

Fall 2009

Justification and Good Works: A Study of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Justin Chay

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Chay, J. (2009). Justification and Good Works: A Study of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/395>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact phillips@duq.edu.

JUSTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS: A STUDY OF THE
JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Justin In-Chul Chay

December 2009

Copyright by
Justin In-Chul Chay

December 2009

JUSTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS; A STUDY OF THE
JOINT DECLARATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

By

Justin In-Chul Chay

Approved October 22, 2009

Gerald Boodoo, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)

Radu Bordeianu, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

William M. Wright, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

George S. Worgul, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Theology
Professor of Theology

Christopher M. Duncan, Ph.D.
Dean, McNulty College and
Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Professor of Political Science

ABSTRACT

JUSTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS; A STUDY OF THE JOINT DECLARATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

By

Justin In-Chul Chay

December 2009

Dissertation supervised by Professor Boodoo

The doctrine of justification tells how the saving grace of God in Christ can be actualized in the believers. Because of the very importance of this doctrine, disputes broke out between Augustine and Pelagius, later in the medieval period, and most importantly during the Reformation period – which led to mutual condemnations and the division of the Western church. The church still does not have a unified voice in interpreting the doctrine despite recent ecumenical dialogues, which culminated in the *Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999.

By analyzing the historical and ecumenical documents, two important “remaining problems” emerge: first, the place of good works in salvation; second, the Catholic doctrine of “inherent righteousness of the justified,” which contradicts the Lutheran teaching of *simul iustus et peccator* (“at the same time righteous and sinner”). Then, by appealing to an

exegesis of the relevant biblical texts, the dissertation seeks to *resolve the fundamental problems* in order to advance the dialogue.

The dissertation defines the justified Christians' human condition: the human condition can be characterized neither by *simul iustus et peccator* nor by "inherent righteousness." Rather, Christians are in an *unstable state* so that depending on whether they are controlled by the Holy Spirit or by their sinful desires, they live like Christians or like sinners. The dissertation also defines the nature of "Christian" works in contrast to the "works of law." Christian works are "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), and are not human achievements or "works of law" that Paul rejects (Rom 3:28). Therefore it is not that Christians do good works "through the grace of God," but that the indwelling Spirit carries out good works through Christians, using them as "instruments." If we thus understand Christian works, then, in light of the biblical texts that teach *the final judgment based on deeds*, Protestants may no longer reject such works for final justification, and the Catholic emphasis on good works will no longer be accused as semi-Pelagianism, thereby removing a big obstacle to further ecumenical agreement. In conclusion, the dissertation proposes a theology of justification.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A number of years ago I was working as an engineer when I was called to a full-time ministry and entered a seminary. Throughout the M.Div. and STM years in seminary and the doctoral study at Duquesne University I have been trained to become a theologian and a better Christian as well. Now with this doctoral dissertation I am about to finish a formal education in theology, but I know that I must continue to learn and struggle to become a better theologian and Christian. For without becoming a good Christian, one cannot become a good theologian, either.

I have always been interested in soteriology; because Jesus came to this world to save the lost ones, soteriology seemed to me the core doctrine of Christianity. In retrospect, I feel fortunate to have come to Duquesne University for doctoral study, for at Duquesne I learned Catholic theology (including soteriology), which complements the Reformed theologies that I had learned in seminary and without which this dissertation would not have been possible. Therefore I sincerely thank Dr. James Hanigan, who was the chairperson and director of graduate studies at Duquesne's theology department, under whose direction the admissions committee offered me, a Presbyterian, a scholarship so that I could study at Duquesne. I think Dr. Hanigan will be happy to read my dissertation, which is an outcome of the admissions committee's decision.

For the past two-and-a half years my dissertation director, Professor Gerald Boodoo, has offered valuable comments on my writings, in a timely fashion, and also supported me in other ways, which I appreciate greatly. I also like to express my sincere thanks to Professors Radu Bordeianu and William Wright, who graciously accepted to be

readers of my dissertation and helped make the dissertation more complete through valuable suggestions. The time and efforts my readers spent for me will have a lasting impact on me and on my future students when I teach them Christian theology.

This dissertation represents a continuation and fruit of the research work that I did with Professor Dale C. Allison at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Dr. Allison has always supported me in various ways and encouraged me throughout the years since I met him in his Greek language class. Besides, the New Testament exegesis and theology that I employed for this study I learned at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, mainly from Professors Dale Allison and Robert Gagnon, without whose teaching I simply could not have written this dissertation. I also thank Ms. Anita Johnson, a very capable librarian at the Barbour Library of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, who helped me with reference work.

I feel that all my past teachers are very special to me, for their teaching will always remain in me as part of who I am, and also in my students as I teach them what I have learned through my teachers. This is why I am willing to go into a teaching ministry, just as my late father, upon his nation's calling, gave up a successful medical practice and taught at a medical school until he retired twenty-eight years later.

During the past six months, both my father and mother passed away. Rather than becoming sad about the losses, I thank God for his blessings on them and celebrate their fruitful lives. They always encouraged their children to learn more and tried to instill in them values they need to live by – honesty, diligence, integrity, etc. – which I now try to pass on to my own children. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and also to my

wife, Ilyoung, and to our three sons, Edward, Andrew, and Daniel, who have endured many years with me as I have pursued a second career in theology.

Soli Deo gloria.

Justin In-Chul Chay

Duquesne University
June 15, 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgment	vi
Introduction	x
1. Historical Development of the Doctrine of Justification	1
1.1 Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy	1
1.2 Medieval Period Debates	15
1.3 The Reformation Period	38
1.4 The Council of Trent (1545-1563) on Justification	57
1.5 The Modern Period	65
2. Recent Ecumenical Dialogues on the Doctrine of Justification	75
2.1 The Gospel and the Church (1972)	76
2.2 The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue VII (1983)	77
2.3 The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide? (1986)	105
2.4 Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999)	133
3. Importance of the Doctrine of Justification and Problems Still to Be Worked Out	156
3.1 Importance of the Doctrine of Justification	156
3.2 Problems Still to Be Worked Out	163
4. Bases for Resolving the Still-Existing Denominational Differences	176
4.1 Methodology	176
4.2 The Relationship between Christ and the Justified: The Vine and the Branches (Exegesis of John 15:1-10)	178
4.3 Justification and Good Works	204
4.4 Summary	218
Conclusion	222
Bibliography	227

Introduction

One of the ultimate human questions of is, “How can I attain eternal life?” or “How can I be saved?” The Christian teaching that answers this question is called the doctrine of justification. The doctrine says that we are justified or saved by God’s grace in Christ through faith “apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28). Because of the very importance of this doctrine, disputes concerning the doctrine broke out between Augustine and Pelagius, in the medieval period, and in the sixteenth century as well between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church – which eventually divided the Western church into Catholics and Protestants.

During the past fifty years, realizing the importance of the doctrine for the unity of the church, Catholics and Protestants have engaged in the ecumenical dialogues to resolve their differences in the understanding of the doctrine of justification. In October 1999, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*,¹ declaring publicly that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Catholics and Lutherans. The result of decades of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, this document represents an ecumenical event of historical significance.

The agreement, however, does not cover all that either the Lutheran or the Roman Catholic churches hold as their doctrines of justification, and the Christian church still does not have a unified voice in interpreting the doctrine despite recent ecumenical dialogues. Cardinal Kasper, who signed the official document of the *Joint Declaration*,

¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. English-Language Edition (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000).

says, “To be honest, there are not only complementary oppositions, there are also contradictions to overcome.”²

The study of the historical debates and the recent ecumenical dialogues reveals two important contradictions that are described below.

1. Human good works and merits

Catholics have traditionally claimed that the good works of the righteous give a title to salvation in the sense that God has covenanted to save those who, prompted by grace, obey his will. Vatican II reiterates the traditional Catholic position on human works and merits.³ Conversely, Lutherans (and Protestants in general) teach that God justifies by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. It is “not on the basis . . . of good works that God declares sinners just and grants them eternal life, but on the basis of Jesus Christ’s righteousness, a righteousness which is ‘alien’ or ‘extrinsic’ to sinful human beings but is received by them through faith.”⁴ “Saving or justifying faith . . . is never without good works; but it does not justify for that reason.”⁵ Lutherans fear that the Catholic emphasis on good works besides God’s grace could “throw believers back on their own resources,”⁶ while Catholics think that the Lutheran emphasis on imputed righteousness could unintentionally encourage a disregarding of good works.

² Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 21.

³ *Lumen Gentium* 48.

⁴ Anderson, H. George, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), § 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, § 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, § 100.

2. *Simul iustus et peccator* vs. “inherent righteousness of the justified”

Lutherans understand the condition of the Christian as being “at the same time righteous and sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Believers are totally righteous in that God forgives their sins and grants the righteousness of Christ, which they appropriate in faith. Looking at themselves through the law, however, they realize that they are still sinners. On the other hand, Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus imparted in baptism removes sin and *the justified are truly made righteous*, even though there remains an inclination (concupiscence) that presses us toward sin. Catholics, however, do not take this inclination as sin in an authentic sense. Lutherans fear that the Catholic doctrine of inherent righteousness may cause the Christians to be insufficiently reliant on God’s promise of mercy and Christ’s saving work. Catholics, on the other hand, fear that the Lutheran position may lead to neglect of the healing and transforming effects of Christ’s saving work in us.

The thrust of this study is in understanding the true nature of “Christian” good works (vs. “works of law” in Rom 3:28) and thereby the believer’s human role and responsibility in salvation. To correctly understand the biblical texts that teach *the final judgment based on works* (e.g. Rom 2:6-11) vs. Rom 3:28, which maintains justification “apart from works of law,” we need to distinguish “Christian” works from “works of law.” We must also define the Christians’ human role – in contrast to the Holy Spirit’s role – in salvation. These are what this study will explore with a purpose of promoting further denominational agreement and answering the important question, “How can I attain eternal life?”

The doctrine of justification is a doctrinal/systematic theology problem that is based on the biblical message of what God has done in Christ to save humanity from the dilemma of sin and how we can appropriate God's saving grace. The experience of recent ecumenical dialogue taught participants the significant contribution of modern biblical studies on justification in bringing about denominational convergences. The *Official Common Statement of the Joint Declaration* calls "the two partners in dialogue . . . to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification."

Heeding this call, to resolve the remaining denominational differences, this study will use the method of biblical theology as well as that of systematic theology. First, the historical debates on justification and the recent ecumenical documents will be analyzed systematically in order to discern *the fundamental problems* that underlie the denominational differences. Then, based on an exegesis of the relevant biblical texts, the fundamental problems will be addressed and a theology of justification developed that harmonizes the biblical data and systematically describes the divine economy of salvation.

This study seeks to resolve the fundamental differences between the Catholic and Protestant positions, thereby contributing toward the unity of the church, as well as answering the ultimate human question concerning salvation. The outcome of this study is also hoped to demonstrate that biblical exegesis is an integral part of theological method and that systematic theology alone, without incorporating biblical studies, has a limitation in solving doctrinal problems; this is one of the important goals of this study. Besides, a clear understanding of the human role and responsibility in salvation will promote a sense of ethical responsibility in Christians.

Chapter 1 introduces the historical development of the doctrine of justification, and chapter 2 presents the recent ecumenical dialogues and agreements – which are by their nature complicated and confusing – concisely but at the same time as accurately as possible (for this purpose the languages in these documents were used without much alteration and many times word for word). General evaluation of each document is given in chapter 2, and critical analysis and comments are made in chapter 3 (and indirectly in chapter 4); however, making extensive comments on each document is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The main purpose of having chapters 1 and 2 is to understand the historical and ecumenical debates, from which I wanted to find out the underlying problems for the denominational differences on the doctrine of justification and then solve the problems. Thus in chapter 3 the fundamental problems that underlie the denominational differences are discussed, and the solutions suggested in chapter 4 and summarized in the conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Development of the Doctrine of Justification⁷

The main external threat to the early church's teaching, especially in the second century, appears to have been pagan or semi-pagan fatalism, such as Gnosticism, which claimed that humans are not responsible for their own sins or for the evil of the world. The tendency of some of the early fathers to emphasize the freedom of fallen humanity may be a reaction to Gnosticism.⁸ The pre-Augustinian theologians are virtually of one voice in asserting the freedom of the human will. Far from recognizing the limitations of human free will, "many early fathers enthusiastically proclaimed its freedom and self-determination (*autexousia*)."⁹ For example, John Chrysostom defended the power of the human free will, which was quoted by many Pelagian writers: "good and evil do not originate from human nature itself, but from the will and choice alone."¹⁰ But this "self-determination" of human free will is a Greek-philosophical rather than a Christian idea.¹¹

The earliest known Latin commentary on the Pauline epistles is that of Ambrosiaster. Like many of his contemporaries, he seems to have believed that humans can acquire merit before God. A similar understanding can be found in the writings of Tertullian. For Tertullian, those who perform good works make God their debtor.¹² Thus the early Western theological tradition appears to be characterized by "works-

⁷ The main source of this chapter is Alister E. McGrath's *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). As noted in the footnotes, other sources were used as well, but the major part of this chapter represents a summary and quotation of McGrath's *Iustitia Dei*.

⁸ T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948.

⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *In epistolam ad Romanos*, Hom. xix, 6.

¹¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 37 and n. 114.

righteousness” approach to the question of justification, thereby deviating from the gospel message of the free grace of God. We will see how St. Augustine, in his debate with Pelagius, redirects the theology in a more Pauline way.

1.1 Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy

The importance of Augustine’s doctrine of justification lies in the fact that it greatly influenced the subsequent doctrines of justification in the medieval period and beyond. Augustine’s doctrine of justification provides the framework for the future discussion of justification.

The Pelagian controversy that broke out in the early fifth century centers on Pelagius, a British layman living in Rome, who was distressed by the questionable moral character of some Roman Christians.¹³ By this time Augustine had already departed from his earlier view (prior to 396) and developed a new “understanding of justification that was much closer to the Pauline concept than that of Augustine’s predecessors”; he now realized “the human inability to achieve justification and the need for divine grace.”¹⁴

This change in his view from his earlier one was a result of his reflections on Rom 9:10-29. He now realized that the human free will, while it is capable of many things, is “compromised by sin” and incapable of desiring or attaining justification “unless it is first liberated by grace.”¹⁵ Thus he became convinced that the human “response of faith to God’s offer of grace” is in itself a gift of God rather than the merit of the unaided human

¹³ For details, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 340-735.

¹⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 34.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum* I, ii, 21, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1953-).

free will.¹⁶ According to Augustine, “the acts of faith is itself a divine gift, in which God acts upon the rational soul in such a way that it comes to believe,” although the acts of receiving and possessing the gift are the humans’.¹⁷ Augustine’s view of humanity’s total dependence on divine grace seemed irrational to Pelagius, because it appeared to deny “human responsibility” and the need for human effort to become holy.¹⁸

1.1.1 The understanding of the “freedom of the will”

It is important to appreciate that Augustine does not deny the existence of the human free will. For Augustine, one must hold both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility and freedom at the same time to do justice to the richness and complexity of the biblical statements on the matter. “*Manichaeism* (to which Augustine himself was initially attracted) was a form of fatalism that upheld the total sovereignty of God but denied human freedom, while *Pelagianism* upheld the total freedom of the human but denied the sovereignty of God”¹⁹

Augustine says that the term “free will” (*liberum arbitrium* in Latin, which was a bad translation of the Greek word, *autexousia* – meaning “responsibility for one’s own actions”) is not to be understood as meaning that human beings have complete freedom in every area of their existence.²⁰ He argues that the human free will really exists in sinners, but that it is “compromised by sin”²¹; the human free will is “biased towards evil.” While Pelagianism was admirably logical and consistent in its description of the human free

¹⁶ Ibid., I, ii, 12.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 13; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 42.

¹⁸ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 34.

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum* I, ii, 21: “*Liberum voluntatis arbitrium plurimum valet, immo vero est quidem, sed in venundatis sub peccato, quid valet?*”

will, it was not based on the teaching of the New Testament or on human experience. For Augustine, “theology is not a matter of logical explanation; rather, it is about wrestling with the mystery of the nature and character of God – something that defies the neat categories of human logic and cannot be allowed to be subordinated to it.”²²

Augustine’s concept of the captive free will (*liberum arbitrium captivatum*) “resolves the dialectic between grace and free will without denying the reality of either.”²³ For Augustine, the human free will is so seriously weakened and incapacitated (though not destroyed) by the Fall that it is incapable of wanting to come to God. So, he develops the important insight that “the grace of God is both necessary and sufficient to overcome the negative influence of sin.”²⁴ He uses two images to explain how this happens: First, grace is understood as the *liberator* of human nature. Augustine argues that grace establishes the human free will, rather than abolishing or compromising it. Second, grace is understood as the *healer* of human nature. Our eyes are blind and cannot see God, and our ears are deaf to the gracious calling of the Lord – until grace heals them. Christians are those who recognize their illness and seek a physician’s help so that they may be healed. In justification the *liberum arbitrium captivatum* (captive free will) becomes the *liberum arbitrium liberatum* (liberated free will) by the action of this healing grace.²⁵

In his letter to Demetrias,²⁶ Pelagius explains logically his views on human free will: God created humanity and knows exactly what it is able to do. Hence all the

²² McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 36-37.

²³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 42.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. McGrath cites Augustine’s *De natura et gratia*, iii, 3; also see McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 37-38.

²⁶ Pelagius, *Epistula ad sacram Christi virginem Demetriadem*, found in *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers*, ed. and trans. B. R. Rees (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1991), 35-70.

commands given to us can be obeyed and are meant to be obeyed. Human perfection is possible, and “since perfection is possible for humanity, it is obligatory.”²⁷ The moral rigorism of this position served only to strengthen Augustine’s argument as he presented the rival view of “a tender and kindly God attempting to heal and restore wounded human nature.”²⁸

1.1.2 The understanding of sin

According to Augustine, all humans were affected by sin as a consequence of the Fall and became seriously ill. “It is through the grace of God alone that our illness (sin) is diagnosed and a cure (grace) made available”; humans cannot do anything about their sinfulness. For Augustine, human nature has an inborn sinful disposition and an inherent bias toward acts of sinning. “The human free will is captivated by the power of sin” and only the grace of God in Christ can liberate humans from the power of sin.²⁹

The idea of a human nature biased toward sin has no place in Pelagius’ thought. For Pelagius, God made human nature good, but people sin through intentional misconduct. Pelagius thus understands sin as an act committed willfully against God. Whereas Augustine regards the church as a hospital where spiritually sick people could recover and grow gradually in holiness through grace, Pelagius would allow only those who are morally upright to enter the church.³⁰

²⁷ Pelagius cited in McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 39. This argument can be found in Rees, 37-45; in pp. 44-45, Pelagius claims that human perfection is possible.

²⁸ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

1.1.3 The understanding of grace

Augustine views human nature as weak and lost that needs divine care to be healed and restored. He frequently quotes John 15:5: “Apart from me you can do nothing,” and claims that humans are totally dependent on God for their salvation. Augustine draws a careful distinction between the *natural human faculties*, which are given to humanity as its natural endowment, and *additional and special gifts of grace*, and says: “God does not leave us where we are by nature, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but he gives us his grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven, and restored.”³¹

Pelagius uses the word “grace” in two different ways. First, grace is used for the God-given *natural human faculties*, which he argues are not corrupted or incapacitated or compromised. When Pelagius insists that humans can, through grace, avoid evil and choose good, what he means is that the natural human faculties – reason, wisdom, free will and “the capacity to exercise free choice” – should enable humans to choose to avoid evil and serve God.³²

Second, Pelagius uses the word “grace” also for *external enlightenment* given to humanity by God – for example, the Ten Commandments and the moral example of Jesus Christ. Grace informs us what our moral responsibilities are, but it does not need to assist us in carrying them out – because God created humans truly good and therefore natural human faculties should enable humanity to carry out these responsibilities. For Pelagius, grace is *external and passive*, whereas Augustine understands grace as something *internal and active* – the real presence of God within us, who transforms and redeems us.

³¹ Ibid., 41-42.

³² Ibid., 42; Rees, 37-38.

According to Augustine, “humanity was created good by God and then fell away from him, but God, in his grace, came to rescue fallen humanity from its predicament.” For Pelagius, “humanity merely needs to be shown what to do and can then be left to achieve it unaided”; for Augustine, humanity needs to be shown what to do and then needs also to be aided at every point.³³

One of the important teachings of Augustine is his understanding of the “righteousness of God” (*iustitia Dei*). The righteousness of God is not that righteousness by which he is himself righteous, but that by which he justifies sinners.³⁴ This righteousness of God, veiled in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament – supremely in Jesus Christ, is so called because, “by bestowing it upon humans, God makes them righteous.”³⁵

The necessity of human preparation for grace, such as that associated with the Franciscan school of the medieval period cannot be drawn from the post-396 writings of mature Augustine, although traces of such a doctrine may be found in his writings prior to 396. Instead, for Augustine, God’s *prevenient grace* prepares human will for justification.³⁶ Once justified by divine action, Christians need to pray to God continually for their growth in holiness.

