

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 44

Article 3

1-1-1973

Justification and Anthropology

Wenzel Lohff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lohff, Wenzel (1973) "Justification and Anthropology," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 44, Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol44/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Justification and Anthropology¹

Wenzel Lohff

The author suggests that contemporary difficulties with respect to understanding the article of justification arise in large measure from the fact that justification has been separated from its anthropological rootage. At the same time, Dr. Lohff argues that the doctrine of justification offers great help to modern man, who often feels trapped in his very humanness. Furthermore, justification, when proclaimed properly, makes Christian unity possible. He describes justification briefly as the right and unequivocal determination of a human practice: to always live anew the life of faith in the Gospel. Dr. Lohff's article appeared in *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV. The English translation has been prepared by B. A. Asen with Edward H. Schroeder. We thank the editors of *Kerygma und Dogma* for permission to prepare an English translation.

1. If we seek consensus concerning the central doctrine of the Lutheran Church these days, it becomes clear that little help is afforded by the production of a more comprehensive and historically precise study of dogma. In fact, such a study could be rather discouraging.

First of all, the basis for resolution of questions is becoming increasingly smaller, due to the loss of the guidance formerly supplied by tradition. The increase of historical knowledge, and above all the rise of modern subjectivity, all lead us to suggest as the signature of our time, Gehlen's "unsettled." The plethora of theological approaches to the meaning of justifica-

tion (those of Brunner, Vajta, and Gloege, among others) produced since Helsinki prove this. Precisely formulated dogmatic statements no longer have the importance that was theirs in the age of orthodoxy. They no longer provide factual clarity concerning the church's doctrine, as they did in an age mindful of tradition. The church of that era knew how to resolve questions both of power and of fact; that is, it knew how to make dogmatic insights operative. The statements produced since Helsinki are representative of only a few influential scholars, whose success is limited to the domination of small groups, whose numbers are ever diminishing. The opinion of the "Brethren" on the re-

¹ The following statements are made within the framework of the theological committee of the VELKD. They are directed toward reaching an understanding of justification and developing the method for making justification relevant to the modern world. The Old Testament, New Testament, and dogmatic understanding of justification will be considered, as well as the relationships between justification and social ethics and justification and ecclesiology. We will not summarize the Biblical-dogmatic bases for the doctrine of justification (for the present, see the author's "Die Heilige Schrift als Grundlage der Kirche," in *Lutherisches Bekenntnis im Ökumenischen Horizont*, Lutherisches Kirchenamt, 1967, pp. 77 ff.). We will, however, concentrate on an attempt to contribute something to the hermeneutical debate and to the problem of the relationship between theological and anthropological statements (for the present see the author's "Das dogmatische Problem der An-

thropologie," in *Humanitas Christianitas, Walter von Loewenich zum 65. Geburtstag*, K. Beyschlag et al., 1968, pp. 291 ff.). Our primary concern is to establish methodical assumptions by which theologians of different backgrounds and outlooks can reach agreement on a universal basis concerning the relevance of the article of justification for faith and the church. The following discussion will speak about the possibility of "consensus." A discussion of consensus is of prime importance for reaching some sort of agreement in the Lutheran Church itself. The extent to which such a consensus is important for interconfessional doctrinal discussions is a separate matter (for the present, see the author's, "Grund und Grenze der Kirche, von der Bedeutung des Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses für das Bemühen um Kirchengemeinschaft im deutschen Protestantismus," *Evangelische Kommentare*, 1970, pp. 13 ff.).

cent Lutheran-Reformed agreements is an instructive example of this very point.²

This fact becomes clearer if, secondly, we consider the church's practice, which any theological consensus certainly should serve. One does not need to study the research in the area of the sociology of religion to determine that today participation in the church in any form in no way implies participation in the doctrinal consensus of the church's symbols—this is true not only of laymen and those on the fringes, but of ecclesiastical officials as well. The church's public image is one of partisan groups constantly criticizing and fighting one another, each declaring the other incompetent, a factiousness that could hardly grow worse. The only bond which is still able to hold them together appears to be the institutionalization of critical dialog—a subject which is itself challenged in the current polemic. When H. Shelsky's famous essay "Can Continuous Reflection be Institutionalized?" appeared (1957),³ it evoked a storm of indignation among theologians. Today Shelsky must be viewed as an example of near classical conservatism.

2. The reason for this lies in the conditions of the intellectual situation of our time, in the advance of post-Enlightenment consciousness, and of the unique form of its threatened "public," a matter to which Shelsky, Habermas, and others⁴ have already alluded. The self-reflection of the Christian theologian in the modern world and society is presented with such an abundance of data and experiences that to take refuge in particular

statements of the dogmatic tradition, even the doctrine of God, can no longer afford him a coherent understanding of reality and the world, nor even of his own identity. If he achieves it at all, it is by suppressing all experiences which do not coincide with his particular theological assertions. For all intents and purposes such an attitude of suppression can scarcely be held, unless of course, a person leads the life of a hermit. The main point, however, is that this method of dogmatic self-assertion is no longer of any use in achieving what the traditional doctrine of the Reformation church sought: consensus in the public teaching of the Gospel. Rather, this method disintegrates into a profusion of mutually conflicting positions. At this point the Evangelical Church is in a more difficult position than the Roman Church (in which the power to formulate doctrine is institutionalized), since it has designated the truth of the free Gospel as the immediate power on which faith is founded. But even the Roman Church is no longer able to cope with the modern situation. Indeed, in other respects the Roman Church is even worse off than the Reformation Church, primarily because of the unwieldy character of its institutions. It is our opinion that these circumstances are the primary reason for the dead end reached by the assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki (1963) in its attempt to discuss the question of justification. Helsinki's seriousness in wrestling with the verity of the traditional proclamation of justification cannot be questioned. However, it does appear that Helsinki did not sufficiently consider the conditions by which truth can be conscientiously proclaimed today.

