is the work of men for God.

Government *cannot* effect salvation, either for the ruler
or the ruled;

but it is this very fact (of grace alone and faith alone)
which lifts men from preoccupation with their own
salvation
for truly public service.

Not a multitude of rams, nor rivers of the sacrificial oil,
can close the ear of the Almighty to the cry of the
neglected poor.

The smoke of such neglectful sacrifice offends the nostrils
of the Lord Most High.

But justified by faith alone, we are free from such offense
to God and man
to serve the cause of justice.

We are also free from seeking to be justified *through*
public favor.

We are free to love — and politics becomes "love at
a distance."

Knowing the distinction between the body of the justified
and the body politic,
we know what can, what cannot, be expected of
a nation,
and are not given to the quick and total solving of all
social problems.

In brief: "They serve the cause of justice best who know
it does not justify."³

Rulers are not qualified by piety,
but only by their skill in fabricating justice.

The church may help provide good magistrates;
but magistrates as such do not subserve the church.

Church and state are good for one another,
so long as they are not at ease together:
so long as church is not subjected to society, nor
government to church
— as you in turn seem to propose.

This is the reason why we prize our freedoms under law:
freedom of faith because justice alone can never
justify;
freedom to speak because no man's voice can be the
voice of God!

FAITH AND LEARNING

RIGHT. Let us return at last to the first question about learning.
to the great and ancient issue about "faith" and
"reason,"
to the relationship between the truths of faith and
truths propounded in our sciences and letters.

If you like, it is the issue of the church and university.

³ This sentence and certain other phrases in the closing sections of this sermon are by way of the sprightly discussion of Justification by Faith by Alexander Miller in *The Renewal of Man* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1955), especially chapters 5 and 6, pages 103—145.

For those who hold the faith, some section of the truth
is closed,
some propositions are forever true.

We have them in the teachings of the church,
authoritative and received.

Must not acceptance be demanded, then, and loyalty
required,
of all who teach?

What otherwise will happen to our youth and to their
unformed minds?

I tell you, irreligion will result, alien politics, or radical
economy.

Some limit must be placed upon discussion by the
immature,
on whom they hear and what they read.

They are in danger where the teachings of the church
are not fully understood, not properly presented, or
opposed.

They place themselves in jeopardy wherever teaching is
no more than secular,
where the community of faith does not control the
community of learning.

LEFT. Our procedure, then, is simple: pious alumni should now
capture
the committee of trustees, smoke out all the atheists,
extract some oaths of faith and loyalty from all the
other faculty,
and proceed to have a Christian university!

Only who would seize the board of trustees next!

And how could this be called a "university," which
(by definition)

must provide a meeting place for diverse views, and
not a select few.

I know nothing about a body of "closed truth," about
propositions now on ice.

**For me it is all open: an unending process
of hypothesis, refinement, rejection, and beginning
over.**

**This procedure requires open minds and free discussion,
that errors may be soon detected and that truth may
triumph.**

**Within the university, the community of learning stands
above
communities of faith.**

CENTER. What I have to say should now be clear.

**We must distinguish between faith, which saves,
and all statements and opinions, which do not.**

**We need not desperately fear a conflict of opinions,
or differences in statement,
for faith sustains even during siftings of opinion,
and while statements are suspended and examined.**

**Within the university free discussion must prevail,
not because the truth will always triumph,
but because it always stands the chance of being
rediscovered
while debate exposes error.**

**There is one special sense for us, but only one, in which
the truth is "closed";
namely, that there is true-being, present and disclosed
in Jesus Christ,
that we may come to share again the being of the
truth
by death and resurrection of ourselves through grace.
Statements testifying to this truth are "true" for those
who share it,
and may show limits within which this truth finds its
expression or is told.**

**In every other sense the truth is open: every factual
proposition
(even statements based on this experience of grace)
may be refined, revised, or find restatement with each
passing day.**

To deny this is no act of faith, but something close to unbelief.

Surely the last atheism is to fear the facts,
as the last sin is against the Spirit.

We look, then, to a wholesome tension between church and university.

Each has a separate function to perform; neither can concede it to the other:

the *church* transforming, freeing human minds, and raising up

a new community by proclamation and a sharing of God's grace;

the *university* a company of unrestricted scholarly inquirers,

"a meeting place for diverse views," as you have said (the most the church can ask is for an invitation to the meeting).

Each remaining true to its own nature may indeed perform

some little service for the other:

men of science, or of letters, checking the pretensions of the theologian

to finality of statement;

the church defending freedom for the scholar when it comes, now and again, under attack.

And who will say the church may not raise up the freest scholars

for our sciences and letters?

—Men liberated from the ancient force of self and fear and law and death,

which otherwise must lead to seizing statements of the truth too soon

or to giving up the search for them at all.

Men free to follow facts wherever they may lead,

and to hear the voice of truth wherever it may speak;
to leave to the devil whatever is false,

and to "welcome new truth like an angel from heaven."

The pursuit of learning does not bring salvation from such forces;

but that pursuit is best conducted by the saved, by those who know there's no salvation in it.

There is a prayer we sometimes say in church with which I hope you'll let me close.

It reads: ". . . that we may never be disdainful of whatever is true in that which is old; nor refuse to receive whatever is true in that which is new;

but loving Thee with our whole mind, rejoice in the accumulation of all true knowledge and use it in the service of our fellow man. . . ."

RIGHT. "That we may never be disdainful of whatever is true in that which is old!"

LEFT. "Nor refuse to receive whatever is true in that which is new!"

CENTER. The collect closes with an indication of the way in which this finally can be done: "Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord!"

Princeton, N. J.