Augustine distinguishes between *operative* and *co-operative* grace: God *operates* to initiate humanity’s justification by giving humans a will capable of desiring good, and God subsequently *co-operates* with that good will to perform good works. “God *operates*

³³ Ibid., 42-43; Rees, 37-40; 43-44.

³⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 44.

³⁵ Augustine, *De spiritu et littera* xi, 18.

³⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 43-44.

upon humans in the *act* of justification, and *co-operates* with them in the *process* of justification.”³⁷

Augustine makes a connection between grace and the operation of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ The Holy Spirit, who is love and is given to humans in justification, enables humans to be inflamed with the love of God and the love of their neighbors. Thus regeneration is itself the work of the Holy Spirit.

1.1.4 The grounds of justification

For Augustine, we are justified by God’s grace: even human works are the result of God’s working within fallen humanity. Everything that leads to salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God, given out of love for his people. “Weak and feeble though we are, and prone to sin, God is at work within us, achieving something we ourselves could never do.”³⁹

Augustine points out that the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) indicates that the basis of the reward given to each individual is the *promise made* to that individual. So Augustine draws an important conclusion that the basis of our justification is God’s promise of grace made to us. God is faithful to his promises and justifies sinners.⁴⁰ For Pelagius, however, humans are justified on the basis of their merits: human good works are the result of the exercise of the totally free human will, in

³⁷ Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* xvii, 33; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 43.

³⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 45.

³⁹ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 43. These statements appear to be in line with the proposal made in this dissertation (cf. § 4.4). However, upon a closer look at Augustine’s theology, we note that, for Augustine, God *co-operates* with humans to perform good works, whereas this dissertation maintains that Christian good works are done by [the Spirit of] God through Christians, using them as instruments – rather than as co-workers.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

fulfillment of commands given by God. If Pelagius can speak of “salvation in Christ” it is only in the sense of salvation through imitating the example of Christ.⁴¹

Throughout the centuries, the Western church has always accepted Augustine as the more reliable exponent of Paul. Augustine’s God is a gracious God earnestly concerned for the salvation of sinful humanity. Pelagius’ logic seems to be very reasonable according to human ethical standards but on closer inspection turns out to be “a fanatical moral rigorism.” Yet Pelagius’ ideas have been revived in every age of the church.⁴²

Augustine understands the nature of faith in the Pauline concept of “justification by faith” as “faith working through love.”⁴³ This understanding would dominate the Western Christian thinking on the nature of justifying faith for the next thousand years.⁴⁴ The reason for this interpretation of Augustine is because early Christians tended to understand faith primarily as an adherence to the word of God, therefore requiring its supplementation with love if faith is to justify humanity. For Augustine, faith alone is merely intellectual assent to revealed truth, so inadequate to justify.⁴⁵ Faith and hope cannot bring us to God unless they are accompanied by love. Faith without love is of no value, as 1 Cor 13:1-3 says.⁴⁶ He therefore draws a distinction between purely intellectual faith and true justifying faith, by arguing that true justifying faith is *faith accompanied by love*. He finds this concept in Gal 5:6: “For in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but the only thing that counts is faith working

⁴¹ Ibid., 44; Rees, 44-45.

⁴² Ibid. A good reason for this may be because Augustine’s soteriology does not seem to adequately take *human responsibility* into account.

⁴³ Cf. Fitzmyer’s comments on Rom 3:27-28 and 29-30 in § 4.3.3.

⁴⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *De Trinitate* xv, xvii, 31; xviii, 32.

through love.”⁴⁷ Although this could be open to a Pelagian interpretation, Augustine excludes such a possibility by insisting that both faith and love in question are the gifts of God rather than the products of natural human faculties.⁴⁸

Augustine rejects the notion of merit *before* justification, but he does not deny the necessity of merit after justification. Once justified, humans may begin to acquire merit. For Augustine, however, merit is understood as a divine rather than a human work. Merit is a gift of God. Eternal life is indeed the reward for merit – but merit itself is a gift from God; this understanding of Augustine is well expressed in his celebrated saying: “When God crowns our merits, he crowns nothing but his own gifts.”⁴⁹

1.1.5 Augustine’s understanding of the nature of justification

The righteousness bestowed upon humanity in justification is regarded by Augustine as *inherent* rather than *imputed*, to anticipate the vocabulary of the sixteenth century.⁵⁰ For Augustine, humans are *made righteous* in justification. Thus the righteousness they receive, although originating from God, is located within humans, and can be said to be *theirs*, part of their being and intrinsic to their persons. This understanding of the nature of justification is related to the Greek concept of deification, which appears in the later Augustinian soteriology.⁵¹ By charity, the Trinity comes to

⁴⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46; the quotation of the Bible verse is from NRSV.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Esistola* 195,5,19, CSEL 57.190: “cum Deus coronat merita nostra, nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua”; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 44.

⁵⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 48 and note 151. McGrath cites the important conclusion of J. Henninger in *S. Augustinus et doctrina de duplici iustitia* (Mödling: Sankt Gabrieler-Studien, 1935), 79.

⁵¹ Ibid.

inhabit the soul of the justified. It is not clear, however, whether Augustine envisages a “created grace” or a “habit of grace,” created within the human soul.⁵²

Augustine speaks of the real interior renewal of the sinner by the action of the Holy Spirit, which he later expressed in terms of participation in the divine being. The later Augustine frequently uses the concepts of adoptive filiation and deification side by side in his discussion of justification. God has given humans the power both to receive and to participate in the divine being.⁵³ By this participation in the life of the Trinity, the justified may be said to be deified. Augustine’s understanding of adoptive filiation is not merely receiving the *status* of sonhood, but *becoming* a child of God: “Justification entails a real change in a person’s *being*, and not merely in his or her *status*, so that this person *becomes* righteous and a child of God, and is not merely *treated* as if he or she was righteous and a child of God.”⁵⁴

The renewal of the divine image in humanity, brought about by justification, may be regarded as a new creation, in which sin is rooted out and the love of God planted in the hearts of people, in the form of the Holy Spirit. But God’s new creation is not finished once and for all in the event of justification. It requires perfecting,⁵⁵ which is brought about by co-operative grace working together with the liberated human free will.⁵⁶ While concupiscence may be relegated to the background as God’s love begins its work of renewal within humans, it continues to make its presence known, as sin is never totally overcome in this life.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Augustine, *De Trinitate* xiv, xii, 15; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 49, 2; *Sermo* 192, 1; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 48 and n. 154.

⁵⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 48-49.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrium* xvii, 33.

⁵⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, I, 44.

Augustine does not distinguish between the two aspects of justification – the event of justification and the process of justification; the distinction dates from the sixteenth century. For Augustine, justification includes both the *event* of the beginning of humanity’s righteousness before God (or remission of sin) and the *process* of its subsequent perfection, so that the later Reformation concept of “sanctification” is included in justification.⁵⁸ Augustine understands justification to include the ethical and spiritual renewal of the sinner through the internal operation of the Holy Spirit. Justification, according to Augustine, is fundamentally concerned with “being made righteous.”⁵⁹

For Augustine, his concept of *iustitia* (justice or righteousness) is firmly grounded in the divine will; *iustitia* is practically synonymous with the right ordering of human affairs according to the will of God. God created the natural order of things, which reflects justice. By ignoring this ordering, “humans stepped outside of this state of *iustitia*, so that their present state may be characterized as *iniustitia*.”⁶⁰ Justification is therefore “making just” or “making right” – restoring every aspect of the right relationship between God and humanity, and of humans to humans, and of humans to their environment.⁶¹

The importance of defining *iustitia* becomes clear in the course of Augustine’s critique of applying a secular concept of justice to the divine dispensation toward humanity. A secular concept of justice defined *iustitia* in terms of God rendering each individual their due, without fraud or grace, so that God would be expected to justify only

⁵⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

those who merited his grace on the basis of their moral achievements. “This approach yielded a doctrine of the justification of the *godly*, whereas Augustine held the essence of the gospel to be the justification of the *ungodly*.”⁶²

Augustine’s understanding of *iustitia* is broad enough to be defined as “being made to live as God intends humans to live, in every aspect of their existence,” including their relationship with God and with their fellow humans and with their environment. Augustine’s fundamental concept of *iustitia* in the human relationship with God is that of the submission of the individual’s whole being to God. The ultimate object of humanity’s justification is their “cleaving to God,” a cleaving that awaits its consummation and perfection in the new Jerusalem, which is even now established.⁶³

Augustine understands the Latin verb *iustificare* to mean “to make righteous.” It is about the transformation of the ungodly to the righteous. Although it is a permissible interpretation of the word in the Latin Bible, it is unacceptable as an interpretation of the word *dikaioun* in the Septuagint (LXX) and the Hebrew concept that underlies it.⁶⁴ There is in Augustine not any notion of justification in terms of “reputing as righteous” or “treating as righteous” by grace, without humanity actually being transformed morally or spiritually.⁶⁵

Augustine’s contribution to the foundation for the medieval development of the doctrine of justification can hardly be overstated. The standard textbook of the medieval theology was Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, which is a collection of patristic sayings, drawn

⁶² Ibid., 51-52.

⁶³ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 46-47 and also 6-21: Semantic aspects of the concept of justification. The Hebrew word *hasdiq* means “to justify”; its primary sense is “to vindicate,” “to acquit,” or “to declare to be in the right” (see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 18-21).

⁶⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47.

largely from the writings of Augustine. In almost every major area of theological debate, the point of departure appears to have been the views of Augustine. All medieval theologians were, in some measure, Augustinian theologians.⁶⁶

1.1.6 Summary

The early Western theological tradition can be characterized by “works-righteousness” approach to justification. But, unlike the earlier theologians, Augustine recognized the human inability to achieve justification and the need for divine grace. Augustine quotes John 15:5: “Apart from me you can do nothing.” According to Augustine, human free will is “compromised” or “captivated” by the power of sin and incapable of desiring or attaining justification, but God’s grace actively heals and restores in us the image of God. The “righteousness of God” is bestowed upon humans to “make them righteous,” and this regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Pelagius insisted that humans are justified on the basis of their merits or good works performed by the autonomous human free will. This Pelagian idea, once rejected by the church, has been revived in every age of the church.

According to Augustine, justification is “making just” of “making right” – restoring the right relationships between God and humanity, of humans to humans, and of humans to their environment. The righteousness humans receive from God becomes part of their being and is intrinsic to their persons. For Augustine, justification brings a real change in a person’s being, and not merely in his or her status.

Augustine’s doctrine of justification has greatly influenced the subsequent doctrines of justification in the medieval period and beyond.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53-54.

1.2 Medieval Period Debates

The high regard for Augustine during the theological renaissance of the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries ensured that the framework of the medieval discussion of justification was essentially Augustinian. The medieval period saw a systematization of Augustine's theology. The development of the doctrine of justification during the medieval period may be seen primarily as the systematization, clarification and conceptual elaboration of Augustine's framework of justification.⁶⁷

1.2.1 The nature of justification

Augustine's interpretation of *iustificare* as "to make righteous" was universally accepted during the medieval period. The characteristic understanding of justification during this period may be summarized as follows: justification means not only the beginning of the Christian life, but also includes its continuation and ultimate perfection, in which "Christians are made righteous in the sight of God and of humanity through a fundamental change in their nature, and not merely in their status."⁶⁸ During this period there was no "distinction between justification (understood as an external pronouncement of God) and sanctification (understood as the subsequent process of inner renewal), characteristic of the Reformation period."⁶⁹

Thomas Aquinas, influenced by Aristotelian physics, defines justification as "a movement by which the human mind is moved by God from the state of sin to a state of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 59-60.

righteousness.”⁷⁰ This leads to a fourfold process of justification, found in the *Summa Theologiae*:⁷¹

- a. The infusion of grace;
- b. the movement of the free will directed toward God through faith;
- c. the movement of the free will directed against sin;
- d. the remission of sin.

In justification, according to Thomas, humanity is moved from a state of corrupt nature to one of habitual grace; from a state of sin to a state of justice, with the remission of sin. Thomas distinguishes between the *virtue* of justice and the *supernatural habit* of justice, infused by God. The virtue of acquired justice may be understood as either “particular justice” that “orders individuals’ actions relating to their fellow humans,” or as legal justice. On the other hand, infused justice, which is the basis of the justification of humanity, is infused into humanity by God, by which the higher faculties of humanity are submitted to God.⁷²

Thomas, like Augustine, understands justification as “being made just.” Thomas, however, defines the precise nature of justification in terms of “rectitude of the human mind,” because he understands human nature in such a way that if the higher nature (human intellect) becomes subordinate to God, it, acting as a secondary cause, may bring all that is subordinate to it (lower nature) into submission to the divine will. As a result, humans can avoid *mortal* sin, even though there still remains *venial* sin after justification, because the higher nature cannot completely overcome the lower. Even the individual

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae q. 113 a. 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, IaIIae q. 113 a. 8; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 64.

⁷² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 66.

who is in a state of grace cannot be said to be free from sin; so he understands the view expressed in Rom 7:13-25 to refer to the Christian in a state of grace.⁷³ In this understanding of the nature of justification, the *event* of the infusion of the habit of justice must therefore be followed by the *process* of the submission of the lower to the higher nature.⁷⁴

The early Franciscan teaching on the nature of justification, as found in Bonaventure's writings, develops a hierarchical concept of justification. The three fundamental operations of grace in justification are the *purification, illumination* and *perfection* of the soul.⁷⁵ Christ performed three acts which reordered humanity's supernatural life toward God: he purged our guilt, enlightened us by his examples, and perfected us by enabling us to follow in his footsteps. Christians are required to respond to these three acts so that they may appropriate the associated benefits. The process of justification destroys "the passions which threaten the development of the new life of humanity, so that humans can rediscover the image of God within themselves."⁷⁶

Both Thomas and Bonaventure understand justification similarly as the rectitude of the higher nature of humans, whether this nature be considered as mind (for Thomas) or as soul (for Bonaventure).⁷⁷ Throughout the medieval period, justification is universally understood to involve a real change in the justified sinner, so that both the remission of sin and regeneration are included in justification. The opinion that an ontological change is effected by justification is associated with the period of High

⁷³ In Rom 7:13-25 Paul expresses the constant human struggle with sin. Whether Paul is describing a Christian or non-Christian experience has been hotly debated.

⁷⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 66.

⁷⁵ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, IV, 3.

⁷⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Scholasticism and the development of the concept of created grace.⁷⁸ This view conceives a special presence of God in the justified, such that an ontological change occurs in the soul; the presence of God in the justified sinner necessarily results in created grace. Although *via moderna* of the later medieval period saw the relationship between God and humans covenantally rather than ontologically (i.e., the ultimate reason for humanity's acceptance by God lies in the divine decision to accept, and not in a habit of grace), the reality of a habit of grace in justification continued to be maintained.⁷⁹

1.2.2 The righteousness of God

An examination of the medieval exegesis of Rom 1:17 shows a consensus among Pauline exegetes that the righteousness of God is to be understood as God's righteousness demonstrated in the justification of the ungodly, in accordance with God's promises of mercy.⁸⁰ The righteousness of God is thus understood in a "soteriological context," referring to the salvation of humanity, "whether as a consequence of God's faithfulness to the divine promises of mercy, or of the bestowal of divine righteousness upon the sinners" in God's gracious act of justification.⁸¹

How can the just God justify the unjust sinner? Anselm of Canterbury answers this question by arguing that "God is just, not because God rewards humans according to their merit, but because God does what is appropriate to God, considered as the highest good."⁸² That highest good includes the redemption of fallen humanity, and therefore its salvation may be regarded as an act of divine justice. Thus, the justice that regulates the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁸¹ Ibid., 73.

⁸² Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 10, 1.109.4-5; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 76, n. 82.

affairs of humans is not identical with the justice that regulates God's dealings with humanity.⁸³ This understanding of justice as "moral rectitude" marks a turning point in the medieval discussion of the righteousness of God.⁸⁴

The distinction between the *intellectualist* and *voluntarist* approaches of the question of the righteousness of God is important. According to the intellectualist interpretation of the righteousness of God, the deliverance of humanity through the death of Christ is the mode most appropriate to right reason. On the other hand, the voluntarist interpretation of the righteousness of God, which originated from Duns Scotus and was developed in the soteriology of the *via moderna* by Gabriel Biel, insists on the priority of the divine will over any moral structures by claiming that God's will is essentially independent of what is right or wrong. "What is good is, therefore, good only if it is accepted as such by God."⁸⁵ Biel's doctrine of justification is based on the concept of a *covenant* between God and humanity which defines the conditions that humans must meet if they are to be justified. And God, acting in mercy and having freely determined to enter into a binding contract with humanity, is now obliged to respect the terms of the covenant.⁸⁶

1.2.3 The subjective appropriation of justification

The medieval theology followed Augustine in insisting that humans have a positive role to play in their own justification. Augustine's celebrated saying "The one who made you without you will not justify you without you" (*Qui fecit te sine te, non te*

⁸³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 77.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

iustificat sine te)⁸⁷ virtually became an axiom in the medieval discussion of justification.⁸⁸ Justifying faith was universally understood to be a gift of God bestowed upon humans as a consequence of their disposition toward justification. The medieval discussion of the appropriation of justification was primarily about the conditions upon which justifying grace and faith are bestowed to the individual by God.⁸⁹ The present section will examine three aspects of the question of the subjective appropriation of justification.

1.2.3.1 The nature of the human free will

Although the term free will (*liberum arbitrium*) is pre-Augustinian and unbiblical,⁹⁰ Augustine interpreted the term in harmony with a biblical understanding of the human bondage to sin and the continuous need for grace, while simultaneously upholding the reality of human free will.⁹¹ For Pelagius, however, “moral responsibility presupposed freedom of the will: I ought, therefore I can.”⁹² The foundation of Pelagianism lies in the autonomous character of the human free will; in creating humans, God gave them the ability to accomplish the divine will. While Pelagius conceded that Adam’s sin had disastrous consequences for his posterity, he insisted that these arose by *imitation*, rather than by *propagation*. Pelagius appears to understand by *grace* what Augustine understands by *nature*. So when Pelagius agrees that humanity needs grace, he means not *special gift*, but *general grace*, which is already given in the endowment of

⁸⁷ Augustine, *Sermo* 169,13.

⁸⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁰ The term “free will” cannot be found in the Bible, even though the concept may be found in the Bible (e.g. Eve’s willful eating of the forbidden fruit in Gen 3:6; and Cain’s willful disobedience to the Lord’s warning in Gen 4:6-8).

⁹¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 93.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 94.

nature, enabling humans to perform God's will with their natural faculties, in imitation of Christ.⁹³

Anselm of Canterbury interpreted free will as follows: Humanity, though fallen, still possesses free will. However, the human free will is not capable of converting its potential (or power) to action unaided;⁹⁴ therefore, the power (*potestas*) of the human free will must be actualized by God. Since only God can convert the power to action (*actus*), only God can justify.⁹⁵ Related to this concept is the conviction expressed by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*: "human free will cannot do good unless it is first liberated and subsequently assisted by grace."⁹⁶

When Gabriel Biel discusses the role of individuals in their own justification, he insists on the requirement of a minimum human response to the divine offer of grace in justification: the free will is able to dispose itself toward the reception of the gift of grace.⁹⁷ Biel agrees, however, that humans cannot fulfill the commands of God by free will without grace. In general, the medieval period had a consensus in the assertion that humanity possesses the freedom to respond to the divine initiative in justification, but there are a widespread disagreement as to the precise nature of the freedom, and whether it is given in nature or acquired through grace.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, *De libero arbitrio* 3.

⁹⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 98.

⁹⁶ Peter Lombard, *Sentences II*. Dist. xxv 8-9.

⁹⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 100; see n. 166.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 101.