A hope for consensus will not come from dogmatic premises but only from the capacity to take what makes the Christian a Christian, the church the church, and make that so elementary

² "Lutherisch-reformierte Kirchengemeinschaft?" in *Brüder, Kirchlich-theologische Zeitschrift vom Standpunkt der Augsburger Konfession*, 21. Jg., Heft 4/5, 1970, 1 ff.

³ Printed by W. Matthes, *Religionssoziologie*, I, 1967, 164 ff.

⁴ J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962.

that unanimity will again be possible. This capacity, in addition to other factors, it appears to us, was a contributing factor to the effectiveness of the Reformation. In comparison to the theological scholasticism which preceded it, the Reformation was able to simplify the peculiarity of the Christian faith in an unprecedented, impressive, and penetrating manner. The Reformation accomplished this, as the early confessional writings demonstrate, by concentrating on what they called the "doctrine of the Gospel." The "doctrine of the Gospel" was understood and taught theologically as justification. But at the same time the early confessional writings radically simplified the understanding of justification over against the theological tradition by interpreting justification anthropologically and focusing the theological content of the tradition of justification on the *conscientia perterrefacta* and *erecta* of the troubled man. The sentence in AC XX 17 is most characteristic of this idea: "This whole teaching is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, nor can it be understood apart from that conflict." Certainly the decisive achievement of this theological doctrine consists in the fact that the believer hears the Gospel, becomes certain of his salvation, and arrives at an understanding of his own identity. Hope of consensus can only be achieved if the connection between justification and anthropology is once again achieved. Whether these new formulations will satisfy the claims of traditional orthodoxy is yet another question. *In any case, the fundamental confessions of the Lutheran Reformation can be referred to as an example of such a method of correlating justification and anthropology.*

3. The theme "Justification and Anthropology" therefore presents a fundamental task to the contemporary doctrine of the church and to theology. If one can say that the

present situation is characterized by a polarization which separates the Christian faith and the Christian church on one side from the secular world of experience, which is considered as "natural," as societal, on the other side, then the task of Christian proclamation and its theology can only be carried out by a mediation which overcomes this polarization productively (T. Rendtorff), so that what the Reformation proclaimed as Gospel can be heard in the lived experience of man's life today. In the brief discussion which follows it will be demonstrated what is at stake when the ideas of justification and anthropology stand in correlation.

4. The central theological issue for the Lutheran Reformation was justification. Justification was the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. The content and nuances of the meaning of the Reformation doctrine of justification will not be discussed here; it is presumed that they are well known.⁵ More important is the question concerning the function and results of the thinking about justification in the entire Reformation proclamation. Justification does not only constitute one new *locus* among other equally important *loci* of the traditional dogma. Justification is rather the center, the signpost by which all dogmatic statements in the Reformation proclamation are to be seen. At the same time, the doctrine of justification establishes the criteria, the limits which give legitimacy or illegitimacy to the proclamation content of all the traditional dogma.⁶ As was mentioned, the norms of the early symbols of the

⁵ Cf. among others: *Die evangelische Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, ausgewählt und eingeleitet von E. Kinder, 1957; W. Dantine, *Die Gerechtmachung des Gottlosen*, 1959; A. Peters, *Glaube und Werk, Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre im Lichte der Heiligen Schrift*, 1962; H. G. Pöhlmann, *Rechtfertigung*, 1971.

⁶ Cf. E. Wolf, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie," in *Peregrinatio*, II, 1965, 11 ff.

Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 44 [1973], Art. 3

Lutheran Church indicate this unanimously. When the continuation of the church is at stake, we have to adhere to these norms. The doctrine of justification is indeed represented as a *locus* in the Augsburg Confession, but it is also clear that the discussion of justification decisively influenced all the remaining *loci* as well. Justification is already outlined in Article II (cf. the rejection), in the teaching on the office of the ministry (AC V), new obedience (AC VI), of the church (AC VII), the sacraments (AC XIII), worldly things (AC XVI), and last, but not least, the form of the church (AC XXI ff.). All of the aforementioned articles are radically influenced by the doctrine of justification. This becomes even clearer in the Apology, where the complex doctrines *de justificatione* and *de dilectione et impletione legis* are the overwhelming contents of the writing, to which the other articles are only attached.

The structure of the Smalcald Articles presents a similar picture. The chief article on Divine Majesty appears as the condition for the proclamation of justification. Justification is the central issue; all other articles yield to this theological exposition. (SA Part III, Tappert 302)

Beyond these formal considerations, the very way the notion of justification is thought out has implications that are of consequence for the total understanding of Christian doctrine. First, in the doctrine of justification the act of salvation is understood as a matter of communication. It takes place in the connection between the promise of God and the faith of man (*promissio-fides*).⁷ It can be designated as the acceptance of man by God (*adoptio in filios dei*),⁸ which reaches the indi-

⁷ *Promissio* and *fides* are correlatively bound, Ap IV 50, Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 114 and elsewhere. Hereinafter, "Tappert."

vidual in the proclamation and in the service of love, lifts him up, gives him certainty (identity), and enables him to live in face of the temptations of the world.⁹

Second, the act of salvation in the doctrine of justification is understood proleptically; the notion of the justification of the sinner is focused on the final judgment. The justifying verdict of the Gospel means anticipation of the divine verdict on judgment day.¹⁰ For this reason it gives both the certainty of salvation and an identity which endures for man as he faces the contradictions of the world and his self-experience. The justified believer can accept the *simul peccator* of his self-experience; the *peccator in re* is *justus in spe*, that is, in transcending hope. This transcending hope grants a new beginning of lived-out salvation. Finally, this anticipatory certainty of salvation enables him to make liberated use of his natural reason in the realm of human practice. It allows a person to deal with worldly matters with an upright conscience even in the face of the vastness of the conditions and consequences of human conduct in this world—a thought that has fundamental significance in view of the world's present orientation toward continuous reflection.

Third, from the communicative and proleptic character of justification the general dogmatic formulation follows: No theological expression can be conclusive, no theological statement is irrevocable. The consequences arising from this may have remained hidden in Reformation thinking because of the dominance of tradition. However, in the actual practice of Reformation proclamation it was carried out: Not even the express concept of "justification" is indispensable for true faith

⁸ Cf. Ap IV 86, Tappert p. 119; Ap IV 196, Tappert p. 134.

⁹ Ap IV 45, Tappert p. 113.

¹⁰ E. g., Ap IV 345, Tappert p. 160.

—as is shown in the Small Catechism and the orthodox controversy on the fundamental article—if only the substance, the unconditional offer of and acceptance of salvation, is present.¹¹ This means that in the Reformation's confession of justification the issue was not the infallibility of a verbal dogmatic tradition but the proper and unequivocal determination of a human practice, namely living on the basis of faith in the Gospel which, to be sure, is substantially indebted to the tradition of Christian proclamation.¹² The task of preserving the continuity of the Reformation faith in the present situation is the task of accomplishing, in view of the present conditions of human experience, the proper and unequivocal determination of the practice of the new life of faith based on the Gospel. The way in which the doctrine of justification can be determinative for a new grounding of the Christian faith can only be indicated here in thesis form.

a. Because Jesus of Nazareth advocated the righteousness¹³ of God, He is the true man. Because in Jesus of Nazareth the act of salvation opened the full power of the righteousness of God to history, Jesus is true God for

¹¹ Cf. O. Rischel, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, Bd. IV, 306 ff. Supported by H. Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchen*, 7th ed., pp. 63 ff., and E. Hirsch, *Hilfsbuch zum Studium der Dogmatik*, Neudruck, 1951, pp. 261 ff.

¹² That the Reformation doctrine of justification is primarily concerned with the right determination of the practice of faith—without detriment to the need for clearly establishing dogmatic fundamentals, chiefly with respect to Christology—is proved by the article on justification in the Apology and the first six articles of the Formula of Concord.

¹³ A Biblical-theological basis for the following theses cannot be given here. The basis depends on the assumption that the Pauline notion of the righteousness of God, as a summary expression of the New Testament salvation-faith against the background of the Old Testament, is valid. Cf. the author's "Die Heilige Schrift als Grundlage der Kirche," pp. 92 ff.

mankind—this is the root of every Christology which is based on justification by faith.

b. Because life in the righteousness of God fulfills the salutary destiny of man, it signifies the completion of creation as God wanted it—this is the root of every statement concerning creation which is based on justification by faith.

c. If participation in the righteousness of God is salvation, then self-exclusion from God's righteousness is tantamount to the failure of man to achieve his destiny—that is the root of every statement about sin which is based on justification by faith.

d. Because the promise of the righteousness of God means the promise of salvation at the end time, the hope of faith rests on future completion—that is the root of every eschatology which is based on justification by faith.

e. Because participation in the righteousness of God also affects man in his bodily and social existence, there are signs and testimonies (AC XIII). The celebration and performance of these signs and testimonies confirm the real presence of salvation to man—that is the root of every statement concerning the sacraments which is based on justification by faith.

The previous statements are only meant to be "catchwords." They could be elaborated upon only in the medium of anthropology. Thus we now turn to that second concept in our theme—anthropology.

5. We have already alluded to the fact that in modern times, and even more acutely in the present situation, unquestioning agreement in understanding the world and life, which an unquestioned acceptance of tradition guaranteed, has been lost. As agreement continues to decay, dogmatic schemes appear to mutually exclude one another, and as a result they are no longer capable of mediation. The only thing they really accomplish is to confront the hearer

with claims of authority and a call for subjection. The only way general agreement can be achieved and subjective certainty opened to outsiders is for the position of only one dogmatic assertion to be reflected, and that in the formulation of subjective certainty this reflection be included. Established tradition has been lost and only questioning man himself remains as the final basis for agreement, even in Christianity. A generation ago Sombart said it very well: Anthropology is the strange way of knowing that men have worked out for themselves when they no longer believe in anything (meant here in the sense of unquestioned valid tradition). In order, nevertheless, to arrive at a final point of agreement for understanding each other, men chose interest in themselves.¹⁴ The previous statement sums up very simply the problem of secularization. What characterizes the present state of affairs is that the claims of absoluteness do not square with the torn conditions which exist. What is needed is agreement concerning the basis from which human life can be oriented. Therefore a theological statement concerning the salvation of mankind cannot avoid the anthropological question.¹⁵ Whatever can be expressed in statements about God, revelation, Christ, and justification

¹⁴ W. Sombart, *Vom Menschen*, 1938.

¹⁵ The concept "anthropology" is not used here in the sense of the "prior understanding" of hermeneutical theology as a neutral basis (cf. W. Joest, "Thesen," in *Kerygma und Dogma*, 1968, pp. 153 ff.). In opposition to an abstract formal prior understanding of man's being, we assert that the self-understanding of man is always mediated in the historical-societal process. The anthropological question in connection with dogmatic statements has the function of natural theology in the sense of orthodoxy, of the *Lehrsätze* in Schleiermacher's sense, and the systems of Christian certainty in the sense of von Frank. Theological anthropology asks, on the basis of the present understanding of faith, about faith's anthropological significance and at the same time about the meaning of historical (and dogmatic) presuppositions.

is at the same time thematizing man's self-understanding. Man is to be struck by these assertions; a claim is to be put on him by them. The meaning and the success of Christian practice depend on whether men are enabled to find, to identify, to perceive themselves in Christian speech and action.