1.2.3.2 The necessity and nature of the proper disposition for justification

The twelfth century saw a growing conviction that a preparation was required of humans for justification; in order for the human soul to receive grace, it must first be disposed to receive it. The necessity of a preparation or disposition for justification was insisted by both the early Franciscan and the Dominican schools, although for different reasons.⁹⁹

According to John of La Rochelle, who belongs to the early Franciscan school, the recipients of uncreated grace – that is the Holy Spirit – are unable to receive it unless their souls have first been prepared for it by created grace.¹⁰⁰ The nature of created grace points to its being a quality of the soul – that is, a *disposition*, rather than a *substance*. The Holy Spirit dwells in the souls of the justified as in a temple; this is impossible unless there is something within the soul that can transform the soul into such a temple capable of receiving the Holy Spirit. The disposition of the human soul necessary for receiving uncreated grace is understood to be a quality of the soul brought about by the action of grace, termed *created grace*.¹⁰¹ According to Bonaventure, this disposition toward justification is effected with the assistance of *prevenient grace* and cannot be brought about by the unaided free will.¹⁰² The prevenient grace disposes the human soul to receive the supernatural gift of habitual grace. Unlike habitual grace, however, no disposition is required for prevenient or actual grace.¹⁰³ Thus the early Franciscan school adopted a strongly Augustinian theology of justification that emphasizes the need of a

⁹⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹⁰⁰ John of La Rochelle, *Quaestiones disputatae de gratia* q. 7, in *Die neuen Quästionen der Gnadentheologie des Johannes von Rupella*, ed. L Hödl (Munich: hueber, 1964), 64.

¹⁰¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 103.

¹⁰² Ibid., 104; see note 182.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 105.

disposition or preparation toward justification on the grounds of the frailty of the unaided human intellect.

The early Dominican school also taught the need for a disposition for justification. In the *Summa contra Gentiles* (1258-64), we can see Thomas' mature views on the question: "Matter does not move itself to its own perfection; therefore it must be moved by something else."¹⁰⁴ He attributes the beginnings of human justification to an internal operation of God.¹⁰⁵ Human preparation for justification is thus understood to be a divine work, so that no preparation is required for the justification of humans which God does not provide.¹⁰⁶ Thomas had an Aristotelian concept for the justification of humanity: "The preparation for grace in humans is the work of God as the prime mover and of the free will as the passive entity which is itself moved."¹⁰⁷ The later medieval period saw the need for a human disposition toward justification accepted as axiomatic. The disputes were primarily whether the disposition was itself a work of grace or a purely human act performed without the aid of grace.¹⁰⁸

1.2.3.3 The axiom *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*

The axiom is probably best translated as "God will not deny grace to those who do their best."¹⁰⁹ The essential principle contained in the axiom is that "humans and God have their respective roles to play in justification; when humans have fulfilled theirs in

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 149, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetum primum* q. 1 a 7.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae q. 112 a. 2 ad 3um.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, IaIIae q. 112 a. 3; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 107.

¹⁰⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Literally, "God does not deny grace to the person who does what is in him" (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 107, n. 208).

penitence, God will subsequently fulfill his part.”¹¹⁰ This principle can be traced back to Irenaeus of the early patristic period.¹¹¹ Yet does a person’s action place God under an *obligation* to act in this way? The idea that humans could, by doing “what lies within them” (*quod in se est*), place God under an obligation to reward them with grace is well expressed in the works of Stephen Langton¹¹² and others influenced by him in the twelfth century.

In general, the possibility of the preparation for grace being the efficient cause of justification was rejected, but the human preparation for justification was regarded as the removal of an obstacle to grace. The origins of the interpretation of the axiom characteristic of the early Franciscan school can be found with John of La Rochelle: Humans cannot dispose themselves adequately for grace, so the required disposition must be effected by God. God will, however, effect this disposition, if humans do “what is in them”; although humans do not have the ability to destroy sin, they can remove the obstacles in the path of divine grace.¹¹³ While this disposition toward grace cannot be considered to be meritorious in the strict sense of the term (i.e., *de condigno*), it can be considered meritorious *de congruo*.¹¹⁴ Bonaventure frequently stresses that “God does not justify humans without their consent, giving grace in such a way that the free will is not coerced into accepting it.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 108.

¹¹¹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, xxxix, 2.

¹¹² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 108; Langton’s commentary on Romans is cited in A. M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*. 8 vols. (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1952-56), 3.252 nn. 14, 15. cf. n. 16: “*Facite, quod vestrum est, quia Deus faciet, quod suum est.*”

¹¹³ John of La Rochelle, *Quaestiones de gratia* q. 6, in *Die neuen Quästionen der Gnadentheologie des Johannes von Rupella*, ed. L. Hödl (Munich: Hueber, 1964), 55-56; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 109-10.

¹¹⁴ Odo Rigaldi, *In II Sent.* dist. xxviii membr. 1q. 4a. ad 3um, in J. Bouvy, “Les Questions sur la grâce dans le Commentaire des Sentences d’Odon Rigaud,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 27 (1960), 86.49-52; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 110, n. 220.

¹¹⁵ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* V, iii, 4; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 110, n. 224.

The mature Thomas sees the preparation of justification as a work of grace, in which God is active and humans passive. Thomas understands doing “what is in him” (*quod in se est*) to mean “doing what one is able to do when aroused and moved by grace.”¹¹⁶ Thomas does not agree that the individual’s preparation for his or her own justification is deemed meritorious, even in the weak sense of the term (*de congruo*).¹¹⁷

While earlier Augustinian theologians taught that this disposition was meritorious *de congruo*, theologians of the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, including Luther’s mentor Johannes von Staupitz, tended to reject the opinion that the disposition for justification was meritorious *de congruo*.¹¹⁸

Based on their theology of the covenant (*pactum*), the theologians of the *via moderna* showed a much more positive attitude to the axiom “do what is in him” (*facienti quod in se est*), interpreting it as follows: By the *covenant*, God has graciously ordained that such an act may be accepted as worthy of grace. Although human acts have negligible inherent value in themselves by God’s standards, God has nevertheless entered into a *covenant* with humanity, by which such human acts have a much greater contracted value – sufficient to merit the first grace *de congruo*.¹¹⁹ Following the general teaching of the Franciscan schools, Biel holds that this disposition toward justification is meritorious *de congruo*. Although humans are able to remove an obstacle to grace, Biel insists that only God can remit sin; but by virtue of the *covenant*, human act obliges God to respond in grace.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 112.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae IaIIae q. 114 a. 5.

¹¹⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 113.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-15.

¹²⁰ Gabriel Biel, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvii q. unica a. 3 dub. 4; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 115 and n. 251.

1.2.4 The concept of grace

Bonaventure divided grace into *gratia gratis data* (actual grace) and *gratia gratum faciens* (habitual or sanctifying grace).¹²¹ In broad terms, *gratia gratis data* came to be understood as an external divine assistance, while *gratia gratum faciens* was understood as supernatural habit within humans.¹²²

In his early period, Thomas seems to have regarded humanity's natural capacities highly that, once justified, humans need no further assistance by divine grace; thus habitual grace alone is treated as the grace that operates and co-operates.¹²³ The mature Thomas is no longer satisfied with his earlier understanding of the nature of habitual grace. Now he says that humans are frail enough to need the continual assistance of divine grace functioning as co-operating grace (*gratia cooperans*) for humans who are already in a state of habitual grace. Thomas now makes it clear that humans need actual grace before and after their conversion; the internal change brought about by the habit of created grace requires further support by external grace.¹²⁴ This change in Thomas' understanding of grace reflects his deeper realization of human impotence, which we noted earlier concerning the human disposition for justification.¹²⁵

The classic Thomist understanding of the nature and divisions of grace, as stated in the *Summa Theologiae*, is summarized as follows by McGrath:¹²⁶ Grace may be defined according to whether it is *actual* or *habitual*, and according to whether it *operates* upon humans or *co-operates* with them. Actual grace (*gratia gratis data*) can be

¹²¹ Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvii dub. 1; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 131.

¹²² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 131.

¹²³ Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvi q. 1 a. 6 ad 2um; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 136 and n. 330.

¹²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 27 a. 5 ad 3um.

¹²⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 136-37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 137-38.

considered as “a series of transient effluxes of divine power or influence, given over and above the realm of nature, which impinge upon human will in order to incline it or assist it to particular actions.”¹²⁷ On the other hand, habitual or sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) “takes the form of a permanent habit of the soul, infused into humans by God, which may be considered to amount to a participation by humanity in the divine being.”¹²⁸ Habitual grace may be lost by mortal sin, and can be regained in penance. The combination of these categories leads to four main divisions of grace:¹²⁹

- a. *Actual operative grace*, which inclines the human will to desire good, and operates without the need for a response from humans.
- b. *Actual co-operative grace*, which assists the renewed will to actualize its good intentions in the form of external actions, and requires the co-operation of the will.
- c. *Habitual operative grace*, which is the formal principle of justification within the Thomist understanding of the process.
- d. *Habitual co-operative grace*, which is the formal principle of merit within the Thomist system, and requires humanity’s co-operation.

1.2.5 The concept of merit

The medieval discussion of merit was based upon Augustine’s celebrated maxim: “When God crowns the merits of humanity, he merely crowns his own gifts to humans,” rather than some human attribute that obliges God to reward humans.¹³⁰ For the early

¹²⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* vi, 15; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 138 and n. 334.

Latin fathers, merit appears to have been understood as a divine gift to the justified sinner, in the context of the bestowal of eternal life rather than of the initial justification. For Augustine, merit both presupposes and expresses grace.¹³¹

The eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, saw the question of merit within a quite different context – the gratuity of the first grace: Can humanity merit its initial justification? The twelfth century saw a distinction between the concepts of *merit* and *congruity*: while humanity cannot merit justification by any human acts, the preparation for justification could be said to make their subsequent justification “congruous” or “appropriate.”¹³² This distinction between merit in its strict sense and in its weaker sense of the term developed in the thirteenth century into concepts of *meritum de condigno* and *meritum de congruo*. The concept of congruous merit arose partly because of a pastoral intention of encouraging people to amend their lives according to the teachings of the gospel. However, it was presupposed that human justification must be seen as a divine gift, rather than as a divine reward, and that *congruous merit* is effected by *gratia gratis data* (actual or prevenient grace).¹³³

As Aristotelian physics greatly influenced the early Dominican school, Thomas conceived merit *ontologically* – in terms of ontological participation in the divine nature itself. On the other hand, the early Franciscan school understood merit *personally* – in terms of personal obligation of God to the individual Christian.¹³⁴

The concept of *condign merit* was employed to express the notion of a self-imposed obligation on the part of God to reward human efforts. Although merit *de*

¹³¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 139.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

condigno is often referred to as “true” merit, to distinguish it from merit *de congruo*, Thomas understands that all merit before God is based upon the divine promise to reward human efforts according to God’s generous and free decision, and it is therefore not based on the inherent value of a human act or the strict justice between equals.¹³⁵ According to the voluntarist position of the later Franciscan school and the *via moderna*, “God is not bound by the moral value of an act, but is free to impose upon that act whatever meritorious value he may deem appropriate.”¹³⁶

According to Ockham, God rewards virtuous acts performed outside a state of grace with congruous merit.¹³⁷ What Ockham intends to say by the notion of congruous merit is that humans are capable of acting in such a way that God may bestow upon them a habit of grace. On the other hand, Wycliffe defines congruous merit as merit which arises through God’s rewarding those human acts that resulted from the influence of divine grace.¹³⁸

The later *via moderna* continued the teaching of Ockham on the nature of merit. Gabriel Biel emphasized that the concept of congruous merit is “based upon the divine liberality rather than on the divine justice.”¹³⁹ The later Franciscan school, the *via moderna* and the *schola Augustiniana moderna* insisted that nothing was meritorious unless God chose to accept it as such. This teaching was extended to include the work of Christ; the *merita Christi* were regarded as being grounded in the divine acceptance.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Ibid., 144.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹³⁷ William of Ockham, *Commentaria in quattuor libros sententiarum IV*. q. 9 (Leiden, 1495); see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 146.

¹³⁸ John Wycliffe, *De scientia Dei*, cited in J. A. Rodson, *Wycliffe and the Oxford Schools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 209, n. 1; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 148.

¹³⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 148.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 149.

Later, Calvin also insisted that “apart from God’s good pleasure, Christ could not have merited anything.”¹⁴¹

1.2.6 The critique of the role of supernatural habits in justification

As we have already noted, justification was generally understood to involve a real change in the sinner, and not merely an external pronouncement on the part of God; and this change was thought to involve the infusion of supernatural habits of grace into souls of humans. There arose a debate, however, concerning whether the infusion of supernatural habits is theologically prior or posterior to the divine acceptance.¹⁴²

The starting point of this debate was probably Peter Lombard’s identification of the love (*caritas*) infused into the soul in justification with the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³ Thomas Aquinas rejected this opinion, for “the union of the uncreated Holy Spirit with the created human soul appeared to him inconsistent with the ontological distinction which it was necessary to maintain between them.”¹⁴⁴ Thomas then found the solution in a created gift which is produced within the soul by God, “and yet is essentially indistinguishable from him – the supernatural habit.”¹⁴⁵ The early Dominican and Franciscan schools taught that the immediate or formal cause of justification of divine acceptance is the infused habit of grace. The possibility of a purely extrinsic acceptance is rejected on the grounds that a real change must occur in humans for them to be acceptable to God, and that a created

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutio* II. xvii.1; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 149-50.

¹⁴² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 176; “*acceptation divina*” is the divine decision to accept individuals to (grant them) eternal life.

¹⁴³ Peter Lombard, *Sentences I*. dist. xvii, 6; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 176.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent. I*. dist. xvii q. 1 a. 1; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 176.

¹⁴⁵ E. Iserloh, *Gnade und Eucharistie in der philosophischen Theologie des Wilhelm von Ockham: Ihre Bedeutung für die Ursachen der Reformation* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1956), 81; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 176-77.

habit of grace effects such a change. So the general consensus of the thirteenth century was that infused grace was prior to divine acceptance.¹⁴⁶

The fourteenth century saw a challenge to this consensus on the basis of the concept of covenantal causality. Duns Scotus claimed that the *grounds of justification and merit* must both be located in the extrinsic denomination of the *divine acceptance*. Scotus supported the general consensus of the period that “those who are accepted by God are distinguished from those who are not by their possession of a created habit of charity.”¹⁴⁷ This does not, however, mean to him that the created habit of charity is the formal cause of divine acceptance, for, from God’s standpoint, the formal cause lies within the divine will itself.¹⁴⁸ Scotus argues that the created habit of charity must be regarded as a secondary cause of divine acceptance. In effect, this argument reflects his concept of *covenantal causality*. As the acceptance of the persons gives rise to the acceptance of their acts, the ground of merit lies outside humanity in the divine acceptance itself. In keeping with the general Scotist principle that “the end is willed before the means to this end,” it followed that “acceptation to grace is posterior to acceptance to eternal life.”¹⁴⁹

Scotus’ teaching on the secondary and derivative role of the created habit in justification was criticized by Peter Aureole. His criticism of Scotus’ teaching of absolute predestination is based on some considerations. Scotus taught that God first predestined a soul to glory and then gave that soul grace, but, for Peter, this failed to do justice to the universal saving will of God. Peter rejects this apparent divine arbitrariness by insisting

¹⁴⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 177.

¹⁴⁷ Duns Scotus, *Reportata Parisiensis* I dist. xvii q. 2 n. 2: “*Sed per solam caritatem distinguitur acceptus Deo a non accepto*”; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 179.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I dist. xvii q. 2 n. 5.

¹⁴⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 180.

that “the formal cause of divine acceptance” must be “the intrinsic denomination of the habit of charity.”¹⁵⁰

The fundamental disagreement between Scotus and Peter relates to the question of the supernatural habit of charity. For Scotus, the causality of the habit for divine acceptance is covenantal, reflecting the divine ordination that such causality should exist. For Peter, once the habit of charity has been infused into the soul, God is obliged, by the very nature of things, to accept that soul. Peter’s claim of the priority of habit over divine act of acceptance was rejected by William of Ockham. Ockham argues that God may bypass created habits, preparing and accepting the soul to eternal life without any such created habit. He also says that “both being loved and being hated by God are effects of the divine will,” and that the “criterion of merit or demerit is what God chooses to accept or reject, lying outside the moral agent,” and not reflecting any quality inherent in the person.¹⁵¹ Ockham’s position was defended by Gabriel Biel, who rejected the absolute necessity of habits in justification.¹⁵²

The *schola Augustiniana moderna* followed Scotus and the *via moderna* (Ockham, Biel) in teaching the priority of the act of divine acceptance over the possession of created habits. Gregory of Rimini distinguished two modes by which a soul is accepted by God:¹⁵³

- a. an *intrinsic* mode, by a habit of grace informing the soul;
- b. an *extrinsic* mode, by which the divine will accepts the soul directly to eternal life.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 181.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 182.

¹⁵² P. Vignaux, *Luther, Commentateur des Sentences (Livre I, distinction XVII)* (Paris: Vrin, 1935), 45-86; H. A. Oberman, *The Harbest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Norminalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1963), 160-84; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 183.

¹⁵³ Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum sententiarum I.* dist. xvii q. 1 a. 2; see P. Vignaux, *Justification et prédestination au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1935), 142-53.

Distinguishing between created and uncreated grace, Gregory argues that the uncreated gift itself (i.e., the Holy Spirit) is sufficient for acceptance without the need of any created form or habit. Gregory thus maintains the possibility of a purely extrinsic justification by simple acceptance; a habit given to the soul bestows no benefit that cannot be attributed to the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴ Like Gregory, Hugolino preserves the divine freedom in the justification of humanity. He maintains the primacy of the acts of divine acceptance over habits: no created grace, whether actual or habitual, can bestow a person acceptance to eternal life as its formal effect. He regards the formal cause of justification as being the extrinsic denomination of the divine acceptance. If a habit of charity were the formal cause of justification, Hugolino argues, “it would follow that a creature (i.e., the created habit) would effect what was appropriate to the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit, which is unthinkable.”¹⁵⁵

A similar critique of the role of created habits in justification can be found in the writings of the later theologians of the Augustinian order. Johannes Klenkok insisted that God could certainly remit sin without the necessity of any created qualities in the soul. Likewise, Johannes von Staupitz emphasized the priority of uncreated grace over created grace: the movement of the soul toward God in justification is effected by none other than the Holy Spirit himself. Johannes von Staupitz may have abandoned the concept of a created habit of grace altogether.¹⁵⁶

The late medieval critique of the role of created habits in justification, with an increased emphasis on the role of uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit, lies as a background

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., dist. xvii q. 1 a. 2: “*alioquin . . . caritas create natura sua aliquam dignitatem in respectu ad vitam aeternam tribueret animae quam nullo modo posset sibi per seipsum tribuere Spiritus sactus*”; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 184.

¹⁵⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 184-85.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 185.

for Luther's early critique on the role of habits in justification. Luther argues that the habit required in justification is none other than the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁷ Luther's critique of the role of created habits in justification and his emphasis of justification as a personal encounter of the individual with God reflect a general disquiet about the theological foundation of created grace and a decisive shift away from created grace toward the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit in the late medieval period. This question of the nature of the formal or immediate cause of justification emerged as an important issue at the Council of Trent.¹⁵⁸

1.2.7 The medieval schools of thought on justification

The thought on justification in the medieval period can be divided into five main schools: the early Dominican school (represented by Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas); the early Franciscan school (Alexander of Hales, Odo Rigaldi, Bonaventure); the later Franciscan school (represented by Duns Scotus); the *via moderna* (William of Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, Robert Holcot, Gabriel Biel); the medieval Augustinian tradition (Giles of Rome, Gregory of Rimini) – within this tradition, we can distinguish between two main schools of thought during the period: the *schola Aegidiana* and the *schola Augustiniana moderna* (The *schola Aegidiana* gave way to the *schola Augustiniana moderna* during the fourteenth century).

¹⁵⁷ Martin Luthers Werke; *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1983-), 9.44.1-4.

¹⁵⁸ H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, ed. *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 39th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2001) (hereafter *D*), Chapter 7, *D* 1528-31; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 186. Chapter 7 of the Tridentine decree on justification does not have any mention of *created habits* as a cause of justification; it says instead that “the single cause [of justification] is the righteousness of God, not that by which He himself is righteous, but that by which He makes us righteous” (cf. § 1.4.1 The Tridentine decree on justification).

McGrath summarizes as follows the characteristic features of the five main schools of thought:¹⁵⁹

- a. All schools agree that human preparation or disposition toward justification is necessary – for various reasons, however.
- b. The possibility of humanity’s meriting justification *de congruo* is rejected by the early Dominican school, while it is accepted by all Franciscan schools and by the *via moderna*.
- c. According to the early Dominican and Franciscan schools, the habit of created grace is the formal cause of justification and the principle of merit. On the other hand, the later Franciscan school and the *via moderna* claimed that the divine acceptance is the formal cause of justification and the formal principle of merit. The *schola Aegidiana* accepted the habit of created grace to be the cause of justification, while the *schola Augustiniana moderna* had serious reservations about the role of created habits in justification, and emphasized instead the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit and the divine acceptance.
- d. For the early Dominican school, original righteousness includes the gift of sanctifying grace. For the early and later Franciscan schools and the *via moderna*, original righteousness includes the gift of actual grace, but not sanctifying grace.
- e. The possibility of humans’ knowing with absolute certitude whether they are in a state of grace is universally rejected in the medieval period.