6. The important contemporary question naturally arises of whether or not it is possible in the current situation, as described, to engage in anthropological talk apart from the individual and social factors that condition every man's self-awareness. Is any statement about the nature of man possible at all? Must not such a statement be considered as illusory, as resulting from a mere bourgeois view of man?¹⁶ The only answer is this: if anthropological reflection—also anthropological reflection in the sense of Christian faith—only deals with man *in concreto* (societally conditioned) and not with man *in abstracto*, then theology will be unable to ignore the social coefficients of man's self-awareness. This means that theology must renounce any claim to decide normatively the nature and destiny of man, as though man were untouched by historical and societal conditions, or by appealing to a source of knowledge that is *sui generis*. Theology should instead investigate man's present orientation to the world and indicate what significance the tradition of the Christian faith, and most importantly justifying faith, has for overcoming these problems. That is, to be sure, an immensely broad assignment that is waiting to be mastered. If one does consider the historico-social conditions of human self-understanding, it then happens that differences of age, of generation, of education, and above all the specifics of

¹⁶ Cf. the discussion concerning Feuerbach's theses by K. Marx (*Fischer-Studienausgabe*, Bd. 1, 1966, p. 139 ff.). Cf. also P. Tillich, *Die sozialistische Entscheidung* (1933), W. W. II, 1962, above all see pp. 255 ff., n. 3.

Lohff: Justification and Anthropology

social classes weigh so heavily that radically different models of human life-interest are conceivable, and the Christian tradition has to relate to all of them. The major point for this kind of operation must be the practice of the church itself (in proclamation, pastoral care, etc.). Doctrinal theology has to supply the practical theologian with the tools to be able to perceive the actual life-interests of men and then independently articulate what significance the tradition of faith has for man in his specific situation. The socio-psychological and social-ethical problems which face the theological task are immense, and one needs faith in justification in order not to lose courage in the face of these problems.

Having said this, we must return to our initial question. That question is whether or not the basis for a consensus can be found in view of the tasks which face the church and theology today. It is important to note that we do not mean a consensus for the special problematics of dogmatics or social ethics, but at a more elementary level a consensus for the practice of the Christian proclamation of faith as it deals with every problem. *The kind of consensus we mean is one which is able to express convincingly the common motivation behind all Christian confession and action and which is also able to engage the conscience. For one who stands in continuity with the Reformation this consensus would find its basis in the doctrine of justification and would have to be formulated via the medium of anthropological reflection.*

7. Everything we have said previously concerning the factors conditioning the present task of theology could not be taken seriously if we proceeded now to formulate this consensus with a claim to dogmatic validity. For this consensus cannot appear until it has been composed in the contemporary church. It cannot be anticipated in the formulations of a specific theological professor. For this reason our com-

ments on the themes of justification and anthropology can only pick out fixed universal data from contemporary anthropology, in reference to which the meaning of Christianity, and particularly the meaning of the Reformation's notion of justifying faith, can be determined. We approach the task in three steps: (a) By speaking about the anthropological implications of the Reformation doctrine of justification. (b) By discussing the abiding significance of *justificatio per fidem*. (c) By speaking about the abiding significance of justification *propter Christum*.

To the first point: In his published lecture about anthropology in 1797 Kant hit upon a distinction which is pragmatically implicit in all thought on anthropology. Kant's distinction was between physiological and pragmatic knowledge of man. The physiological knowledge of man, says Kant, draws on what nature makes out of man, i. e., the physiological characteristics with which man is born. Pragmatic knowledge draws on what man as a free being makes and should make out of himself.¹⁷ Physiological knowledge in this sense extends to all of the biological, psychological, and sociological investigations of man, including also human biology and the behavioral sciences. The pragmatic knowledge of man thematizes, by contrast and in distinction from this, his responsibility. This was the primary theme of anthropology for idealistic theology until existential theology came along.¹⁸

It is true that in the final analysis Kant's distinction can only be carried

¹⁷ Kant, *Werke*, ed. E. Cassirer, Bd. VIII, 1923, p. 3.

¹⁸ What existential theology generally designates as the dialectic of the tangible and the intangible is actually the thematization of (unmediated) subjectivity in the manner of Kierkegaard: "Die Subjektivität ist die Wahrheit" (*Abschließende unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift*, edited by Hirsch, et al., Bd. 1, p. 179 ff., 200; "Truth is Subjectivity," *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by

out tendentially. For as physiological anthropology develops, up to and including the behavioral sciences in all of their multiplicity, a pragmatic motive, a vested interest in knowledge, is indicated: whether it is to liberate man from prejudices about himself (the pathos of emancipation) or merely the vested interest in perpetuating the human species.¹⁹ Antithetically, however, one has to say that pragmatic anthropology, i. e., the interest of man in his own freedom and self-determination, has changed the physiological-empirical data of man in post-Enlightenment times—if not in respect to anthro-biology (one thinks of the possibility of affecting the genes and extending the chances for human survival), then surely in respect to the societal formation of man's life. For this reason an adequate understanding of man is possible only where the aspects of man's objectivity and subjectivity are dialectically related to one another. By this we mean, where man is interpreted out of the interplay between his empirical data and his self-model in the historical-societal process. This assertion implies the superiority of all dialectical views of man (Hegel, Marx, contemporary critical dialectics), as opposed to all naive naturalism and idealism. These dialectical views of man are also congruent with the way Christian tradition understands man. Christian tradition comprehends the destiny of the human race as the interplay of the qualities of man's creaturehood which are not in his control (the "givens" of man) with man's own acts of responsibility (estrangement and reconciliation). It sees the salutary fulfillment of man's existence in a historical-societal process of salvation experiences.²⁰

David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton University Press for American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1941).

¹⁹ For the last point cf. K. Lorenz, *Das sogenannte Böse*, 3d ed., 1964.

8.1. First, we will consider what the field of anthropology has produced in recent times. Here we encounter the thesis of "being open to the world" (*Weltoffenheit*) in many variations.²¹ *Weltoffenheit* means freedom from the animalian instinct for protection and from being bound by the environment. It also means possessing the necessary drive and motivation to form a "second" nature, a cultural way of behavior. Man has the capacity to live because the animalian guidance systems of instinct which he lacks are compensated for by the creation of social and linguistic institutions. These institutions make activist life a permanent human condition. They are legitimized through societal traditions and internalized by the individual in the socialization process. Not until the internalization of societal norms has occurred does the individual find his social identity.²² We discovered such institutional conditions for man's existence already classically developed in ancient high cultures, in their institutions of religion, of state government, and of law. The same is visible in the historical tradition of Israel and continues to exist until the present. It is at this point, however, that a conflict arises. The conflict involves the violation or disregard of sacred institutions. When such a violation occurs, reintegration of an individual into the institution means that the institution must assert itself over against the individual. This reintegration can be achieved by destroying the transgressors, by graded sanctions, or if need be by ritual or cultic sacrifice. Any or all of these methods

²⁰ That is the anthropological sense of the classical doctrine of man's "states" (primitive state, fall, reconciliation, redemption).

²¹ For much of this basic information see especially the work of A. Gehlen, *Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, 4th ed., 1950.

²² Cf. the summaries of P. Berger, Th. Luckmann, *The Social Structure of Reality* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

may be used to reintegrate the individual into a community that is determined by institutions. At this level, one could even say that the process of reintegration is analogous to "justification."

8.2. Already in early times the crisis of institutional orders produced two tendencies which go beyond the level of institutional formation of human life. The first tendency is to universalize order. This is combined with the doubt that life determined by institutions was adequate and with the new experience of human subjectivity. The destiny of man, what man was meant to be, was no longer seen as totally bound up with institutions. Instead, man's destiny is measured by a universally valid Moral Law which criticized merely existing tradition. In Greek philosophy, and especially in the Platonic dialogs, the individual saw himself responsible only to this universal Moral Law. Any condemnation or justification which took place occurred before this law. As a result, man grasped a new way of understanding freedom, a way which was opposed to institutions. This freedom was, as Kant later expressed it, established via the postulate of the Moral Law. This means that a salutary shaping of human life does not occur by allowing existing conditions to do or to go wherever they want to, but by consenting to the universal moral destiny in the face of which a man perceives his individual subjectivity. This view sees the basis for natural law in the task of criticizing the institutional and positivistic law of given societies.²³

This tendency in Hellenistic philosophy had retroactive effect in Jewish and Christian thinking and stands in

the background of the Pauline as well as the Reformation doctrine of the Law.

8.3. Finally, in contrast to what was said in 8.2, the peculiar Israelite experience of the transcendence of the deity must be considered. The God of Israel does not possess the semitranscendence of religious institutions. The God of Israel is not the guarantor of universal order. He appears rather as a Power who makes a promise, and it is this promise which determines man's calling. This calling or destiny is to trust the historical guidance of the One who made the promise and to preserve communal faithfulness. This faithfulness moves man to obey the Power who called him. It causes man to live uprightly in the salvation community.²⁴ The steps involved in forming this human understanding in the Biblical and ecclesiastical tradition will not be pursued here. It is sufficient to say that its development lies essentially in the fact that slowly but surely the purity of this understanding of man's destiny prevailed over institutional order and also over man's being tied to the universal *nomos*.²⁵

The proclamation of Jesus constitutes a final radicalizing of this, both in His critique of the traditional norms (the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount) as well as in His drawing the consequence of removing human destiny from any inner-historical kind of realization. Jesus not only declared that the hope of God's dominion fulfilled man's destiny in the eschatological community, but also announced its beginning now, and authoritatively granted to the man who was open to His promise participation

²³ "Law" is not understood here as objective fact (*lex universalis*), but as a meaningful category for understanding reality as all-encompassing order. For the theme of natural law as critic cf. J. Habermas, "Naturrecht und Revolution," in *Theorie und Praxis*, 2d ed., 1967, p. 52 ff.

²⁴ Cf. G. von Rad, *Theologie des AT*, II, 1969, 352 ff., 365 ff.; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). W. Pannenberg, "Zur Theologie des Rechts," *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik*, 7/1963, 1 ff., 17.

²⁵ Pannenberg, p. 19.

in it.²⁶ The person who accepts this promise of Jesus will simultaneously be led to accept his fellowman, for it is in this way that the community of God that lives from the dominion of God is established. The Christian community testified that Jesus suffered and died on the cross for the sake of this promise and that the resurrection confirmed the promise. Therefore Paul concentrated on designating the "Christ event" as the establishment of *dikaiosyne theou*—the justifying of the sinner through faith. Consequently, if what determines a man is no longer bound up with taking institutions into account, but lies rather in being received into the eschatologically righteous community, then man's failure to achieve his destiny is no longer to be related to the institutions or the fulfilling of a universal order. Instead it is man's failure to achieve his place in God's intended universal history and his failure to meet the challenge of faith (Rom. 14:23). The justification of the sinner depends solely on whether or not he accepts the promise of faith contained in the Jesus event, i. e., that he commits himself completely to the salvation community opened up for him in which he discovers that God is his own destiny and that his neighbor is his brother.²⁷

8.4. The Pauline understanding of salvation as the creation of the community of the righteous was only gradually retrieved in the history of the church. It was not the formation of the Trinitarian and Christological

dogma that thematized the historical origin of the Christian salvation experience through the medium of new languages. It was rather the correct use of these dogmas which could clearly elucidate what was meant anthropologically by justifying faith. The identification of salvation with sacred institutions or with obedience toward the universal order (law) in the church had to be criticized anew. Such criticism occurred radically in the Reformation. Justification was made the center of Christian faith and the only criterion for proper handling of dogmatic statements of faith. The decisive factor was the Christian as well as humane practice based on justifying faith: namely, the promise of salvation unconditionally established in the Christ event awakens in man the unconditional acceptance of salvation through faith and calls the believer to dedicate his life to the community of love thereby established.²⁸

It is not possible to consider critically the theological concepts in which this practice was expressed in the theology of the Reformation, nor to discuss the societal and anthropological consequences of this practice. We will instead limit ourselves to discussing the question of what justifying faith, as the Reformation formulated it, is capable of saying within the context of man's modern self-understanding. Our discussion will revolve around the classical formulation of AC IV: *justificatio propter Christum per fidem*.

9. First, we will discuss the phrase *justificatio per fidem*. An important objection currently raised against the doctrine of justification is aimed at the obligation of man to justify himself before God, to "pass muster" as it were, and to be responsible to the divine judge. Both of these obligations, which are presupposed in the

²⁸ Cf. the basic assertions in Ap IV 189 ff., Tappert, pp. 133 ff.