Despite the nominalism of the *via moderna* and the realism of the later Franciscan school, their doctrines of justification are substantially identical. The context within which the question of justification is set is that of the *covenant* between God and

¹⁵⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 186-207.

humanity, by which God chooses to accept human acts as being worthy of salvation, even though their intrinsic values are negligible.

One aspect of the soteriology of the *via moderna* which is of particular interest is “the Christological lacuna within their understanding of the economy of salvation.”¹⁶⁰ In this soteriology, it is quite possible to discuss justification without reference to the incarnation and death of Christ. According to the *via moderna*, the Old Testament scheme of justification is essentially the same as that of the New. Biel understands the covenant between God and humanity in such a way that “God rewards the person who does *quod in se est* with grace, irrespective of whether this pertains under the old or new covenant.”¹⁶¹ While the new covenant abrogates the ceremonial aspects of the old, the moral law of the Old Testament remains valid. Christ is therefore “described as *Legislator* than as *Salvator*, in that he has fulfilled and perfected the law of Moses in order that he may be imitated by Christians.”¹⁶²

1.2.8 Summary

The medieval period saw the systematization and conceptual elaboration of Augustine’s theology of justification. During this period there was no distinction between justification (understood as an external pronouncement of God) and sanctification (the subsequent process of renewal), characteristic of the Reformation period; justification meant not only the beginning of the Christian life, but also its continuation toward perfection, in which Christians are made righteous through a fundamental change in their nature, and not merely in their status. In justification, according to Thomas Aquinas,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 200

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Biel, *In III Sent.* dist. xl q. unica a. 3 dub. 3; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 200.

humanity is moved from a state of corrupt nature to one of *habitual grace*, with the remission of sin.

Throughout the period, theologians followed Augustine in insisting on humans' positive role in their own justification and the necessity of the human disposition toward justification. Justifying faith was universally understood to be a gift of God bestowed upon humans as a consequence of their preparation or disposition toward justification. The disputes were primarily whether the disposition was itself a work of grace or a purely human act performed without the aid of grace. According to Bonaventure, this disposition toward justification is effected with the assistance of *prevenient grace* and cannot be brought about by the unaided free will, but he held the possibility of humanity's meriting justification *de congruo*. The mature Thomas sees the preparation for justification as a work of grace and does not count human preparation for justification meritorious, even in the weak sense of the term (*de congruo*). On the other hand, the theologians of the *via moderna* insist that human preparation merits justification *de congruo*, interpreting it as follows: By the *covenant*, God has graciously ordained that such an act may be accepted as worthy of grace.

According to Thomas, habitual or sanctifying grace, which is infused into humans by God, forms a permanent habit of the soul. But he realized human frailty and the need of continual assistance of divine grace functioning as co-operating grace for humans who are already in a state of habitual grace; the internal change brought about by the habit of created grace requires further support by external grace (actual grace). The general consensus of the thirteenth century was that the infused habit of created grace is the

formal cause of justification. The fourteenth century saw a challenge to this consensus on the basis of the concept of covenantal causality.

Duns Scotus claimed that the *grounds of justification and merit* must both be the extrinsic acceptance of God; God first *predestined* a soul to glory and then gave that soul grace. Ockham and Biel of the *via moderna* argue that God may accept the soul to eternal life without any such created habit. Gregory of Rimini claims that the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit is sufficient for acceptance without the need of any created form or habit. The late medieval critique of the role of created habits in justification, with an increased emphasis on the role of uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit, lies as a background for Luther's early critique of the role of habits in justification. Luther argues that the habit required in justification is none other than the Holy Spirit. The medieval theology generally rejects the possibility of humans' knowing with absolute certitude whether they are in a state of grace.

1.3 The Reformation Period

The distinctive mark of the mainline Reformation is generally considered to be its doctrine of justification, which Martin Luther believed is "the article by which the church stands or falls" (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*).¹⁶³ The Protestant doctrine of justification since late 1530s can be characterized by the concept of "imputed righteousness of Christ" (vs. the medieval understanding of "righteousness inherent in humans"), together with its conceptual distinction between justification and sanctification. The notional distinction between justification (the external act of God who

¹⁶³ See R. Schwarz, "Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre als Eckstein der christlichen Theologie und Kirche," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 10 (1998), 14-46; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 208, n. 4.

declares the sinner to be righteous) and sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal) became necessary because of a forensic understanding of justification, along with the associated insistence upon the alien and external nature of justifying righteousness (But Luther, unlike later Protestantism, does not distinguish between justification and sanctification).¹⁶⁴

The Reformers defined justification as the forensic *declaration* that believers are righteous (in *status*), rather than as the process by which they are *made* righteous (in *nature*).¹⁶⁵ This represents a clear break from the medieval theological tradition, which was unanimous in its understanding of justification as both an act and a process, by which both the status of humans before God and their essential nature changes.¹⁶⁶ The Reformers also rejected the necessity of created habits of grace in justification, thereby reflecting the general tendency of the late medieval period within the *via moderna* and *schola Augustiniana moderna*, to locate the ground of justification in the extrinsic denomination of the divine acceptance (see the earlier discussion in § 1.2.6).¹⁶⁷ Thus, like all periods in the history of doctrine, the Reformation demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity with the preceding period.

1.3.1 Luther's discovery of the "righteousness of God"

The young Luther appears to have adopted an understanding of the "righteousness of God" essentially identical to that of the *via moderna*. So the young Luther rejected the idea of supernatural habits in justification. His early understanding of justification was

¹⁶⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 209-10.

¹⁶⁵ *Apologia* art. 4, paras. 252, 305.

¹⁶⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 212-13.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

based on the *covenant* theology of the *via moderna* and on the interpretation of the axiom “*facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*,” characteristic of this school of thought: humans are capable of turning to God in humility and faith for his grace, and God treats this humility of faith as the precondition necessary for justification under the terms of the *covenant* (that is, doing “what is in them,” as demanded of humans), and bestows grace on them.¹⁶⁸

Over the period of 1514-19, however, Luther’s understanding of justification underwent a radical change. First, Luther now insists that humans are *passive* in their own justification. Although he does not deny that humans have *any* role in their justification, he says that humans are not capable of initiating or collaborating with the process leading to justification. Then he says that the idea that humans can do “what is in them” (*quod in se est*) is nothing less than Pelagian, even though he once held this position himself. He now understands that God bestows the precondition of justification upon humanity; God himself in Christ meets a precondition which humans cannot fulfill. For Luther, the “righteousness of God” is revealed exclusively in the cross.¹⁶⁹

We have Luther’s own account of what happened. In the final year of his life (1545), Luther published a brief account of his theological reflections as a young man.¹⁷⁰ Luther kept reflecting on Rom 1:17: “In the gospel a righteousness of God is revealed,” but he could not understand how the revelation of the “righteousness of God” was gospel or “good news.” Luther recalled that he had been taught to interpret the “righteousness of God” as the “righteousness by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 218-20.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 220-23.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: B□hlau, 1983-), 54.185.12-186.21; see McGrath, *Justification*, 51. Luther died in 1546.

sinner,” so that the revelation of the “righteousness of God” in the gospel was nothing other than the revelation of the wrath of God directed against sinners. How could this be good news for sinners? There is every indication that Luther is here referring to the concept of the “righteousness of God” associated with the *via moderna*: “God is righteous in the sense that God rewards the person who does *quod in se est* with grace, and punishes the person who does not.”¹⁷¹ At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, Luther began to understand that “the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith . . . the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”¹⁷²

The God who is revealed in the gospel is not a strict judge who judges us exactly according to our merits, but a merciful and gracious God (Exod 34:6-7) who forgives sin and grants his children something they do not deserve. What Luther came to understand by the “righteousness of God” is an “alien righteousness”: “We stand as justified sinners before God, clothed with a righteousness that is not our own but is given to us by God himself. Our righteous standing with God, the fact that we are ‘right with God’ through the faith he gives us, is ultimately due to the overwhelming grace of God rather than to our efforts to make ourselves righteous in his sight.”¹⁷³ Luther’s emphasis on “justification by faith alone” extols the graciousness and generosity of God and affirms the inability of sinful humans to justify themselves. “We are passive, and God is active,

¹⁷¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 219.

¹⁷² As quoted in McGrath, *Justification*, 51; cf. Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17.

¹⁷³ McGrath, *Justification*, 52.

in our justification. Grace gives, and faith gratefully receives – and even that faith must itself be seen as a gracious gift of God.”¹⁷⁴

1.3.2 Luther’s mature theology of justification

The well-known slogans of the Reformation – such as *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solo Christo* – affirm the graciousness of God. “For Luther, to compromise the gospel of the grace of God was to destroy the central element of Christianity.”¹⁷⁵ It is for this reason that Luther saw the article of justification as *the* word of the gospel, to which all else was subordinate. His controversy with the church of his day was not based on any *direct* ecclesiological argument, but on his belief that humans cannot initiate the process of justification and that the church of his day had fallen into the Pelagian error.¹⁷⁶ The priority of his soteriology over his ecclesiology is evident in his statement of 1535, to the effect that “he will concede the Pope his authority if the latter concedes the free justification of sinners in Christ.”¹⁷⁷

Luther’s idea of the “alien righteousness of Christ” means that the righteousness we attain in justification “is not part of our being but is something that is and remains external to us.”¹⁷⁸ This understanding led him to criticize Augustine, who understood the righteousness to be part of our being. “For Augustine, justifying righteousness is an *internal* righteousness, something God works *within* us; for Luther, it is *external*,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁷⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 224.

¹⁷⁷ Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 40/I.357.18-22; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 224.

¹⁷⁸ McGrath, *Justification*, 55.

something God works *outside* us.”¹⁷⁹ And this idea of an “external” or “alien righteousness” led to the characteristically Protestant concept of *forensic justification*.

For Luther, humans are justified by laying hold of a righteousness which is not their own – the alien righteousness of Christ, which God mercifully “reckons” to humans: “The Christ who is grasped by faith and lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.”¹⁸⁰ This Christ, who is really present in the believers, effects their renovation and regeneration. Furthermore, by insisting that faith is given to humans in justification, Luther denies that humans are justified *on account of* their faith; justification is *because of Christ*, and *not because of faith*. Melancthon’s teaching of “imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer,” which is so characteristic of Protestant theologies of justification, originates with Luther.¹⁸¹

In his teaching of human free will, Luther deviates from Augustine. Augustine’s doctrine of justification is based on the concept of *captive free will*, which becomes *liberated free will* by the action of the grace that heals. But Luther does not envisage the liberation of the *slaved free will* after justification, because he sees the “slavery of human will” as “a consequence of humans’ creatureliness, rather than of their sin.”¹⁸² Therefore, whereas Augustine understands the believer to become righteous in justification, Luther is reluctant to admit that humanity becomes righteous in justification. “If anything, humans become more and more aware of their sinfulness, and of their need for the alien

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸⁰ Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 40/I.229.28.

¹⁸¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 229.

¹⁸² Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 18.615.13-16; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 230.

righteousness of Christ.”¹⁸³ Humans are intrinsically sinners, and will remain so, despite being extrinsically righteous. Luther explicitly criticizes Augustine on this point. The “strongly Christological orientation” of Luther’s understanding of the righteousness of believers sets him apart from Augustine on this point.¹⁸⁴

Luther does not, as he is frequently misunderstood, reject the necessity of good works in justification: “works are necessary for salvation, but do not cause salvation, in that faith alone gives life.”¹⁸⁵ He frequently appeals to “the biblical image of the good tree which bears good fruit, that fruit demonstrating rather than causing its good nature.”¹⁸⁶ Likewise, the “good works of the justified demonstrate the believer’s justification *by God*, and cannot be considered to cause it.”¹⁸⁷

The recent interpretation of Luther by the “Finnish school” emphasizes the believer’s *actual participation in the divine life* through union with Christ.¹⁸⁸ Christ is present within the believer in faith. Such ideas are found in Luther’s 1520 writing, *The Freedom of a Christian*. Using the analogy of a human marriage, Luther argues that “Christ and the believer are united through faith; Christ bestows his righteousness upon the believer, and the believer’s sin is transferred to Christ.”¹⁸⁹ This approach, while recognizing forensic elements within Luther’s theology of justification, stresses its transforming aspects. On this reading of Luther, there is a greater degree of affinity between Luther’s theology of justification and the eastern notion of divinization

¹⁸³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 233.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 39/I.96.6-8.

¹⁸⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 231; see Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 39/I.254.27-30.

¹⁸⁷ Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 39/I.96.9-14.

¹⁸⁸ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, Edited and introduced by Kirsi Stjerna. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005.

¹⁸⁹ McGrath, *Justification*, 52; see Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 7.25.26-26.9; cf. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 225.

(*theosis*).¹⁹⁰ Luther's concepts on justification greatly influenced the development of the Lutheran Reformation, but they were not accepted without modification, as we will see in the next section.

1.3.3 Justification in early Lutheranism, 1516-1580

In his later writings (after 1530), Melanchthon emphasizes the notion of an *alien righteousness*, which is imputed to the believer. Justification is then interpreted as being “pronounced righteous” or “accepted as righteous.” A sharp distinction is drawn between *justification* – the external act in which God declares the believer to be righteous, and *regeneration* – the internal process of renewal in which the believer is regenerated through the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹¹

The Augsburg Confession (1530) uses the formula “on account of Christ through faith” (*propter Christum per fidem*) and it defines the correct understanding of the formula as “justification by faith alone” (*sola fide*). The sole ground for human justification lies not in humans themselves or anything they can do, but in “Christ and his work alone,” and “faith is a reception by humans of the gracious deed of God in Christ.”¹⁹² In the *Apologia* (1530) for the Confession, Melanchthon states that “justification is to be understood forensically, as the declaration that the believer is righteous on account of the alien righteousness of Christ.”¹⁹³ Thus justification does not signify “making righteous,” but “pronouncing righteous.”¹⁹⁴ There is no righteousness

¹⁹⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 225-26; on this see J. Heubach, *Luther und Theosis*, Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1990; R. Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamos und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 1997.

¹⁹¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 238.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁹³ *Apologia* art. 4 para. 305; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 241.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 4 para. 252.

within humans, or inherent to them, which can be regarded as the basis of their justification; “humans are justified on the basis of an external and alien righteousness, which is ‘reputed’ or ‘imputed’ to them.”¹⁹⁵

1.3.3.1 The objective grounds of justification

Among Melanchthon’s contemporary critics was Andreas Osiander, leader of the evangelical faction in Nuremburg. For Osiander, the Melanchthonian concept of justification as merely “declaring righteous” was totally unacceptable. For Osiander, saving righteousness was the indwelling righteousness of Christ. Justification must therefore be understood to consist of the infusion of the essential righteousness of Christ. Osiander’s view is a reassertion of a fundamentally Augustinian understanding of the nature of justification (i.e., the real interior transformation of an individual through the indwelling of God). Indeed, the new Finnish school’s interpretation of Luther may be regarded as an indirect vindication of Osiander’s reading of Luther. However, Osiander’s views merely served to harden the German Protestant opinion in his day against the concept of “justification by inherent righteousness.”¹⁹⁶

1.3.3.2 The role of works in justification

Perhaps through his emphasis on the priority of faith in justification, Luther seemed to imply that good works were not important. Luther, however, is prepared to concede that if no works follow faith, the faith in question is dead and is not a living faith

¹⁹⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 241.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

in Christ.¹⁹⁷ Melancthon, however, always had a more positive view on the role of the law in the Christian life. He defines justification in terms of “a new capacity to fulfill the law,” and Christian freedom as “a new freedom to fulfill the law spontaneously.”¹⁹⁸

1.3.3.3 The subjective appropriation of justification

The Formula of Concord (1577) responded to some of the internal debates concerning the doctrine of justification. Justification is here defined in explicitly forensic terms, and it is made clear that it is not faith which is reckoned as justifying righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. The Formula also asserts that good works are obligatory, in that they are commanded and they express faith and gratitude to God; they are not, however, necessary for salvation. Works are “the effects of justifying faith, and must not be confused with the cause of that faith.”¹⁹⁹

Whereas, since 1535, Melancthon had recognized three causes of justification (the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the human will), permitting the contribution of the human will in justification, the formula recognized only one such cause – the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Luther’s doctrine of the enslaved human will is undermined, in favor of the assertion that “the free will may, under the influence of grace, assent to faith.”²⁰¹ The Formula of Concord envisages the human free will as being liberated by grace, whereas Luther regarded it permanently enslaved through human creatureliness.²⁰² Thus the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 243.

¹⁹⁸ *Melancthon's Werke in Auswahl*, ed. R Stupperich. 8 vols. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951-), 2.148.22-4; 149.19-21; 4.153-4; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 243.

¹⁹⁹ *Epitome* IV.16; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 247.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., II.6; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 247.

²⁰¹ Ibid., II.18; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 248.

²⁰² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 248.

Formula of Concord marked the ending of the internal controversies of the Lutheran church after Luther's death.

1.3.4 Early Reformed theology, 1519-1560

Although Luther's influence on the Reformation was immense, it is important to appreciate that reforming movements developed in other parts of Europe around the same time, often on different reforming agenda. For example, in Switzerland, the early reforming movement (1510s-1520s), which is linked with Swiss humanists at the Universities of Basel and Vienna, focused on the life and morals of the church and of individual Christians, rather than on doctrinal reform.²⁰³ For the Swiss Reformers, redemption was about inner transformation, ensuing in a life of discipleship. Thus Luther's emphasis on "justification by faith alone" appeared to them to erode this demand for obedience. Zwingli echoed similar concerns. Erasmus, who influenced both Zwingli and Bucer, emphasized the law (the *lex Christi*) and moral aspect of Scripture.²⁰⁴ This may explain the strongly moralist doctrines of justification associated with these two key theologians of the early Reformed church in Switzerland.

Whereas, for Luther, the question of how one might find a gracious God led to his intense personal preoccupation with the doctrine of justification, Zwingli's concerns appear to have been primarily with the reform and revitalization of the church.²⁰⁵ As a result, Zwingli (also Erasmus) subordinates justification to regeneration.²⁰⁶ For early

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 249.

²⁰⁵ See E. Ziegler, "Zur Reformation als Reformation des Lebes und der Sitten," in *Rorschacher Neujahrsblatt* (1984), 53-71.

²⁰⁶ For example, see W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to his Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70: "From the beginning there was in Zwingli a concern with the living of the new

Swiss Reformers, the person who has true faith is the person of moral integrity.²⁰⁷

Similarly, Heinrich Bullinger insisted that “justification meant, not imputation of righteousness, but the actualization of righteousness.”²⁰⁸ As with later Pietism, the justification of humans is confirmed by their moral actions.

Bucer develops a doctrine of *double* justification: after a “primary justification,” in which the sins of humans are forgiven and righteousness imputed to them, there follows a “secondary justification,” in which humans are *made* righteous; the *justification of the ungodly*, “expounded by Bucer on the basis of St. Paul,” is followed by the *justification of the godly*, “expounded on the basis of St. James.”²⁰⁹ Although the primary justification of humans takes place on the basis of faith alone, their secondary justification takes place on the basis of their works. In Bucer’s *odo salutis*, justification has two elements: an initial justification by faith, and a subsequent justification by works. Bucer locates human moral action under justification, whereas others (such as Melancthon) locate it under regeneration or sanctification.²¹⁰ Although this secondary justification appears to be equivalent to the later concept of sanctification, it is still conceived in primarily moralist terms.²¹¹ The righteousness and good works which are effected by the Holy Spirit are to be seen as the visible evidence of humanity’s unmerited

life . . . In his concern for the transformation of people’s lives he could even say that it would have been better not to send a redeemer at all than to send one and then for us not to change.”

²⁰⁷ McGrath, “Humanist elements in the Early Reformed Doctrine of Justification,” in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982) 5-30.

²⁰⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 250-51; see Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum decades quinque* (Zurich, 1552), 157b.

²⁰⁹ Martin Bucer, *Metaphrasis et enarratio in epistolam D. Pauli ad Romanos* (Basel, 1562), 231 A-B; 232 D-E; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 252.

²¹⁰ John Calvin, *Christianae religionis institutio* (Basel, 1536), III, OS 1.73; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 253.

²¹¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 252.

acceptance in the sight of God. Just as a good tree produces good fruits, so “the justified sinner must produce good works.”²¹²

It is widely agreed that the most significant contribution to the development of the early Reformed doctrine of justification was due to John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He clearly defines justification in forensic terms: “To be ‘justified’ does not mean that we become righteous, but that we are reckoned to be righteous on account of Christ.”²¹³ Humans are not made righteous in justification, “but is accepted as righteous, not on account of its own righteousness, but on account of the righteousness of Christ located outside of humans.”²¹⁴ For Calvin, humans may be said to be justified when they are accepted by God as if they were righteous.