²⁶ Pannenberg, p. 20; also *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 1964, pp. 47 ff., 232 ff.; Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

²⁷ The three steps commented on here form only a rough sketch. In order to complete the picture concrete exegetical and historical work should be done. The necessity to do this task should not be denied. Here we rather point out where exegetical and historical work must begin in connection with basic dogmatic questions.

message of justification, are allegedly no longer responsive to contemporary man's self-understanding. Contemporary man asks the more elementary question of meaning, of whether or not God even exists and what there is in the present fractured condition of the world that holds it together and gives man identity.²⁹ Contemporary man might also say that it is not justification at all but man's self-realization that is the goal of his life. The real meaning of life is contained in what man can achieve, in his drive to live life to the ultimate. For modern man technology provides the means to that end. The Reformation confessions, however, say by contrast that justification occurs *per solam fidem*. Faith is readiness to hear, to open oneself up to and (to) expose oneself to those things which human existence does not have under its control. These are the qualities that are always *a priori* to every attempt at reflection. In this sense existential theology interprets faith as the abandonment of life based on the tangible, that which I control, and self-commitment to the intangible, which I do not control. This idea arises from Kierkegaard's notion of the destiny of man's existence as the task of the self having to relate to itself. By performing this task, man transparently grounds his existence upon the Power that created it.³⁰ In *Sickness unto Death* Kierkegaard developed an anthropology based on this destiny, a comprehensive casuistry of the failures man makes of his existence, all of which revolve around man's unwillingness to accept himself, to become transparent to his own insight,

²⁹ Cf. the "Botschaft der 4. Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes in Helsinki," in *Helsinki* 1963, ed. W. Wilckens, 1964, p. 456; P. Tillich, *Rechtfertigung und Zweifel* (1924). W. W. VII, 1970, pp. 85 ff.; also *Systematische Theologie* I, 2d ed., 1956, pp. 61 ff.

³⁰ S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 10.

or to open himself up to the Power that constituted him, "The All-Encompassing One" of his existence. One can maintain that these insights of Kierkegaard have borne fruit in the anthropology of modern depth and conflict psychology. Human conflicts frequently can be traced back to the basic law that man has either lost (or not yet attained) the ability to accept the greater horizon of life's conditions beyond his control. The therapy applied in such a case can appear as a secular form of the knowledge that man can live *ex fide sola*. In fact, one may ask whether this secular form of therapy is not more significant than Christian pastoral care, because in its practice more about justification is operative than is the case in much arrogant and dogmatically precise preaching. However, by contrast we must say that justification aims at awakening faith and providing the necessary courage for self-commitment to the ground of life which is not in man's control. The famous assertions in the Apology indicate this fact: *diligere Deum super omnia, oboedire Deo in afflictionibus*.³¹ The more the decay of institutional order exposes man's will to secure himself and the conflict which arises from it, the clearer this basic fact becomes.

10. Of course, the Reformation emphasis on *sola fide* does not mean *nuda fides*,³² but *fides promissionis evangelii*. The demand to open oneself up and to commit oneself is not an absurd demand only if it is a demand that has a solid foundation, a demand that places man on a foundation which inspires self-commitment. It is only in this way that identity can be achieved and subjectivity is able to find a foundation. The "promise" is not automatically efficacious in verbal dogmatic proclamations, but only where it

³¹ Cf. the sequence in Ap IV 45, Tappert, p. 113.

³² Cf. Ap IV 73, Tappert, p. 117.

is authoritative, i. e., where it amounts to a person being received into a community of Christian practice which points to that acceptance testified to as "God's righteousness in Christ." This acceptance has its nonreligious analogy in the total complex of current insights into the conditions of socialization. And to gain such insights one does not have to think of the extreme situations of the hospital sickbed or test-tube babies. The most elementary conditions of socialization, of shaping human identity, include man's being offered possibilities of identification in a matrix of personal acceptance. The first such matrix is what Erikson designates as a life-space of "primeval trust."³³ It is on this basis that the specific identity of a person develops and a man is enabled to become a real person rather than remain dependent on his parents and teachers. In this way subjectivity is awakened through subjectivity. The crucial significance of acceptance as a fundamental condition of salvation and of any wholesome shaping of human life is experienced in many places today. The Christian proclamation of justification points toward the universal historical horizon where this acceptance can be grounded and motivated. Such motivation will not be forthcoming, however, if the act of acceptance is placed under dogmatic premises—the question of whether justification can be separated from Christology is in our opinion an improper question. Instead, justification opens itself, without reservation, to the present conditions of humanity and then indicates what the Christian proclamation has to give and contribute to this particular humanity. In the face of the problematics of socialization and of the experience that our every action can result in the success or failure of our existence, carrying with it incalculable results

³³ Cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Identität und Lebenszyklus*, 1966, pp. 55 ff., 62.

for the neighbor, and in the face of the fact that all human action contains unforeseeable consequences, we must say that justifying faith does not guarantee a conscience secured but a conscience comforted.³⁴ This occurs by connecting success and failure to the comprehensive ground from which the Christian faith experiences the possibility of acceptance: "I am with God in grace." Such certainty does not mean self-certainty. This is evident from what was said previously, that openness and self-commitment are the bases for entry into justification. Both of them, demands for openness and the willing involvement in a prevenient acceptance, are spoken of fundamentally in the Reformation doctrine of repentance. This doctrine teaches *contritio* as rejection of self-centeredness and *fides* as the certainty in every self-commitment (fragmentary though it always is) of being accepted by God.³⁵

11. The problem still exists of whether or not the Reformation doctrine of justification has, in an exclusive way, a Christological basis—this is most soberly expressed by the formula of AC IV: *justificatio propter Christum*.³⁶ Justification certainly touches the individual in his innermost subjectivity, but always in such a way that a man is simultaneously placed into an all-encompassing Christological, eschatological, and ecclesiological horizon. The dogmatic solution which the Reformation and tradition gave for this *propter Christum* certainly

³⁴ Cf. W. Trillhaas, *Dogmatik*, 1962, pp. 400 ff.

³⁵ Cf. AC XII, Ap XII, 46, 50.

³⁶ It should be mentioned once again that what follows does not constitute a reduced justification doctrine, reduced by virtue of Christological grounding. Within the framework of our consideration the three problems mentioned rather provide the access points by means of which the explanation of the doctrines of justification and reconciliation can be made (and distinguished) in the context of contemporary problematics.

Lohff: Justification and Anthropology

had its problems. Where it simply reverted to the Anselmic atonement theory, the Christ event became an objective, once-for-all, completed salvation fact which was reckoned to the individual.³⁷ This was most sharply expressed by Johann Gerhard: *legem requirere justitiam propriam, evangelium vero offere alienam*.³⁸ The Law then appears as the basic stipulation of human existence, and the Gospel is merely a conditional amnesty. As a result, justification was not only individualized, but the connection of the salvation event with the founding of new life in the redemptive community was torn apart. It destroyed the community concept. It meant ultimately that the Christ event could not be understood as one encompassing reality of a fellowship of redeemed human lives anticipating realization in the church and heading toward eschatological perfection.

Historical research, and especially the history-of-tradition research, is opposed to this Anselmic atonement theory. It demonstrates that Christology did not originally develop around the lifting out or isolation of one man but around the interpretation of human history. Christology proves its validity in its interpretation of history and makes a history of salvation possible.³⁹ Thus Hegel conceived history as the progressive increase of human

freedom and gave the Christ event prime significance.⁴⁰

Once again, then, the Christian proclamation of salvation meets post-Christian anthropology. One such anthropology conceives of man as an ensemble of historical-societal relationships.⁴¹ It sees the task of a man as bringing about human emancipation solely through the political realm. Only through the political sphere can the alienated conditions of society be remedied. Only through the creation of a just and free association in which the freedom of the individual represents the conditions of freedom for all others can alienated human life be restored. Not until the future society, created through human emancipation, can this freedom and salvation be realized; and the only avenue to it is the political practice of emancipation movements. This leads to the claim that, in view of the actual "unfreedom" of man in this world, the Christian proclamation of salvation amounts to little more than fair words or empty promises about help from an apparent, other-worldly power and flight from the one task of mankind's self-liberation.

However, salvation thematized as "freedom" in the history of the human race can indeed be apprehended by justifying faith. The category of freedom is employed by Paul (and John) as well as by the reformers as the main expression for the salvation mediated by justification. But the *libertas Christiana* as the total expression of salvation does not appear as a datum to be achieved by the revolutionary practice of human self-disposal. It is rather a freedom made a historical possibility proleptically, through the historical salvation event in Christ,

³⁷ R. Prenter gives a summary description of this problem, *Schöpfung und Erlösung*, Bd. 2, 1960, pp. 356 ff.; Prenter, *Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 1964, p. 285; Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

³⁸ Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici* (1610 ff.), ed. J. Cotta, 1762, VI, p. 134; VII, p. 50. Also cf. E. Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melancthon*, 1891, p. 130.

³⁹ Cf. among others P. Tillich, *Christologie und Geschichtsdeutung*, W. W. VI, p. 72 ff., and W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 1964; Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*.

⁴⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte (Theorie Werk-ausgabe, Bd. 12, 1970)*, passim, especially pp. 30 ff.

⁴¹ Cf. Karl Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach* (Fischer-Studienausgabe I, 1966, p. 139).

an event that takes place as a power for community of man with God and of man with his fellowman. Precisely because the Christ event is the source which makes this salutary freedom historically possible, it is conceived as the saving event. The freedom of Christ cannot be only postulated dogmatically; it must be grasped in the concrete practice of faith. For it means freedom from self-claims and the will of accomplishment as well as freedom from the existing institutions and the Moral Law. The believer possesses this freedom not for himself alone, but only in the fellowship of free people, a fellowship in which the acts of an individual find their measure in the needs of others (1 Cor. 10:23, cf. Luther's dialectic on the freedom of the Christian man).⁴² The freeing power of the salvation event manifests itself as the power for creating community in the service of love as well as in encouraging one to speak a fraternal word.

But is it not necessary in view of the existing "unfreedom" and political authority which exists today to understand this salutary forming of human society as mere illusion? The only answer that can be given to that question is given by the Christian practice of living the life of justifying faith. Indeed, the individual must be envisaged as an ensemble of historical relationships, but the issue of whether or not a man attains salvation (freedom from self-justification and commitment to serving mankind), this issue we dare to assert does not consist in his participation in human emancipation but in his being prepared to surrender himself to the fellowship of justification which is offered him. In view of the rapid growth of anti-nomianism in modern society, justifying faith cannot place its hope in the fact that salutary life will first be made possible when all conditions of

society will have been transformed. Nor does justifying faith expect such a salvation to come through the technical-political will toward accomplishment of a whole society of men who are themselves bereft of salvation. Justification *propter Christum* means rather that where anyone, anywhere, unconditionally surrenders himself to the loving acceptance *in Christus*, salvation happens and the freedom of a Christian man is established. This has its consequences for the church. The redemptive community which lives from justification does not prove itself by creating a "Constantinian" sacred, supranatural law. The "rights," the justice, which the justified man receives takes as their measure the criticism which Jesus made of the traditional law and His announcement of salvation which opened the future to man. Justification works itself out in the unconditional acceptance of one's neighbor, an acceptance that takes critical cognizance of the specific current situation. The proclamation of the Gospel of justification grounds the liberated subjectivity which it bestows to a person in unity with a community of critical subjectivity.⁴³ Only where the individual in his subjectivity is free from the compulsion to justify himself and where he accepts human society in its specific situation and places his gifts into service to that society, can hope for the wholesome forming of a human society of freedom exist. According to Apology VI 189 the *politia Christi* proves its power in the weakness of those members who confess Him before this world.⁴⁴

CONCLUDING THESES

1. In trying to arrive at a consensus concerning the doctrine of the Gospel today, one is confronted with a situa-

⁴³ Cf. H. Ringeling, *Begriff und Bedeutung einer kritischen Religiosität*, in T. Rendtorff/A. Rich, *Humane Gesellschaft, Beiträge zu ihrer Gestaltung*, 1970, pp. 91 ff.