Calvin preserves an importance aspect of Luther’s understanding of justification which Melancthon appeared to have abandoned – the personal union of Christ and the believer in justification, which has been successfully retrieved by the modern Finnish interpreters of Luther. Thus Calvin speaks of the believer’s being “grafted into Christ,” so that the concept of *incorporation* becomes central to Calvin’s understanding of justification. The righteousness of Christ, which justifies humanity, “is treated as if it were that of the humanity within the context of the intimate personal relationship of Christ and the believer.”²¹⁵

Calvin thus integrates Christ into the life of Christians in an *internal*, rather than a purely *external*, manner. To be united with Christ is to be born as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). This union with Christ has two main benefits. Calvin refers to them as the “double

²¹² *Bucer*, 11-14; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 252-53.

²¹³ John Calvin, *Christianae religionis institutio* (Basel, 1536), III, OS 1.73; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 254, n.163.

²¹⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 254.

²¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes* (1559 edition hereafter) III.xi.10; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 255.

grace” of *justification* and *sanctification*, based on 1 Cor 6:11. These two are given to Christians simultaneously when they unite with Christ. Apart from union with Christ there can be no justification or sanctification. And justification cannot exist without sanctification, since both are given simultaneously. In other words, although justification and sanctification may be *distinguished*, they cannot be *separated*. This distinction between “justification” (being *declared* righteous) and “sanctification” (being *made* righteous) has led to considerable confusion. What the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian church had called “justification” now had to be split into two parts, one of which was still called “justification.” The Roman Catholic opponents of the Reformation “misunderstood the Reformers to be suggesting that it was not necessary for justified sinner to be regenerated,” and they criticized the doctrine of forensic justification as a result.²¹⁶

For Calvin, *justification* and *sanctification* are the two consequences of the believer’s incorporation into Christ.²¹⁷ Thus where Bucer speaks of *justification of the godly* or “secondary justification,” Calvin speaks of *sanctification*; where Bucer links the first and second justification on the basis of the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit, Calvin relates them on the basis of the believer’s *grafting into Christ*. The strength of Calvin’s understanding of justification is that justification is now conceived Christologically, thus permitting the essentially moral conception of justification associated with Zwingli and Bucer to be discarded. Where Zwingli and Bucer tended to make justification dependent on believers’ regeneration through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, which enabled them to keep the law and imitate the example of Christ,

²¹⁶ McGrath, *Justification*, 60.

²¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.1, 6.

Calvin interprets both justification and sanctification to be the chief benefits of Christ, bestowed simultaneously and inseparably upon the believers as a consequence of their grafting into Christ. Sanctification is not the effect of justification; both justification and sanctification are effects of union with Christ. Sanctification is thus “actualizing our new status in Christ” through “the process of being conformed to Christ.”²¹⁸

Another point of importance concerns the grounds of assurance, which can best be seen by comparing Zwingli and Calvin. For Zwingli, a person is justified on account of the person’s moral regeneration. The grounds of assurance are thus located in that person, who must ensure that he or she is sufficiently regenerated to meet the requirements of justification. For Calvin, however, justification takes place outside the believer by an act of God’s grace. “The believer may therefore rest assured – in a manner not permitted by Zwingli” – that all that needs to be done will be done by God, and the believer may concentrate on his Christian life.²¹⁹

Like Luther, Calvin stresses that faith is involved in justification only to the extent that “it grasps and appropriates Christ”;²²⁰ faith does not justify, but Christ does.²²¹ Justification can only be *on account of Christ*. “Faith is merely the vessel which receives Christ – and the vessel cannot be compared in value with the treasure in it. Faith may thus be said to be the instrumental cause of justification.”²²² Calvin is concerned, not so much with justification, as with incorporation into Christ. The question of justification was essentially an aspect of the greater question of the relation of humanity to God in

²¹⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 256; by this Calvin does not mean that the believers are justified because they are conformed to Christ. Instead, Calvin claims that the believers are justified because Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them (see *Institutes* III.xi.23).

²¹⁹ McGrath, *Justification*, 59.

²²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes* III.xi.7.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, IV.xvii.11; III.xviii.10.

²²² *Ibid.*, III.xi.7; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 256.

Christ.²²³ Overall, Calvin may be regarded as establishing the framework of the discussion of justification within the Reformed school of thought.

By the year 1540, the following four characteristics of the Protestant doctrines of justification were established:²²⁴

- a. Justification is the forensic *declaration* that the Christian is righteous, rather than the process by which humans are made righteous. It involves a change in *status* rather than in *nature*.
- b. A deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification (the external act by which God declares the believer to be righteous) and sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit).
- c. Justifying righteousness is the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to the believer and external to him, not a righteousness that is inherent within him, located within him, or in any way belonging to him.
- d. Justification takes place *per fidem propter Christum*, with faith being understood as the God-given means of justification and the merits of Christ the God-given foundation of justification.

1.3.5 The English Reformation; from Tyndale to Hooker

The Reformation in England drew its inspiration primarily from its continental counterpart. Until 1530s, however, essentially Augustinian doctrine of justification was in circulation in England. For example, William Tyndale, although making extensive use of Luther in his early polemical works, still tends to interpret justification as “making righteous.” Tyndale’s emphasis on the renewing and transforming work of the Holy Spirit within humans is quite distinct from Luther’s emphasis on faith, and clearly parallels Augustine’s transformational concept of justification.²²⁵

²²³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 257.

²²⁴ McGrath, *Justification*, 61.

²²⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 258-59 and n. 180.

Later in 1586, however, Richard Hooker presented an interpretation of the nature of justification which is similar to that of Calvin: humans are justified *through faith on account of Christ*. Justification is conceived Christologically, in terms of the personal presence of Christ within believers through the Holy Spirit, on account of which humans are declared righteous and the process of sanctification is initiated. He clearly distinguishes between justification through imputed righteousness, which is external to humans, and sanctification through inherent righteousness: “At the instant of their justification, humans are simultaneously accepted as righteous in Christ and given the Holy Spirit, which is the formal cause of their subsequent actual sanctifying righteousness.”²²⁶

1.3.6 Summary

The distinctive mark of the mainline Reformation is its doctrine of justification. The Protestant doctrine of justification can be characterized by the concept of “imputed righteousness of Christ” (vs. the medieval understanding of “righteousness inherent in Christians”), together with its conceptual distinction between justification and sanctification. The Reformers also rejected the necessity of created habits of grace in justification and located the ground of justification in the extrinsic divine acceptance. The central theme of the Reformation – affirmed in slogans such as *sola gratia, sola fide, and solo Christo* – was the graciousness of God and human inability of initiating the process of justification. For Luther, to compromise the gospel of the grace of God was to destroy the central element of Christianity. It is for this reason that Luther saw the

²²⁶ Ibid., 264-65; Richard Hooker, *Works*, ed. J. Keble, 3d ed. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1845), 3.469-81;483-547.

doctrine of justification as “the article by which the church stands or falls,” to which all else was subordinate.

For Augustine, justifying righteousness is an *internal* righteousness; for Luther, it is an “external” or “alien righteousness of Christ,” which God “reckons” to the believer. Unlike Augustine, Luther does not envisage the liberation of the *slaved free will* after justification, because he sees the “slavery of human will” as “a consequence of humans’ creatureliness, rather than of their sin.” Therefore, whereas Augustine understands the believer to become righteous in justification, Luther insists that humans “become more and more aware of their sinfulness, and of their need for the alien righteousness of Christ.” Humans are intrinsically sinners, and will remain so, despite being extrinsically righteous. However, the recent interpretation of Luther by the “Finnish school” emphasizes the believer’s *actual participation in the divine life* through union with Christ, thus stressing the transforming aspects of justification. However, Luther’s concepts on justification were not accepted without modification by the later Lutheranism.

Melanchthon draws a sharp distinction between *justification* – the external act in which God declares the believer to be righteous, and *regeneration* – the internal process of renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther denies that humans are justified *on account of* their faith. The Augsburg Confession (1530) uses the formula “on account of Christ through faith” (*propter Christum per fidem*) and “justification by faith alone” (*sola fide*). The sole ground for justification lies not in what humans can do, but in “Christ and his work alone,” and “faith is a reception by humans of the gracious deed of God in Christ.” Thus justification does not mean “making righteous,” but “pronouncing

righteous.” There is no righteousness inherent to humans that can be regarded as the basis of their justification; humans are justified on the basis of an external and alien righteousness of Christ, which is “imputed” to them.

Luther does not, as he is frequently misunderstood, reject the necessity of good works in justification: “works are necessary for salvation” and “demonstrate the believer’s justification *by God*”; but works “do not cause salvation.” He would concede that faith without works is dead and is not a living faith. The Formula of Concord (1577) asserts that good works are obligatory, but works are the effects of justifying faith, and not the cause of that faith. The Formula recognized only one cause of justification – the Holy Spirit. The Formula envisages the human free will as being liberated by grace, whereas Luther regarded it permanently enslaved through human creatureliness.

Reforming movements developed in other parts of Europe around the same time, often on different reforming agenda. Unlike Luther, the main concerns of the early Swiss Reformers (e.g., Zwingli, Bucer) have been primarily with the reform and revitalization of the church. As a result, the early Swiss Reformation – as with the later Pietism – advocated moralist doctrines of justification, subordinating justification to regeneration. Bucer develops a doctrine of *double* justification: After a “primary justification” by faith, in which the sins of humans are forgiven and righteousness imputed to them, there follows a “secondary justification” by works, in which humans are *made* righteous.

The most significant contribution to the development of the early Reformed doctrine of justification was due to John Calvin. He clearly defines justification in forensic terms: “To be ‘justified’ does not mean that we become righteous, but that we are reckoned to be righteous on account of Christ. Calvin preserves an importance aspect

of Luther's understanding of justification which Melancthon appeared to have abandoned – the personal union of Christ and the believer in justification. The believer's *grafting into Christ* has two main consequences: the “double grace” of justification and sanctification, which are given to us *simultaneously* when we unite with Christ. In other words, although justification and sanctification may be *distinguished*, they cannot be *separated*. Sanctification actualizes our new status in Christ through the process of being conformed to Christ. This distinction between “justification” (being *declared* righteous) and “sanctification” (being *made* righteous) has led to considerable confusion. The Roman Catholic opponents of the Reformation “misunderstood the Reformers to be suggesting that it was not necessary for justified sinner to be regenerated,” and they criticized the doctrine of forensic justification as a result. Another point of importance concerns the grounds of assurance. For Calvin, the ground of assurance is located outside the believer and in God's grace. The believer may therefore rest assured that Christian life has been initiated by God, and may “concentrate upon his Christian life.” Overall, Calvin established the framework of the discussion of justification within the Reformed school of thought. Later in 1586, an English Reformer, Richard Hooker, also conceived justification Christologically – in terms of the personal presence of Christ within believers through the Holy Spirit, on account of which humans are declared righteous and the process of sanctification is initiated.

1.4 The Council of Trent (1545-1563) on Justification

The Catholic Church was not well prepared to meet the challenge posed by the rise of the evangelical faction within Germany and elsewhere in the 1520s and 1530s.

When the Council of Trent assembled in June 1546 to meet the challenge and debate the question of justification, present in the council were theologians from various religious orders and therefore with diverse schools of theology.²²⁷ The task facing the theologians assembled at Trent was thus the clarification of Catholic teaching on justification, as well as the definition of the Catholic dogma in relation to the perceived errors of Protestantism.²²⁸

1.4.1 The Tridentine decree on justification

Because the council recognized the peculiar importance of the doctrine of justification, the Tridentine decree on justification devoted the first sixteen chapters to a point-by-point exposition of the Catholic teaching on justification before proceeding to condemn thirty-three specific teachings that are unacceptable to the Catholic Church. Because the council was primarily concerned with distinguishing Catholic teaching from that of the Reformers, and not with settling disputed matters within the Catholic schools of theology, it seems to have allowed a broad range of opinions on justification as authentically Catholic.²²⁹

The first nine chapters discuss the “first justification,” in which humanity’s initial transition from a state of sin to righteousness is described. This is followed by four chapters dealing with the “second justification” – how humans, once justified, can

²²⁷ Eduard Stake-meier, “Die theologischen Schulen auf dem Trienter Konzil während der Rechtfertigungsverhandlung,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 117 (1936), 118-207, 322-50, 446-504. McGrath argues that the traditional teachings associated with the major orders appears to have exercised considerably less influence upon the proceedings on justification than might be expected; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 324.

²²⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 309.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

increase in righteousness.²³⁰ The decree opens with an analysis of the fallen condition of humanity. Because of original sin, which affects the entire human race, humans are incapable of redeeming themselves. Free will is not destroyed, but is weakened and incapacitated by the Fall²³¹; the council thus reaffirmed the position of Augustine and the Council of Orange II on this point.²³² The “particularism implicit in Luther’s teaching on election” is excluded by the assertion that “Christ died for all people, granting grace through the merits of his passion in order that humans might be born again, and hence justified.”²³³

Justification is defined in transformational terms, including the reference to the change in human status and nature:

The justification of the ungodly is a translation from that state in which humanity is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.²³⁴

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the necessity and the mode of preparation toward justification. Humans are called through prevenient grace, without their own merits, to dispose themselves toward justification. “As a consequence of humans’ assenting to and co-operating with this call, God touches their hearts through the illumination of his Holy Spirit.”²³⁵ The decree on justification is notable for its appealing to Scripture and avoiding scholastic vocabulary of the medieval period.

The preparation for justification is then defined in terms of humans’ believing the truth of divine revelation and the divine promises (especially the promise that God will

²³⁰ Ibid., 339.

²³¹ H. Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, ed. *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 39th ed. (Freiburg:Herder, 2001) (hereafter *D*), Chapter 1, *D* 1521.

²³² The second Council of Orange (529), held in southern France, adopted the views of Augustine on nature and grace, and rejected the view known as Semi-Pelagianism.

²³³ Chapter 3, *D* 1523; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 339.

²³⁴ Chapter 4, *D* 1524.

²³⁵ Chapter 5, *D* 1525.

justify the ungodly through his grace), and thus being moved to detest their sins and repent of them. This culminates in the sacrament of baptism, in which individuals declare their intention to lead a new life and observe the divine commandments.²³⁶

The seventh chapter presents a careful analysis of the causes of justification as follows.²³⁷

final cause	the glory of God and eternal life
efficient cause	the mercy of God
meritorious cause	the passion of Christ
instrumental cause	the sacrament of baptism
formal cause	the righteousness of God

The assertion that the *single* formal cause of justification is “the righteousness of God,” not by which he himself is righteousness, but by which he makes us righteous, shows a deliberate effort to exclude the possibility that there exists more than one formal cause. The statement also implicitly excludes the possibility that *imputed righteousness* is a contributing cause to human justification. More importantly, the medieval debate over whether the formal cause of justification was an intrinsic created habit of grace or the extrinsic denomination of the divine acceptance was circumvented by a reversion to the Augustinian concept of “righteousness of God.” The connection of the “first justification” with the sacrament of baptism continues the medieval tradition of “excluding the possibility of extrasacramental justification.”²³⁸

The eighth chapter deals with the concepts of “to be justified by faith” and “to be justified freely.”²³⁹ Faith is to be seen as the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God. This

²³⁶ Chapter 6, *D* 1526.

²³⁷ Chapter 7, *D* 1528-31; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 340.

²³⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 341.

²³⁹ Chapter 8, *D* 1532.

gift is given freely, in the sense that nothing that precedes justification can be said to merit justification:

We are said to be justified by *faith*, because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and the root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God, and to enter into the fellowship of his children; but we are therefore said to be justified *freely*, because none of those things which precede justification – whether faith or works – themselves merit the grace of justification.²⁴⁰

Although this statement clearly excludes the possibility that humans may merit justification *de condigno*, it does not – and was not intended to – exclude the possibility that they merit it *de congruo*. In other words, the traditional teaching of the Franciscan order that humanity’s disposition toward justification is meritorious *de congruo* is neither explicitly accepted nor rejected.²⁴¹

The ninth chapter deals with the question of the certitude of faith.²⁴² Trust or assurance on the part of the believer concerning the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the efficacy of the sacraments is certainly appropriate; what is inappropriate is the “mad confidence of the heretics” concerning the individual’s justification:

Just as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ, or the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, nevertheless everyone, on consideration of themselves and their own weakness and indisposition, should have fear and apprehension concerning their own grace, in that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that they have obtained the grace of God.²⁴³

The tenth chapter starts the section of the decree dealing with the “second justification,” in which humanity increases in righteousness. This second justification is seen as a positive duty placed upon humanity by virtue of the first justification. There is a clear connection between this Tridentine concept of the second justification and the Reformed concept of sanctification. Whereas in the first justification, grace operates upon

²⁴⁰ Ibid.; cited in McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 341.

²⁴¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 341.

²⁴² Chapter 9, *D* 1533-4.

²⁴³ Chapter 9, *D* 1534.

humans, in the second, humans co-operate with grace. “It is thus both possible and necessary to keep the law of God.”²⁴⁴ The opinion that such good works involved in the second justification are sinful is rejected. The Augustinian doctrine of final perseverance is reaffirmed; in this mortal life, “no one may know whether he is among the number of the predestined, except through special revelation.”²⁴⁵

The final three chapters deal with those who have fallen from the grace of justification through mortal sin. Those who are moved by grace may regain the grace of justification through the sacrament of penance, on account of the merit of Christ.²⁴⁶ The lapsed individual remains a believer; “it is only grace, and not faith, which is lost by mortal sin.”²⁴⁷ The final chapter deals with the question of merit. While insisting upon the biblical principle that good works are rewarded by God, Trent emphasizes that merit is a divine gift to humanity (cf. Augustine in § 1.1.4). Although the grace of Christ precedes and accompanies human efforts, those efforts are real nevertheless. By their co-operation with grace, believers are entitled to receive merit and to increase in justification. The individual who perseveres until the end will “receive eternal life as a reward, the crowning gift promised by God to those who persevere.”²⁴⁸

1.4.2 The thirty-three canons

The thirty-three canons appended to the decree condemn certain heretical opinions, by no means restricted to Protestantism. The specific condemnation of Pelagianism is significant, because it needed magisterial clarification. However, “it

²⁴⁴ Chapter 11, *D* 1536-9; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 342.

²⁴⁵ Chapter 12, *D* 1540.

²⁴⁶ Chapter 14, *D* 1542-3.

²⁴⁷ Chapter 16, *D* 1545-9 is summarized in McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 342.

²⁴⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 343.

appears that it is certain caricatures of Protestantism which are actually condemned, rather than Protestantism itself.”²⁴⁹ Canon 11 may be singled out in this respect:

If anyone says that people are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God: let him be condemned.²⁵⁰

It is clear that this condemnation is aimed against a purely extrinsic conception of justification – in other words, the view that the Christian life may begin and continue without any transformation or inner renewal of the sinner. In fact, the canon does not censure any magisterial Protestant position, because the initial (extrinsic) justification of humans is either understood (as with Melancthon) to be inseparably linked with the subsequent (intrinsic) sanctification, so that the two are only notionally distinct, but no more; or else “both the extrinsic justification and intrinsic sanctification are understood (as with Calvin) to be contiguous dimensions of the union of the believer with Christ.”²⁵¹ Underlying this canon appears to be “an error primarily due to terminological confusion, but compounded by Luther’s frequently intemperate (and occasionally obscure) statement of the matter.”²⁵²

McGrath comments on the Tridentine decree on justification:

The degree of latitude of interpretation incorporated into the Tridentine decree on justification at points of importance makes it impossible to speak of “the Tridentine doctrine of justification,” as if there were *one such doctrine*. In fact, Trent legitimated a range of theologies as Catholic, and any one of them may reasonably lay claim to be a ‘Tridentine doctrine of justification.’ Trent may be regarded as endorsing the medieval catholic heritage on justification, while eliminating much of its technical vocabulary, substituting biblical or Augustinian phrases in its place . . . It will, however, be clear that the degree of latitude of interpretation implicitly endorsed by Trent did more than permit the traditional teaching of the medieval schools to be considered Catholic; it also caused uncertainty concerning the precise interpretation of the decree. The result of this

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Canon 11, *D* 1561.

²⁵¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 343.

²⁵² Ibid., 343-44.

uncertainty may be seen in the immediate post-Tridentine period, in which it transpired that the debate on justification within Catholicism was renewed, rather than settled.²⁵³

1.4.3 Summary

The Council of Trent assembled in June 1546 to meet the challenge of Protestantism and to debate the question of justification. The council's decree on justification discusses the "first justification" – humanity's initial transition from a state of sin to righteousness – and the "second justification," in which humanity can increase in righteousness. Justification is defined in transformational terms, including the reference to the change in human status and nature. The Tridentine concept of the second justification is clearly connected with the Reformed concept of sanctification. Whereas in the first justification, grace operates upon humans, in the second, humans co-operate with grace. By their co-operation with grace, believers are entitled to receive merit and to increase in justification. The individual who perseveres until the end will receive eternal life as a reward.

Humans are called through prevenient grace, without their own merits, to dispose themselves toward justification. Faith is seen as the beginning of human salvation and the foundation of justification. This gift of faith is given freely. Trent asserts that the *single* formal cause of justification is "the righteousness of God," thereby avoiding the medieval debate over whether the formal cause of justification is an intrinsic created habit of grace or the extrinsic denomination of the divine acceptance. Although Trent clearly excludes the possibility that humans may merit justification *de condigno*, the possibility that they merit it *de congruo* is neither explicitly accepted nor rejected. Speaking of the assurance

²⁵³ Ibid., 344.

of justification, it declares that no one can know with a certainty that they have obtained the grace of God, except through special revelation.

The thirty-three canons condemn certain heretical opinions. However, it appears that they actually condemn certain caricatures of Protestantism, rather than Protestantism itself. The degree of latitude of interpretation incorporated into the Tridentine decree on justification legitimated a range of theologies as Catholic. This caused uncertainty concerning the precise interpretation of the decree and resulted in the debate on justification within Catholicism in the immediate post-Tridentine period.

1.5 The Modern Period

If there is a “modern period” in the development of the doctrine of justification, that period must have been initiated by the Enlightenment in England, France and Germany in the eighteenth century.²⁵⁴ It was this movement that called into question the presuppositions (such as the doctrine of original sin) upon which the theologies of justification were based until then. One of the most distinctive themes of the modern era is its “shift from a fundamentally theocentric to an anthropocentric frame of reference, defined by a new emphasis on human autonomy in relation to both revelation and salvation”; humanity now enters a new era of autonomy – independent of God.²⁵⁵

This radical shift has two important implications. First, the doctrine of justification is largely subverted by the Enlightenment’s emphasis upon self-actualization as the goal of human existence. Secondly, the Enlightenment emphasis upon the autonomy of humanity called into question the notions such as “original sin,” on which

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 360.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 358.

classic formulations of the doctrine of justification has been founded, as irrational and designed to enslave humanity to certain patterns of belief and behavior. Enlightened approaches now claimed that “humanity was in full possession of whatever rational resources were necessary for self-fulfillment.”²⁵⁶

1.5.1 The Enlightenment critique of orthodox doctrines of justification

The origins of the Enlightenment critique of orthodox doctrines of justification may be located in “the new emphasis upon the autonomy of humans as moral agents,” so characteristic of the movement.²⁵⁷ The new optimism about the human natural capacity to understand and master the world led to a suspicion of the traditional moral and religious systems that questioned the human autonomy. The rise of moral optimism and rationalism posed a serious challenge to the traditional theologies. Those associated with English Deism rejected the idea of original sin. They generally saw the work of Christ in terms of the “great encouragement he brought to a virtuous and pious life.”²⁵⁸ Faith alone does not justify, and must be supplemented with the moral element. Faith (i.e., believing Jesus as Messiah) and good life are indispensable conditions of the new covenant for all those who would obtain eternal life.²⁵⁹

The later Deism, while emphasizing the moral character of Christianity, not only rejected the concept of original sin, but also attacked the central dogmas of the Christian faith which were at variance with reason. Christ has a place in this soteriology only in so

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 359.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 360.

²⁵⁸ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in *Works* 7.148.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.105; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 361.

far as he established the laws, by which humanity must live.²⁶⁰ The traditional structure of the doctrine of justification was discarded, in favor of a purely moral concept of justification: humans are justified “on the basis of their unaided act of repentance, inspired by the moral example and teaching of Christ, and motivated by the knowledge of the good which this repentance will bring them.”²⁶¹

The indirect influence of Pietism on rationalist critiques of orthodox doctrines of justification should be noted carefully. Many of the representatives of the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärer*) were of Pietist origins. For the Pietist, the object of justification was morally regenerate individuals, whose moral regeneration both caused and demonstrated their justification. In many respects, the early German Enlightenment paralleled later Pietism in its theology of justification.²⁶²

Johann Gottlieb Töllner argues that “the concept of vicarious satisfaction for sin” may be rejected.²⁶³ He then argues that it is the renewal of the individual which leads to the bestowal of grace, rather than the satisfaction of Christ. The obedience of Christ is an essentially moral quality, which inspires a corresponding moral quality in humans – upon the basis of which they are forgiven and justified. Humans’ justification does not depend on the “objective” value of the death of Christ, but upon the “subjective moral influence” that exerts upon humans.²⁶⁴ This is a characteristic understanding of the later Enlightenment, which emphasizes the “moral” or “exemplarist” interpretation of the death of Christ.

²⁶⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 363.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 365.

²⁶³ Johann Gottlieb Töllner, *Der thätige Gehorsam Christi untersucht* (Breslau, 1768), 42; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 368 and n.38.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 685.

By the year 1780, the foundations of the Christian doctrine of justification had been subjected to such destructive criticism by the Enlightenment in England, France and Germany that it appeared impossible that they could ever be restored. The next section turns to the discussion of the distinctive works of Kant and Schleiermacher whose critiques of the Enlightenment contributed to the re-establishment of the doctrine of justification.

1.5.2 The moral critique of the Enlightenment: Immanuel Kant

The soteriologies of the later Enlightenment can be characterized in terms of their rationalism, moralism and naturalism. Fundamental to such soteriologies was the axiom of soteriological autonomy of the individual: all individuals possess all the resources necessary for their justification.²⁶⁵

The cornerstone of Kant's theology is the priority of the apprehension of moral obligation (*das Sollen*) over anything else. Kant notes that the belief that the duty of humans is to pursue the highest good has as its necessary presupposition the possibility of moral perfection. Kant, however, recognizes that humans are free creatures, with the ability of misusing that freedom. His account of moral obligation takes account of the possibility that people will ignore unintentionally their apprehension of moral obligation. His thesis of "radical evil" indicates therefore that the most that can realistically be expected is progress toward, rather than attainment of moral perfection.²⁶⁶ Kant thus redefines moral perfection in terms of "disposition" toward this unattainable objective.

²⁶⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 372.

²⁶⁶ See G. E. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1990.

Having defined a “good disposition” as the intention to work toward moral perfection, Kant claims that “God treats those who possess an *intention* to work towards moral perfection *as if they were already in full possession of that perfection.*”²⁶⁷ The person who is pleasing to God is pleasing only because of a gratuitous act by which God overlooks his or her deficiencies. As Kant puts this elsewhere, individuals who attempt to please God “in so far as it lies within their ability” may rely upon the divine grace to “supplement” their deficiencies.²⁶⁸ On the basis of these assumptions, Kant asserts that those who attempt to be pleasing to God may rest assured of the truth expressed by the doctrine of reconciliation, which states that their former sins are abolished.²⁶⁹

The significance of Kant’s *Religion* lies in recognizing “the necessity of divine grace *as a postulate of practical reason.*”²⁷⁰ The deep pessimism of his doctrine of “radical evil” is counteracted by his optimism concerning the role of divine grace in supplementing a good disposition and abolishing the moral guilt of a prior evil disposition (by a process of vicarious satisfaction). His analysis of practical reason suggested that “the doctrines of justification and reconciliation had a proper and necessary place within moral philosophy.”²⁷¹

1.5.3 The religious critique of the Enlightenment: F. D. E. Schleiermacher

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, more people realized the severe spiritual limitations of Enlightenment rationalism. Reason, once seen as a liberator, came

²⁶⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 374; see Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*. 22 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902-42) 6.75.1-76.6; cf. 6.62.14-66.18.

²⁶⁸ Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6.120.10-16.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.183.37-184.3.

²⁷⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 376. Kant recognizes the need of religion within the limit of practical reason.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

increasingly to be regarded as spiritually enslaving. Whereas the Enlightenment appealed to the human reason, a new movement known as “Romanticism” appealed to the “human imagination,” which it believed to be capable of recognizing the profound sense of mystery arising from the realization that “human mind cannot comprehend even the finite world, let alone the infinity beyond this.”²⁷²

Although Schleiermacher is not regarded as a Romantic, the new significance attached to human “feeling” helped him to develop an account of Christian faith without the prevailing rationalist reductions of the concept. The essence of “piety,” which Schleiermacher holds to be irreducible element of every religion, is not rational or moral principle, but “feeling” or “the immediate self-consciousness.”²⁷³ Schleiermacher constructs his dogmatics upon the basis of the fact of redemption in Christ, and thus upon the antithesis of sin and grace. “The redemptive activity of Christ consists in his assuming individuals into the power of his God-consciousness.”²⁷⁴

For Schleiermacher, the Enlightenment regarded Christ primarily as the teacher of an *idea* of God or the exemplar of a religious or moral principle. Like the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher insists that justification is contingent upon a prior alteration within humans. But he diverges from the Enlightenment in his understanding of the nature of the alteration. For the Enlightenment, the alteration was to be conceived morally. For Schleiermacher, the alteration was to be conceived *religiously* as “laying hold of Christ in a believing manner” (*Christum gläubig ergreifen*).²⁷⁵

²⁷² Ibid., 376-77; see, for example, M. H. Abrams, *Natural supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973).

²⁷³ F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 4th ed. 2 vols. (Berlin, 1842-3), § 3, 2-4; 1.7-13; cited in McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 377.

²⁷⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 378; see Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 106, 1; 2.162.

²⁷⁵ Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, §109, 4; 2.201.

Schleiermacher argues that humans are unable to attain a dominant God-consciousness unaided because of an inherent disposition within humans toward sin, which leads them to recognize their need for external divine assistance. Schleiermacher defines the distinctive feature of Christianity as the principle that “all religious emotions are related to redemption in Christ.”²⁷⁶ The Enlightenment axiom of the soteriological autonomy of humans eliminated this distinctive element of an Augustinian understanding of redemption. Schleiermacher subordinates sin to the divine purpose of redemption, regarding humans’ recognition of sin as the necessary prelude to their redemption. Schleiermacher has replaced the Enlightenment’s moral understanding of salvation with *religious* understanding of salvation.²⁷⁷

1.5.4 The reappropriation of the concept of justification: A. B. Ritschl

Through Schleiermacher’s soteriology, a purely rationalist or moralist interpretation of the justification of humanity was increasingly seen to be religiously deficient. Yet Schleiermacher’s critique of the Enlightenment did not include an objective dimension of justification. Justification was seen essentially in terms of human transformation.²⁷⁸ Albrecht Ritschl reintroduces an objective dimension of justification into the systematic discussion of the doctrine.

Ritschl published the first volume of his *Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung Theologie Versöhnung* in 1870. His theology is based on the centrality of God’s redemptive action in history, with its subsequent human response and obligations. Ritschl draws a highly influential distinction between early authentic Christianity and its later

²⁷⁶ Ibid., § 22, 2; 1.125; cited in McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 380.

²⁷⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 381; this is McGrath’s assessment of Schleiermacher.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 382.

unauthentic form, which resulted from the intrusion of elements essentially alien to the gospel itself. According to Ritschl, “Christianity is essentially soteriologically oriented, but became corrupted through the intrusion of Hellenistic metaphysics into a Christologically centered religion.”²⁷⁹

In his polemic against the claims of idealistic rationalism, Ritschl argues that the specifically Christian knowledge of God takes the form of “value-judgments evoked by divine revelation.”²⁸⁰ Ritschl regards the justification of humanity as the fundamental datum from which all theological discussion must proceed, and upon which it is ultimately grounded. Ritschl’s definition of justification reintroduces objective concepts into the systematic discussion of the doctrine: justification or the forgiveness of sins is the “acceptance of sinners into that fellowship with God within which their salvation will be effected and developed into eternal life.”²⁸¹ For Ritschl, “sin separates humans from God, effecting the withdrawal of God’s presence from the sinner; justification is therefore the divine operation through which the sinner is restored to fellowship with God.”²⁸² Ritschl stresses that justification, which is concerned with the restoration of humanity’s fellowship with God, necessarily finds its expression in the lifestyle of the individual.

Ritschl declares his intention to break from the moralism of Catholicism and the Enlightenment by affirming that “justification is a creative act of the divine will which, in declaring the sinner to be righteous, *effects* rather than *endorses* the righteousness of individual humans.”²⁸³ Ritschl points out how the divine pardon of the sinner in

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 383.

²⁸⁰ A. B. Ritschl, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung Theologie Versöhnung*, third edition (Bonn: Marcus, 1888), § 28; 195-200.

²⁸¹ Ibid., § 16; 83; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 385.

²⁸² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 385.

²⁸³ Ibid., 387; see Ritschl, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung Theologie Versöhnung*, § 16; 77-83.

justification was generally treated by orthodoxy as “analogous to the bestowal of pardon upon a guilty individual by a head of state,” for “the greatest good of the people.”²⁸⁴

1.5.5 The dialectical approach to justification: Karl Barth

In one of his early lectures, Barth talks about the dialectic between human and divine righteousness. “God’s will is not a superior projection of our own will: it stands in opposition to our will as one that is totally distinct (*als ein gänzlich anderer*).”²⁸⁵ It is this infinite qualitative distinction between human and divine righteousness that forms the basis of Barth’s repeated assertion that “God is, and must be recognized as, God.”²⁸⁶

For Barth, God’s judgment has been executed against Christ, and will never be executed against humanity, in whose place Christ stood.²⁸⁷ Barth insists upon the total inability of humans to justify themselves, or to co-operate in a significant manner with God in bringing about their salvation. “His doctrine of election, when linked with his understanding of the capacities of fallen humanity, necessarily leads to a doctrine of universal restoration: all are saved, whether they know it or not, and whether they care for it or not.”²⁸⁸

1.5.6 Summary

The modern period in the development of the doctrine of justification has been initiated by the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The traditional doctrines of

²⁸⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 388.

²⁸⁵ Karl Barth, “Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes,” in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1925), 15; see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 394.

²⁸⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 394.

²⁸⁷ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. 13 vol. (Zurich: Evangelische Verlag, 1928-68), II/2 § 33, 2; 183.

²⁸⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 402-03.

justification were largely subverted by the Enlightenment's emphasis on human autonomy independent of God and its claim that humans possess all resources necessary for their justification. The later English Deism and the German Enlightenment (influenced by the later Pietism, whose object of justification was moral regeneration) adopted a purely moral concept of justification: Humans are justified not on the basis of the "objective" value of the death of Christ, but on the basis of human moral quality, inspired by the subjective moral influence of the example and teaching of Christ.

The critiques of the Enlightenment rationalism by Kant, Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth contributed to the re-establishment of the doctrine of justification. Kant's analysis of practical reason pointed out the human deficiency in attaining moral perfection and therefore the necessity of divine grace. Whereas the Enlightenment reduced Christian faith to human reason, Schleiermacher emphasized "feeling" or "God-consciousness" as the essence of piety. Schleiermacher has replaced the Enlightenment's *moral* understanding of salvation with *religious* understanding of salvation, by constructing his dogmatics on the basis of the redemption in Christ, and thus upon the antithesis of sin and grace. Ritschl reintroduced an objective dimension of justification: Sin separates humans from God, and justification is the divine operation through which the sinner is restored to fellowship with God; this necessarily *effects* transformation of the lifestyle of the individuals and leads them into eternal life. Finally, Karl Barth insists on the total inability of humans to justify themselves or to co-operate in a significant manner with God in bringing about their salvation. His doctrine of justification, however, leads to a doctrine of universal salvation.

CHAPTER TWO

Recent Ecumenical Dialogues on the Doctrine of Justification

One of the most important developments in Christianity since World War II has been the rise of the ecumenical movement, with its willingness to discuss denominational divisions with a purpose of overcoming them. The new social factors that lessened the tension between the churches in Western liberal democracies, aided by the progressive attitude adopted by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) have contributed to the development of the new, open relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches.²⁸⁹

The new willingness on the part of Roman Catholic theologians to discuss the controversial issue of justification is widely thought to have been stimulated by an early work of the Swiss theologian Hans Küng. In his book *Justification* (German edition, 1957; English translation, 1964), Küng compares the views of Karl Barth with those of the Council of Trent, and argues that there is fundamental agreement between the position of Barth and that of the Roman Catholic Church. Even though Küng's work is open to criticism on a number of points, his book may be regarded as having initiated the ecumenical discussion of justification, implying that at least some degree of agreement on the doctrine of justification could be reached between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The doctrine had thus far been seen largely an insurmountable obstacle to ecumenical dialogues.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 413.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 414-15.

The following periods saw a significant number of such dialogues between Roman Catholics and Protestants, culminating in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999. This chapter describes the most significant achievements of the recent ecumenical dialogues on the doctrine of justification: *The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue VII* (1983) and *Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), as well as two other documents that contributed to the ecumenical development of the doctrine: “The Gospel and the Church” (1972) and *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (1986).²⁹¹

2.1 The Gospel and the Church (1972)

In 1972 the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, appointed by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, published the document, “The Gospel and the Church,” now generally known as the “Malta Report.”²⁹² Under the general theme of “The Gospel and the Church,” the commission discussed a variety of controversial issues which are very significant for the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches. The broad formulation of the general theme, however, did not allow a detailed treatment of the problems. The report presents the convictions and insights of the study commission.²⁹³ The final report claims that the members of the study commission “have reached a noteworthy and far-reaching consensus,” even though they admit the

²⁹¹ Many times this chapter tried to follow closely the wording of the original documents so that it would represent these documents correctly.

²⁹² “The Gospel and the Church,” published jointly in *Lutheran World* 19 (1972), 259-73, and *Worship* 46 (1972), 326-51.

²⁹³ “The Gospel and the Church,” § 13.

limitations of their work.²⁹⁴ This report, however, has no binding character for the churches.²⁹⁵ As for the doctrine of justification, the commission noted a developing ecumenical consensus on the doctrine: “Today . . . a far-reaching consensus is developing in the interpretation of justification”; Catholic theologians also emphasize that “God’s gift of salvation is unconditional as far as human accomplishments are concerned,” while Lutheran theologians stress that the event of justification is not limited to forgiveness of sins or “a purely external declaration of the justification of the sinner” but it encompasses “the new life of the believer.”²⁹⁶

This development underlies the important discussion, begun in 1978, between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians in the United States. In September 1983, after six years of discussion, the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue group published a document, entitled *Justification by Faith*. This document consists of a comprehensive analysis of the historical development of the doctrine, as well as a careful assessment of the nature and significance of the controversial issues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

2.2 The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue VII (1983)²⁹⁷

In 1983, for the first time since the Regensburg Colloquy in 1541, an official Roman-Catholic and Lutheran dialogue produced a common statement on the doctrine of justification together with background papers – the fruit of a six-year dialogue between scholars appointed respectively by the U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops’ Committee for

²⁹⁴ Ibid., §§ 7-9.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., § 13.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., § 26.

²⁹⁷ George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985). This is the official document of the U.S. dialogue, the editors being assigned to finalize the common statement.

Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and Lutheran World ministries, which is the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. This convergence has become possible because of “a growing consensus in biblical and historical scholarship and the new climate in ecumenical relationships that has developed since Vatican II.”²⁹⁸

In chapter one, the U.S. common statement traces the history of the doctrine of justification, highlighting those aspects of particular importance for the current Lutheran-Roman Catholic discussion.²⁹⁹ Then, in chapter two the dialogue partners reflect on the history of the doctrine in order to understand “the contrasting concerns and patterns of thought in the two traditions,” before coming up in chapter three with the convergences between the theologies of the two traditions. They emphasize that the common statement is “the result of a process of common search,” and “not a compromise between initially opposing views”: “Where they have been able to discern agreements, they have made a common statement. Where they have discovered differences, they have tried to state them clearly and to assess their effect on relationships between the two communions.”³⁰⁰

2.2.1 Reflection and Interpretation

In the beginning of chapter two, the dialogue partners note that the differences between the two traditions, which were “interpreted as conflicts” in the “polemical atmosphere of the past,” may in part be “complementary and, even if at times in unavoidable tension, not necessarily divisive.”³⁰¹ In this chapter they try to describe and

²⁹⁸ Anderson, back cover.

²⁹⁹ This historical survey is not summarized here, because a more comprehensive history of the doctrine of justification and its summaries are already given in Chapter I – Historical Development of the Doctrine of Justification.

³⁰⁰ Anderson, 9.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, § 94.

interpret the historical concerns and thought patterns of Catholic and Lutheran understandings of justification.