⁴⁴ Tappert, pp. 133 ff.

⁴² WA 7, 21, 36.

tion in which a vast increase of historical knowledge is combined with boundless subjective experiences (permanent reflection). Dogmatic precision in the style of 17th- and 18th-century dogmatism transforms itself to a subjective position. The more specific dogmatic knowledge becomes, the less hope there appears to be for consensus. It is then that the demand for institutionalizing critical dialog arises.

2. In view of these circumstances, a consensus concerning the doctrine of the Gospel can only be hoped for if the criteria for right faith and right doctrine, over against the theological tradition, are made so elementary that unity is possible. This was the achievement of the early confessional writings of the Reformation (in their own day). They were able to do this by qualifying the "doctrine of the Gospel" theologically by means of the doctrine of justification and then interpreting this doctrine in the direction of an anthropological consensus (AC XX 17: This whole teaching is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, nor can it be understood apart from that conflict).

3. The early Lutheran confessional writings understand justification not simply as one article of faith among others, but as the criterion appearing in various articles of faith for the correct use of all articles of faith. Concentrating on the doctrine of justification does not mean that the evangelical proclamation is reduced to one article. It means more importantly, that for the faith of the Reformation a correct evangelical doctrine in all articles of faith occurs only if these articles are shown to be segments of the saving faith confessed in the doctrine of justification.

4. The Reformation doctrine of justification refers to the communicative (*promissio-fides*) as well as to the

eschatological (*peccator in re-justus in spe*) character of Christian existence and all of its respective doctrine. For this reason justification cannot be established by claiming infallibility for one verbal dogmatic tradition but by the right and unequivocal determination of a human practice: to always live anew the life of faith in the Gospel. This means that today anthropological reflection must be employed as it was in the early confessional writings.

5. In view of the loss of an all-encompassing and binding tradition, anthropological reflection is the only possible mediator between conflicting positions within theology as well as the conflict between theology and other human disciplines. Only where a thesis functions to reflect the self-understanding of man is it able to formulate an offer of identification for others.

6. The societal limitations of every self-expression of man as well as the differences of individual life-styles appear to make a universal anthropology impossible or at least unfruitful. However, we still face the task of formulating the human understanding of faith so that consensus in the elementary aspects is possible while at the same time making possible a legitimate, concrete articulation of individual faith.

7. Kant distinguished between the physiological knowledge of man (empirical nature) and the pragmatic (freedom, self-formation) knowledge of man. If the physiological knowledge of man, however, also has a pragmatic motive and changes the pragmatic self-understanding of man and his empirical data, then the physiological and the pragmatic knowledge of man cannot be separated from one another. This insight unites a dialectical anthropology with traditional Christian practice.

8. The following anthropological

assertions can be made concerning justifying faith:

8.1. Man as a "being open to the world" is capable of living because where the animalian instinct for protection is lacking in man it is compensated for by the creation of institutions. The welfare of man consists in his conforming to the institution. When he fails the institution, he can be reintegrated only by the institution having its way, e. g., graded sanctions or even extermination.

8.2. In the crisis of institutional formations the question arises of the universal order of a (Moral) Law. This Moral Law transcends the institutions and criticizes them. Man's responsibility and justification are then related to these instances (natural law, "Law").

8.3. In the Israelite experience of the historical transcendence of the Godhead, obligation to the historical leading of God replaced obligation to institutions and the Law. Here the conflict is measured not in the damage done to the orders but in the refusal to be historically faithful to God's fellowship. (Rom. 14:23)

8.4. Against this background Jesus' proclamation of the dominion of God is to be understood as the direct promise of salvation for anyone (even the disintegrated) who unconditionally opens himself up to this promise. Paul interpreted the Christ event, on the basis of the Easter experience, as the establishment of the righteousness of God for faith. Anyone who opens himself up to the promise of justification is taken into the fellowship of the soteriological fulfillment of human destiny.

8.5. The Pauline understanding of salvation as the creation of the righteous community of the justified was retrieved gradually in the history of the church. The decisive step in the process of regaining Paul's understanding of salvation was established

in the Christian and humane practice of the Reformation: the unconditional promise of salvation established in the Christ event awakens the unconditional acceptance of salvation by faith and prompts the believer to dedicate his life to establish the community of love.

9. *Fides* is to be interpreted as self-opening and self-commitment, by which alone man can conquer the existential conflicts that arise from the situations of his own self-incarceration. Indeed, the more the decay of institutional protection exposes man's self-protective will and the conflict which arises from it, the clearer this fundamental operation of faith becomes.

10. *Fides* is made possible through the encouragement which arises from being accepted. It must be verified by letting every aspect of life be qualified by this acceptance. Such verification is expected of every man by virtue of the "universal priesthood of all believers." In view of the far-reaching results of our actions, it is only the certainty of acceptance which grants a life with a "comforted conscience."

11. The confession of justification *propter Christum* cannot be based on an isolated estimation of the Christ event as though it were objective salvation merchandise (Anselm, Lutheran Orthodoxy). More importantly, the Christ event proves itself as salvation event in the "fellowship of freedom in faith" which it brings forth. The community demonstrates freedom's effects in the way it shapes the everyday life of man. For the sake of man and in view of the increasing antinomianism of modern society, justifying faith will not set its hope on a revolution of all social circumstances as the prerequisite to make wholesome life in freedom possible. Nor will faith expect salvation to come from the technical-political

Lohff: Justification and Anthropology

desire for accomplishment arising from a society which is itself bereft of salvation. Faith testifies rather to the certainty that where everyone unconditionally surrenders himself to God's loving acceptance and lives this

life of acceptance in relation to his neighbor, salvation happens. It is only in the freedom of a Christian built on such foundations that the fashioning of a wholesome human community can be realized.