Lutherans generally try to safeguard the absolute priority of God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ and therefore exclude self-reliance for salvation. The unconditional love of God for fallen humanity implies that the promised salvation depends on nothing else but the gift of faith by which believers trust in God.³⁰² Catholics, while accepting the absolute priority of God's saving action, are generally more concerned with emphasizing "the efficacy of God's saving work in the renewal and sanctification of the created order," an efficacy which Lutherans do not deny.³⁰³

These different concerns cause significantly different patterns of thought and expression. The Catholic concerns are expressed in emphasizing the transformational process in which humans are brought to new life through God's infusion of saving grace. Lutherans, on the other hand, bear in mind the situation of sinners standing before God and hearing God's words of judgment and forgiveness at the same time.³⁰⁴

These different concerns and thought patterns entail different ways of speaking and thinking about points such as (1) the imputational or forensic character of justification, (2) the sinfulness of the justified, (3) the sufficiency of faith, (4) merit, (5) satisfaction, and (6) the criteria by which Christian life and doctrine are to be judged. On each of these points they make the following observations and generalized remarks, while recognizing that these generalizations cannot do a full justice to the complexity of the questions.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ibid., § 95.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., § 96.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., § 97.

2.2.1.1 Forensic justification

For Lutherans, justification means imputation of Christ's righteousness to sinners when they receive it in faith. Justification is therefore the forensic act of God's declaring the sinner just. Taking God's declaration as efficacious, Lutherans also affirm the reality of sanctification and good works, but they regard these as effects or fruits rather than part of justification itself. In this way the Lutheran doctrine of imputed righteousness intends to safeguard the unconditional character of God's promises in Christ.³⁰⁶

Catholics fear that "emphasis on forensic justification or imputed righteousness, if not accompanied by other themes" – such as the remission of sin, adoption, redemption, regeneration, healing, sanctification, reconciliation, new creation, and salvation – could unintentionally disregard the benefits imparted through God's loving work in Christ.³⁰⁷ Lutherans, conversely, fear that "the Catholic emphasis on the non-forensic aspects could throw believers back on their own resources."³⁰⁸

The two traditions have different approaches to the relationship between the remission of sins and the transformation by grace. Catholics have tended to think that infusion of grace is a cause of the forgiveness of sins and sanctification. Lutherans think that the traditional Catholic emphasis on the infusion of grace does not express adequately the unmerited character of God's forgiving mercy. For Lutherans "God's justifying act of forgiveness is itself the cause or constant power of renewal throughout the life of the believer."³⁰⁹ Catholics, conversely, think that the Lutheran position is too

³⁰⁶ Ibid., § 98.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., § 99 and § 100.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., § 100.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., § 101.

narrowly focused on the “consolation of the terrified consciences” and “does not take sufficient account of the doxological dimension” of God’s “transformative indwelling.”³¹⁰

2.2.1.2 Sinfulness of the Justified

Lutherans maintain that the sinfulness of the justified is revealed simultaneously with the forensic act of justification (*simul iusti et peccatores*). Even though justification certainly effects inner renewal, including the gifts of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, and good works, Lutherans see this renewal as a lifelong struggle against sin both as unrighteousness and self-righteousness. Original sin and its effects can no longer reign in those who continue to hear and trust the justifying proclamation, but sin nevertheless remains and is in need of continued forgiveness. Catholics, on the other hand, maintain that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit removes the guilt of sin and makes the justified pleasing in God’s sight. The concupiscence which remains is not “truly and properly sin in those born again.”³¹¹ The justified can avoid mortal and venial sins, although success in this struggle can be achieved only by a special divine favor.³¹² For however just and holy, they fall from time to time into the sins. Moreover, the Spirit’s action does not exempt believers from the lifelong struggle against sinful tendencies. According to Catholic doctrine, concupiscence and other effects of original sin remain in the justified, who therefore “must pray daily to God for forgiveness.”³¹³

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Council of Trent, Session VI, ch. 5 (DS 1515); cited in Anderson, § 102.

³¹² Ibid., can. 23 (DS 1573); Anderson, § 102.

³¹³ Ibid., ch. 11 (DS 1537); Anderson, § 102.

Lutherans fear that “the Catholic doctrine of inherent righteousness may cause the Christian to be anxious or complacent, and in either case insufficiently reliant on God’s promise of mercy.”³¹⁴ Catholics fear that “the Lutheran position may lead to a certain neglect of good works or may not adequately motivate the believer to give praise and thanks to God for the healing and transforming effects of his redemptive action in us.”³¹⁵ To describe this transformation, Catholics sometimes appeal to the concept of divinization (*theosis*), which occupied an important place in the Greek patristic tradition, and stress that the “inherent righteousness” of believers is primarily God’s gift of himself (i.e., *gratia increata*). Lutherans usually do not use the word of divinization, even though they follow Luther in “speaking of the believer’s participation in the glory of the resurrected Christ and of the continuously operative presence in believers of the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁶ The divergent ways of speaking about the sinfulness of the justified represent the continuing differences in their concerns.³¹⁷ [Both traditions, however, agree in recognizing human weakness or sinfulness even after being born again.]

2.2.1.3 Sufficiency of faith

Catholics can speak of justification by faith or even justification by faith alone “insofar as they teach, as do Lutherans, that nothing prior to the free gift of faith merits justification and that all of God’s saving gifts come through Christ alone.”³¹⁸ Catholics stress, however, that “the indwelling Holy Spirit brings about in believers not only assent

³¹⁴ Anderson, § 103.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., § 104.

³¹⁸ Ibid., § 105.

and trust but also a loving commitment that issues in good works.”³¹⁹ Thus Catholic theology has customarily held that faith, to be justifying, must be accompanied by the gift of love – as traditionally expressed in the Scholastic formula, “faith animated [or: formed] by love” (*fides caritate formata*); in this understanding, faith can exist without love and without justifying grace.³²⁰

Lutherans, for their part, understand justifying faith as “living and operative”; they also deny that faith as mere assent can be justifying: Love “always springs from such faith, but is among the works of the law, which do not justify.”³²¹ Thus Lutherans refuse the Catholic teaching that faith infused in the soul by God can be dead and sterile. They suspect that “in making a distinction between dead faith and living faith Catholics teach by implication that believers can move themselves from a state of sin to righteousness, thus in effect justifying themselves.”³²² Lutherans’ fears are increased when they hear Catholics speaking of “sinners actively cooperating in their own justification.” Although Catholics insist that cooperation is itself a gift of grace and that the love which makes faith live is totally God’s gift, Lutherans find that the Catholic doctrine is liable to Pelagian distortions.³²³ For Lutherans the Catholic doctrine that faith alone is insufficient tempts Christians to rely on their own activity rather than on the saving work of Christ. [Vatican II broadened the definition of faith beyond intellectualistic concept and left open the possibility that faith may include “the entire

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., § 106.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

response of the faithful to justifying grace.”³²⁴] In recent decades the denominational differences have been greatly narrowed by the “common approach to exegesis and the shift from Scholastic to modern categories of thought (personal and existential rather than physical or metaphysical).”³²⁵ But the theological differences regarding the relation of faith to love have not been fully transcended, even though faith is now recognized on both sides as incomplete without trust in Christ and loving obedience to him.

2.2.1.4 Merit

Both Lutherans and Catholics hold that the inner renewal that comes from justification brings good works. Lutherans, however, associate merit with law. Insisting that Christians “are justified before they keep the law,”³²⁶ they deny that good works merit salvation. Lutherans say in their Confessions that 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,”³²⁷ but they have generally considered it misleading to speak of any rewards as “merited.”³²⁸

Catholics hold that justification removes in the justified whatever is hateful to God and that “the good works of the righteous gives title to salvation itself in the sense that God has covenanted to save those who, prompted by grace, obey his will.”³²⁹

Catholics recognize that any merit of the creature is based on God’s free promises in

³²⁴ Ibid., § 73; n. 133 cites *Dei verbum* 5, which implies a broader definition of faith when it describes the obedience of faith as one “by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God offering ‘the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals’ [Vatican I] and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.”

³²⁵ Anderson, § 107.

³²⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession 4:366.

³²⁷ Ibid., 4:194.

³²⁸ Anderson, § 108.

³²⁹ Ibid., § 109.

Christ and that meritorious works presuppose grace and have their meritorious value because the Holy Spirit is active in the justified.³³⁰

Even when these reservations are made, Lutherans are inclined to hold that Catholic ways of thinking and speaking about merit can lead to a legalism that derogates from the unconditional character of God's justifying grace. Lutherans speak of reward, new obedience, and good fruits, but avoid the language of merit.³³¹ Catholics admit that merit has often been preached in a self-righteous way bordering legalism, but they deny that the abuse of the doctrine invalidates the doctrine itself. They point out that in crowning our merits God crowns his own gifts. For any assurance of final perseverance and salvation, Catholics believe, "one must not trust in one's own merits but rather hope in God's continued mercy."³³²

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, and the tension remains.³³³

2.2.1.5 Satisfaction

In the sixteenth century both Lutherans and Catholics agreed that, "as far as eternal punishments are concerned, Christ through his sufferings and death gave full satisfaction for all sin, original or personal."³³⁴ Catholics, however, held that the sufferings of the saints could "fill up" what was lacking in Christ's sufferings (cf. Col 1:24), "not as regards intrinsic value but as regards the application to particular times,

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid., § 110.

³³² Ibid., § 111.

³³³ Ibid., § 112.

³³⁴ Ibid., § 113.

places, and persons.”³³⁵ They held that believers could “participate in the sufferings of Christ, in his expiation of their sins, and in his intercession for the spiritual needs of others.”³³⁶

The Catholic doctrine was often misunderstood and “was used in support of a variety of abuses that were rightly denounced by the Lutherans and by many reforming Catholics.”³³⁷ “Many of these abuses were corrected by the reforms of the Council of Trent; others have gradually died out, but some, no doubt, still remain.”³³⁸ Properly interpreted, however, “the Catholic doctrine of satisfaction can give a Christian meaning to suffering and to solidarity in the communion of saints.”³³⁹ The question of satisfaction requires more thorough dialogue in the future.³⁴⁰

2.2.1.6 Criteria of authenticity

The Lutheran movement, “founded at a time when superstition and corruption were rampant,” was legitimately concerned to find a critical principle by which to test what is authentically Christian.³⁴¹ The principle of justification by faith that emphasizes “the sole mediatorship of Christ,” was accepted by Lutherans as “the article by which the church must stand or fall.”³⁴² Lutherans believe that this principle retains its critical importance, because the tendency of Christians to rely on their devices rather than on Christ continues.

³³⁵ Ibid., § 114.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid., § 115.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid., § 116.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid., § 117.

³⁴² Ibid.

Catholics, on the other hand, are wary of using any one doctrine as the absolute principle by which to purify the Catholic heritage. While conceding that “the church stands under the gospel and is to be judged by it,” Catholics insist that to speak of “Christ alone” or “faith alone” could lead to neglecting the means of grace, such as the canonical Scripture, sacraments, ritual, devotion, and of the ordained ministry. But Lutherans question whether, even in modern Catholicism, it has been made sufficiently evident that “the rites and orders of the church are not to be imposed as conditions for salvation, but are valid only as the free unfolding of the obedience of faith.”³⁴³ They suspect that “the papacy and magisterial infallibility remain in need of reinterpretation and restructuring in order to make them unmistakably subordinate to the gospel.”³⁴⁴ Finally, concerning a problem this dialogue has not discussed, Lutherans wonder whether the Catholic official teachings on Mary and the cult of the saints do not detract from the principle that “Christ alone is to be trusted for salvation because all God’s saving gifts come through him alone.”³⁴⁵

We can see that Lutherans are primarily concerned about emphasizing God’s unconditional saving promises and about purifying the church based on the application of justification by faith as a critical principle. Catholics, on the other hand, are concerned with “protecting the fullness of God’s gifts” and are on guard against criticism that might erode the Catholic heritage.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Ibid., § 119.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., § 120. As mentioned above, “the Catholic heritage” here includes “the Catholic official teachings on Mary and the cult of the saints” as well as “the papacy and magisterial infallibility” (§ 119).

2.2.1.7 Conclusion

Catholics and Lutherans “can share in each others’ concerns in regard to justification and can to some degree acknowledge the legitimacy of the contrasting theological perspectives and structures of thought.”³⁴⁷ Yet, some of the consequences of the different perspectives seem to be irreconcilable. It is therefore necessary for both sides “to take seriously the concerns of the other and strive to think jointly about the problems.”³⁴⁸ In this effort they now turn to the biblical data on justification and reflect jointly on the possible convergences.

2.2.2 Perspectives for Reconstruction

2.2.2.1 Biblical data

In recent decades the common use of historical-critical methods in the biblical study has brought Catholics and Lutherans to a fuller agreement about the meaning of many passages which have been controversial at least since the sixteenth century. This approach to the biblical study puts emphasis on the context of each book or passage and on the theology of each writer, thus encouraging readers to “avoid misusing isolated verses out of context as ‘proof-texts’ in a bad sense and so to respect the meanings of the biblical authors.”³⁴⁹ This common approach to biblical study has also influenced Lutheran and Catholic systematic theologians.³⁵⁰

The participants of the dialogue paid extensive attention to biblical passages bearing on righteousness/justification by faith and its relation to the love and good works

³⁴⁷ Ibid., § 121.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., § 122.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

expected of a Christian. In the common statement they focus on the historically divisive issue of how to interpret the biblical data on justification by faith. A detailed and comprehensive survey is available in a separate volume entitled *“Righteousness” in the New Testament* as well as in related essays on merit.³⁵¹ Overall, Catholics have come to acknowledge that righteousness/justification is more prevalent than has been suspected earlier and that “it is an image of prime importance for our expression of the Christ-event or even the gospel”³⁵²; 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.”³⁵³ The joint examination of Scripture brought out new insights as well as already-existing convergences and agreements, which are highlighted as follows:

2.2.2.1.1 Many of the varied meanings of the New Testament Greek term *δικαιοσύνη* (and related words) stem from the Hebrew word *צְדָקָה*. This point is readily apparent from Paul’s frequent appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament): for example, Hab 2:4 (cf. Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17, “he who through faith is righteous shall live”³⁵⁴) and Gen 15:6 (Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3, “Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”). The biblical terms “righteous” and “justification” have a rich background and a wide variety of uses. As images “they are drawn from juridical, forensic (law court) settings and are employed to describe the right relationship of human

³⁵¹ John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament: “Justification” in the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue. With responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

³⁵² *Ibid.*, † 423.

³⁵³ Anderson, § 123.

³⁵⁴ Scripture quotations in this chapter (Ch. III) are from the Revised Standard Version.

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.” It may also suggest that a person is in “right relationships.”³⁵⁵

When predicated of humans, biblical “righteousness” means “justice in ruling or judging, ethical uprightness, covenantal loyalty, obedience to Torah, or forensic innocence.”³⁵⁶ When predicated of God, “righteousness” is understood as “his fundamental uprightness,” and “above all, especially in the postexilic period, as his gracious salvific activity, manifest in a just judgment” (Isa 46:3; 51:5-8; 56:1; cf. Hos 2:18-19; Ps 40:9-10; 98:2).³⁵⁷ Thus the Hebrew term for God’s “righteousness” (צדקה) appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as his “mercy” (Isa 56:1; RSV “deliverance”) and his “steadfast love” (Hebrew אהבה) is rendered as his “righteousness” (*δικαιοσύνη* in Greek).³⁵⁸

2.2.2.1.2 The earliest Christian use of righteousness/justification terminology and its forensic imagery seem to appear in credal summaries or confessions of faith now embedded in the Pauline and other epistles but pre-Pauline in origin.³⁵⁹ Examples are 1 Cor 6:11 (“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”); Rom 4:24-25 (“Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification”); and Rom 3:24-26a (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 Tim 3:16; and possibly 2 Cor 5:21). The early Christian community used this Old Testament imagery to express the claim that by

³⁵⁵ Ibid., § 126.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., § 127.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Reumann, †† 55-76, 368-75.

Christ's death and resurrection humans stand righteous before God's tribunal. These common expressions of the apostolic faith do not specifically mention "faith" or "works," but they show that Paul was not the first to express the meaning of Christ event in terms of righteousness/justification.³⁶⁰

What Paul did to the righteousness/justification language of Old Testament and pre-Pauline origin was to sharpen the meaning of the inherited language, especially in Galatians, Romans, and Philippians. 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 also insisted on "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) and response to the gospel in believers' lives.³⁶¹

2.2.2.1.3 In the face of disputes since the Reformation, the understanding of what Paul meant when he wrote that his gospel revealed "the righteousness of God . . . through faith for faith" (Rom 1:17) has been greatly helped by considering the rich Old Testament and pre-Pauline background.³⁶² Luther preferred to speak of "the righteousness of God" as an alien righteousness that God gives on account of faith in Christ. Recent biblical scholarship sees the righteousness of which Paul speaks "both as 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."³⁶³ This understanding of "righteousness of God" as an attribute of God and also as his gift helps us to go beyond the divisive issues of the

³⁶⁰ Anderson, § 128.

³⁶¹ Ibid., § 129.

³⁶² Ibid., § 130.

³⁶³ Reumann, ¶¶ 93, 381.

sixteenth century. At that time, in polemical debates, Catholics and Lutherans often translated “righteousness of God” into mutually exclusive ways.³⁶⁴

We can now better understand what Paul says on justification by relating this theme to other images which he employed to describe God’s salvific activity toward human beings. While righteousness/justification is the primary way Paul describes what God has done for us in Christ, he also uses other images to express aspects of God’s activity in a nonforensic terminology that refers to personal and corporate transformation – such as salvation (Rom 1:16; 10:10; 13:11; 2 Cor 7:10), expiation of sins (Rom 3:25), redemption of sinners (Rom 3:24; 8:32; 1 Cor 1:30), reconciliation of sinners to God (Rom 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18-20), adoption (Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5), sanctification (1 Cor 1:2, 30; 6:11), freedom (Rom 8:1-2, 21; Gal 5:1, 13), transformation (Rom 12:20; 2 Cor 3:18), glorification (Rom 8:30; 2 Cor 3:10), and a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; cf. 1 Cor 15:45).³⁶⁵ These other images describe the aspects 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.

While Paul inherited righteousness/justification terminology as a biblical way of describing what Christ had done for humans, he also related it to grace and faith more clearly than others. Paul’s classic formula is presented in Gal 2:16: “a human being is not justified because of deeds [i.e., observances] of [the] law, but rather through faith in Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 3:21). The verb “is justified” is certainly used here in a declarative, forensic sense; whether there is also an effective sense here (i.e., that the person is “made, as well as declared, righteous”) is disputable. Yet since justification has not only a

³⁶⁴ Anderson, § 131.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, § 132.

forensic sense but also represents God's power at work, we can say that sinners are "rendered righteous" (cf. Rom 5:19).³⁶⁶

According to Paul, this justification takes place by "the grace of God," through faith, not through the law (Gal 2:21; Rom 3:22, 24), as Paul argues from the Abraham story in Galatians 3-4 and Romans 4. For Paul faith in Christ comes from hearing the gospel (Gal 3:2; Rom 10:17) and results in personal "obedience" (Rom 1:5; cf., 16:26). Faith is also something "which works itself out through love" (Gal 5:6), a Pauline phrase relating faith to loving Christian service. Such an understanding avoids much of the sixteenth-century dispute over the interpretation of Gal 5:6.³⁶⁷

Paul certainly emphasizes in Romans that righteousness comes through faith and by grace (Rom 1:17; 3:21ff). Yet in Romans, Paul also talks about "God's righteous judgment" based on one's "works": "[God] 'will render to everyone according to his works' (Ps 62:12); to those who by persistence in a good deed seek glory and honor and immortality [he will] give eternal life"; for those who sin, his furious wrath waits (Rom 2:6-8). Whether Rom 2:6-11 refers to Christians or not is debated by exegetes.³⁶⁸ Paul also says in 2 Cor 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."³⁶⁹

Such passages have helped some Protestant interpreters to reckon in Paul with a

³⁶⁶ Ibid., § 133.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 321, n. 57: "In much of the Scholasticism of the day *caritas* was understood as a divinely infused virtue whereby the believer is brought into union with God. The formula *fides caritate formata* was meant to interpret the Vulgate version of Gal. 5:6, '*fides quae per caritatem operatur*,' transposing it into Aristotelian thought categories: 'faith formed [in the Aristotelian sense of formal causality] by charity,' i.e. a faith animated by love. The Greek of Gal. 5:6 is usually translated 'faith working through love' (RSV), but another possible meaning is 'faith inspired by [God's] love [toward us].'"

³⁶⁸ Reumann, †† 125-29, 390-91.

³⁶⁹ Anderson, § 135.

“judgment based on works” and some Catholics with the likelihood that “this need not be understood as contrary to justification by faith.”³⁷⁰

Justification is not merely a future or past event, but is “an eschatological reality which stretches from the past through the present and into the future.”³⁷¹ Thus Paul can enjoin to the Philippians, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” and then immediately add, “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12-13). “The ‘good deed’ (cf., Rom 2:7; 1 Thess 1:3) that Christians, justified by faith in Christ Jesus, will bring to the tribunal of God will be done because God is at work in them.”³⁷²

2.2.2.1.4 The emphasis on justification by faith in undisputed Pauline letters becomes less pronounced in the changed situations of the Deutero-Paulines and Pastorals. They show less interest in how believers are justified and more emphasis upon the effects of justification in believers’ lives. Eph 4:24 presupposes that justification causes holiness. Eph 2:4-10 echoes Pauline teaching about being “saved by grace through faith,” but it does not use “righteousness/justification” terminology to make this point. The Pastoral epistles are similar in tone, emphasizing the effects of justification in terms of the “good deeds” of believers. The Deutero-Paulines, especially the Pastorals, “illustrate the living reality that justification introduces into the believer’s existence,” thus further developing Paul’s doctrine.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Reumann, † 129; Anderson, § 135.

³⁷¹ Anderson, § 136.

³⁷² Reumann, †† 83, 125, 377, 390.

³⁷³ Anderson, § 138.

2.2.2.1.5 A survey of the other New Testament writings on righteousness/justification shows various usages of the terminology that are different from Paul's. Among the Synoptics, Matthew uses the word *δικαιοσύνη* to refer to God's way of salvation (5:6; 6:33) or human ethical response (5:10; 6:1) or both (21:32).³⁷⁴ Whereas Paul regarded "righteousness" as God's gift and "faith" as human response, Matthew speaks at times of "the kingdom" as the gift from God and "righteousness" as the response.³⁷⁵ The righteousness terminology in John, 1 John, and Revelation reflects ethical nuances, though Christ is "the Righteous One" who is the expiation for sins (1 John 2:1-2).³⁷⁶

2.2.2.1.6 The Letter of James is significant in Lutheran-Catholic debates. In Jas 2:14-26, we encounter the famous discussion of faith and works, which argues that justification is not by faith alone but by works that complete it. "You see that a human being is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24) may seem to contradict Gal 2:16 or Rom 3:28. Yet we recognize that for Paul "works" regularly means "works of the [Mosaic] law" (see Rom 3:21) and "faith" means a faith which "works itself out through love" (Gal 5:6; see § 134). Such faith is for Paul no "dead" faith; it amounts to that "faith which is completed by works" (Jas 2:22b). Moreover, for Paul faith implies both allegiance to God in Christ and the inescapable outcome in good deeds. Therefore, it differs greatly from what "faith" denotes in Jas 2:19 – acceptance of revelation without corresponding behavior. Thus we can now agree that James did not directly attack Paul's teaching on justification by faith. It rather corrects "a caricature" of Paul's teaching "which seemingly

³⁷⁴ Reumann, ¶¶ 226-43, 410.

³⁷⁵ Anderson, §140.

³⁷⁶ Reumann, ¶¶ 254-65, 412.

advocated some form of libertinism, a caricature with which Paul himself at times had to contend (see Rom 3:8; 6:1, 15).”³⁷⁷

2.2.2.1.7 Modern biblical study sheds light on the topic of merit, which was another divisive issue in the sixteenth-century controversies. “Merit” is a technical Western theological term for a concept that has no single equivalent terminology in the original texts of the Bible.³⁷⁸ However, the notion can be related to the biblical idea of the “recompense” or “retribution” of God for human conduct. The Old Testament literature often sets forth the relationship between what humans do for (or against) God and what they in return receive from him. Paul writes of death as “the wages of sin,” but “he does so in contrast to eternal life as ‘God’s free gift’ (*charisma*; never ‘wages of good work,’ Rom 6:23; cf. Gal 6:7-9) which has been effected by Christ’s suffering for us (cf. Rom 5:9-11 with vv. 15-17).”³⁷⁹ Eph 2:1-10 describes this act of Christ in terms of the immeasurable riches that the Father has freely given through his Son. Using such 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 nonexistent “merit” of human or Christian works;³⁸⁰ in Lutheran and Protestant hymns the merits of Christ, in contrast to human lack of merits, are often mentioned.³⁸¹

The New Testament texts that stress God’s recompense for each person’s conduct (e.g., Mark 10:29-30 and parallels: Matt 19:29; Luke 18:29-30) when considered together with those that teach the “unprofitableness” of works (Matt 20:1-10; Luke 17:7-10)

³⁷⁷ Anderson, § 142.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., § 143.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., § 144.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 335, n. 209.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 337, n. 210.

remind us how complex the questions of “merit” are. We cannot easily apply “human ethical schemata (including those of natural or commutative justice)” to the divine judgment. Hebrews (4:1; 6:7-8, 10-12; 10:26-29) illustrates the paradoxical incalculability of a divine recompense. Nevertheless, we should not overlook this aspect of biblical teaching on the divine recompense, though it must always be viewed within the framework of God’s merciful action for humans in Christ.³⁸²

Yet it is righteousness/justification that emerges in the New Testament as an image and concept of prime importance, and in Romans as the central image, for expressing what God has done in Christ and thus for expressing the gospel. And it is Paul among biblical authors who most fully and carefully discussed “righteousness” and “faith” and who, in the light of his understanding of these terms, thinks of justification as simply “by grace” and “through faith” without additions or qualification. In brief, “a faith centered and forensically conceived picture of justification is of major importance for Paul and, in a sense, for the Bible as a whole, although it is by no means the only biblical or Pauline way of representing God’s saving work.”³⁸³

2.2.2.2 Growing convergences

The modern interpretation of Scripture has greatly contributed to the theological convergences, but these convergences have also been facilitated by the disappearance of many nontheological sources of division, including political and ecclesiastical interests of the parties involved, which contributed to the conflict over justification in the sixteenth century. As a result of these developments Lutherans and Catholics have drawn closer

³⁸² Ibid., §145.

³⁸³ Ibid., §146.

together and they are now closer on the doctrine of justification than at any previous time.³⁸⁴

What has emerged from the joint study is “a convergence (though not uniformity) on justification by faith considered in and of itself, and a significant though lesser convergence on the applications of the doctrine as a criterion of authenticity for the church’s proclamation and practice.”³⁸⁵ The common statement describes first the incomplete convergence on the use of the criterion and then the material convergence.

2.2.2.2.1 Use of the Criterion

Catholics as well as Lutherans can acknowledge the need to test the practices, structures, and theologies of the church by the extent to which they help or hinder “the proclamation of God’s free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith.”³⁸⁶ For example, Catholics and Lutherans traditionally differ on purgatory, the papacy, and the cult of saints. Lutherans, however, accept the possibility that such teachings can be understood and used in ways consistent with justification by faith and then they need not divide the churches even though Lutherans do not accept them. Catholics, on their side, admit the legitimacy of the test and they are “open to different opinions regarding the degree to which these traditionally Catholic positions must be accepted by others” on the way to closer communion.³⁸⁷ The ecumenical rapprochement that has already occurred during and since Vatican II is evidence that greater church union “is possible without explicit adherence to all Roman

³⁸⁴ Ibid., § 151.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., § 152.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., § 28.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., § 153.

Catholic dogmas”³⁸⁸ The acceptability of post-Reformation development in each tradition “must be assessed in its own right and in connection with other outstanding issues,” and cannot be judged “simply by reference to justification by faith as a doctrine per se.”³⁸⁹

Differences in thought structures cause considerable tension between Catholic and Lutheran views on justification. Lutherans reject all reference to the freedom and goodness of fallen human beings “on the ground that this would undermine the unconditionality of God’s promises in Christ.”³⁹⁰ This understanding raises questions about the Catholic descriptions of justification as a process of ontological transformation. Catholics, on the other hand, ask whether this Lutheran understanding does justice to “God’s respect for human freedom and to the idea of a real change wrought by the Holy Spirit.”³⁹¹ This conflict between thought structures raised a number of unresolved issues, which demand further dialogue.³⁹² They believe, however, that the theological disagreements about structures need not be church-dividing, in view of the convergences that are described below.

2.2.2.2.2 *Convergences*

Accepting justification by faith as a criterion of Christian authenticity depends on prior convergences on the doctrine itself. Some of the common convictions of the Catholics and Lutherans are long-standing; others have come to light more recently. The

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., § 154.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Some of these unresolved issues are discussed in the next chapter (in § 3.2 – Problems Still to Be Worked Out), and resolving them is the main goal of this study.

common statement presents the following agreements.³⁹³ These agreements are very significant, even though they remain subject to different interpretations and formulations in each tradition.

First, Christ and his gospel are the source, center, and norm of Christian life, individual and corporate, in church and world. Christians have no other basis for eternal life and hope of final salvation than God's free gift in Jesus Christ, extended to them in the Holy Spirit.

Second, the prerequisite of final salvation is righteousness. To be saved one must be judged righteous and be righteous.

Third, as a consequence of original sin all human beings stand in need of justification even before they commit personal sins. Those in whom sin reigns can do nothing to merit justification, which is the free gift of God's grace. Even the beginnings of justification, for example, repentance, prayer for grace, and desire for forgiveness, must be God's work in us.

Fourth, we remain God's creatures even when ruled by sin. We retain the human freedom to make choices among created goods, but we lack the capacity to turn to God without divine help.

Fifth, justification, as a transition from disfavor and unrighteousness to favor and righteousness in God's sight, is totally God's work. By justification we are both declared and made righteous. Justification, therefore, is not a legal fiction. God, in justifying, effects what he promises; he forgives sin and makes us truly righteous.

Sixth, Scripture, the proclamation of the word, and the sacraments are means whereby the gospel, as the power of God for salvation, comes concretely to individuals to awaken and strengthen justifying faith.

Seventh, in justification we receive by faith the effects of Christ's action on our behalf. Justifying faith is not merely historical knowledge or intellectual conviction, but a trustful, self-involving response to the gospel.

Eighth, justifying faith cannot exist without hope and love; it necessarily issues in good works. Yet the justified cannot rely on their own good works or boast of their own merits as though they were not still in need of mercy.

Ninth, sin no longer reigns in the justified, yet they remain subject to sinful inclinations and the assaults of sin so that, when left to their own powers, they fall repeatedly. Of

³⁹³ Anderson, § 156. For the purpose of accurate presentation, the entire twelve agreements are quoted here word for word.

themselves they remain capable of losing justification, but, because of the great mercy of God in Christ, they may firmly trust and hope that God will bring them to final salvation.

Tenth, the eternal reward promised to the righteous is a gift, for it depends wholly on God's grace in Christ, the one mediator between God and fallen humanity.

Eleventh, the good works of the justified, performed in grace, will be recompensed by God, the righteous judge, who, true to his promises, "will render to everyone according to his works" (Rom 2:6) (cf. § 108).

Twelfth, the priority of God's redeeming will over every human action in bringing about ultimate salvation is recognized in both our traditions by the classic doctrine of predestination.

Fundamental to this agreement is a common affirmation noted in the introduction section of the common statement: "*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.*"³⁹⁴ This affirmation is not fully equivalent to the Reformation teaching on justification according to which "God accepts sinners as righteous for Christ's sake on the basis of faith alone"; but by emphasizing that hope for salvation should be placed entirely on God, it expresses a central concern of the Reformation teaching, while not excluding the traditional Catholic position that "the grace-wrought transformation of sinners is a necessary preparation for final salvation."³⁹⁵ There are, however, "remaining differences on theological formulations and on the relation between theology and proclamation (cf. §§ 88, 154)."³⁹⁶

They emphasize that the common affirmation does not adopt any one particular way of conceptualizing God's saving work. Yet whatever the aspect of God's saving

³⁹⁴ Ibid., § 4 and § 157.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., § 157.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

work one is led to highlight, the affirmation holds that our ultimate hope and trust for salvation are “to be placed in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not in our own goodness, even when this is God-given,” or on our religious experience of faith. As long as this affirmation is maintained, a variety of describing salvation and interpreting God’s justifying declaration is possible, and Lutherans and Catholics can recognize each other as sharing “a commitment to the same gospel of redemptive love received in faith.”³⁹⁷ They proclaim that this affirmation serves as a criterion for judging all church practices, structures, and traditions because Christ alone is to be trusted as the one mediator through whom God bestows his saving gifts. They also affirm that “all Christian teachings, practices, and offices should so function as to foster ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom 1:5),” for the salvation of the faithful and the praise of God. Thus they make the following declaration:

We believe that God’s creative graciousness is offered to us and to everyone for healing and reconciliation so that through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ . . . we are all called to pass from the alienation and oppression of sin to freedom and fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit. It is not through our own initiative that we respond to this call, but only through an undeserved gift which is granted and made known in faith, and which comes to fruition in our love of God and neighbor, as we are led by the Spirit in faith to bear witness to the divine gift in all aspects of our lives. . . . This gospel frees us in God’s sight from slavery to sin and self (Rom 5:6). We are willing to be judged by it in all our thoughts and actions, our philosophies and projects, our theologies and religious practices. Since there is no aspect of the Christian community or of its life in the world that is not challenged by this gospel, there is none that cannot be renewed or reformed in its light or by its power. . . . We are grateful at this time to be able to confess together what our Catholic and Lutheran ancestors tried to affirm as they responded in different ways to the biblical message of justification. A fundamental consensus on the gospel is necessary to give credibility to our previous agreed statements on baptism, on the Eucharist, and on forms of church authority. We believe that we have reached such a consensus.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Ibid., § 159.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., § 161.

Finally, they submit this common statement to their churches for study, “for the purpose of confessing their faith as one.”³⁹⁹

2.2.3 Summary and Evaluation

The U.S. common statement begins in the first chapter with the historical development of the doctrine of justification, and in the second chapter reflects on the history of the doctrine to understand “the contrasting concerns and patterns of thought in the two traditions” that caused many of the difficulties (§ 94). It then comes up in chapter three with the convergences between the theologies of the two traditions.

In chapter two, it is noted that the differences between the two traditions, which were interpreted as “conflicts” in the polemical atmosphere of the past, may in part be “complementary and even if at times in unavoidable tension, not necessarily divisive” (§ 94). Many of the difficulties arise from the two traditions’ *contrasting concerns and patterns of thought*, with different emphases and ways of speaking (§ 97). The Catholic concerns are expressed in emphasizing the transformational process in which humans are brought to new life through God’s infusion of saving grace. Lutherans, on the other hand, intend to safeguard the unconditional character of God’s saving promises in Christ (§ 98) and stress the unmerited character of God’s forgiving mercy.

The document discusses six key issues: the forensic character of justification, the sinfulness of the justified, sufficiency of faith, merit, satisfaction, and the criteria by which Christian life and doctrine are to be judged. The chapter concludes with the following statement:

³⁹⁹ Ibid., § 165.

Lutherans and Catholics can share in each others' concerns in regard to justification and can to some degree acknowledge the legitimacy of the contrasting theological perspectives and structures of thought. Yet, on the other hand, some of the consequences of the different outlooks seem to be irreconcilable.⁴⁰⁰

To resolve the problems, the dialogue partners turn in chapter three to biblical data on justification and reflect jointly on the possible convergences. They found that the biblical witness is "richer and more varied than has been encompassed in either traditional Catholic or Lutheran approaches to justification" (§ 149). Therefore, both sides "need to treat each other's concerns and ways of interpreting Scripture with greater respect and willingness to learn than has been done in the past" (§ 149).

What have emerged from the joint study are the growing convergences on the six key issues, listed under twelve headings (§ 156). The common statement ends with the following common affirmation:

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.⁴⁰¹

The U.S. common statement is among the most important ecumenical documents on the doctrine of justification. McGrath has a very high regard for this document. He says: the document demonstrates that "the contributors to this document are competent and informed."⁴⁰² Lane agrees: "This has generally, and rightly, been regarded as the most satisfactory of our documents on justification."⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., § 121.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., § 157.

⁴⁰² McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 416.

⁴⁰³ Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 97.

The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Justification by Faith is the most comprehensive ecumenical study so far on the doctrine of justification. What has emerged from the joint study is “a convergence (though not uniformity) on justification by faith considered in and of itself, and a significant though lesser convergence on the applications of the doctrine as a criterion of authenticity for the church’s proclamation and practice” (§ 152).

The common statement, however, admits that the agreements in § 156 “remain subject to different interpretations” (§ 155) and that there are “remaining differences on theological formulations” (§ 154). This is why the word “convergence” rather than “consensus” was used in the common statement. This means that we cannot yet confess our faith as one; the church is not yet ready to declare in a unified voice how we can appropriate the saving grace that God has provided in Christ. *Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) (see § 2.4 of this chapter) tries to overcome this problem.

2.3 The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide? (1986)⁴⁰⁴

2.3.1 Introduction

2.3.1.1 The origin and course of the investigation

This document originated from the meeting in 1980 of Pope John Paul II with German Protestant Christians, in which “the urgent need for improved ecumenical cooperation with regard to Sunday services, eucharistic fellowship, and mixed marriages”

⁴⁰⁴ Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds., *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

was emphasized.⁴⁰⁵ In the Joint Ecumenical Commission set up after this meeting (1981-85) it was soon pointed out that these burning practical issues of pastoral importance could not be addressed without first solving fundamental theological questions involved.⁴⁰⁶

Yet the commission found out that the “condemnations” of the sixteenth century stood in the way of the churches’ full mutual recognition and communion. So the commission entrusted the Ecumenical Study Group of the Protestant and Catholic theologians, which came into being in 1946, with the task of “ironing out the past” through a clarification of the mutual doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century that are found in the Confessions of the Lutheran and Reformed churches and the doctrinal decisions of the Council of Trent.⁴⁰⁷ According to the general conviction, these so-called condemnations no longer apply to our partner today. But the commission’s pronounced goal was to establish in official, binding form that the condemnatory pronouncements in the sixteenth century no longer apply to today’s partner.⁴⁰⁸ In this effort, the commission stressed the importance of accepting both new insights that have emerged and their own historical inheritances, for inherited doctrinal statements cannot be simply overlooked by any theologian.⁴⁰⁹

All in all, from 1981 to 1985, fifty theologians (including some Reformed theologians), divided into three different working parties – justification, sacraments, and ministry – participated in the total process of the work and its evaluation. In January

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

1986, the Joint Ecumenical Commission presented to the public its final report on the examination of the sixteenth-century condemnations.⁴¹⁰

2.3.1.2 Methods of investigation

As a methodological approach to its work on the condemnatory pronouncements, the study group asked the following questions:⁴¹¹

- (1) Against whom is a given doctrinal condemnation directed?
- (2) Was this condemnatory pronouncement a correct rendering of the target position?
- (3) Does it still apply to the position adopted by today's partner?
- (4) If it does, what importance and significance does the remaining difference between the two parties (that is still subject to the condemnatory pronouncement) have today?

In inquiring how far the sixteenth-century condemnations have ceased to apply to today's partner, they came up with a wide spectrum of judgment.⁴¹² For example:

- (1) There are rejections on the Protestant side which have as their target not the binding doctrine of the Catholic Church but theological opinions of the time.
- (2) Some condemnations were directed at extreme and marginal positions on the other side, which were not the doctrine of the church but were personal opinions.
- (3) Some other condemnations were directed at extreme theses which did not represent the full, comprehensive doctrine of the partner even then, let alone today.
- (4) Views that were originally stated in oppositional, exclusive terms may today not infrequently prove to be complementary. Both partners occasionally stick fast in antitheses because they are each imprisoned within the confines of a particular

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 178-87.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹² Ibid., 9.

terminology, particular way of thinking, and so forth, which are conditioned by the circumstances of intellectual and theological history.

(5) Problems of definition and different kinds of approach can ultimately distort what is in fact common ground.

2.3.1.3 The presuppositions for a reevaluation of the disputed questions of the Reformation period

The ecumenical study group presents the following insights that have led to fruitful progress in conversations between the partners:⁴¹³

First, progress in biblical studies and historical research has led directly to the insight that people can mean the same thing by different words – and also that the same words can mean different things.

Second, why, then, do we choose one or the other mode of expressions and insist on it? The reason is that the “different ‘words’ we ‘fight for’ spring from and reflect particular different ‘concerns’ and emphases in the interpretation of a message.”⁴¹⁴ On the other hand, no one way of expressing the truth of faith can take account of all its aspects at once, giving equal weight to them all.

Third, the expressions in a confessional document or conciliar texts are historically conditioned. Consequently, traditional doctrines have continually to be reinterpreted, as had long taken place in the Catholic and the Protestant churches alike. Therefore, “the positions maintained in the sixteenth century no longer confront one another in unaltered form.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Ibid., 17-19.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

These insights have encouraged a new openness in the attempts of Catholic theologians to arrive at a better understanding of the theology of the Reformation and, conversely, in the efforts of Protestant theologians to understand Roman Catholic theology – thereby greatly helping to answer the question, Do the sixteenth-century condemnations still apply to our discussion partner today? Today “far-reaching agreement in the interpretation of Holy Scripture, clearer insight about the historical contingency of traditional doctrinal formulations, and the new spirit of ecumenical dialogue” have all contributed to the achievement of mutual understanding.⁴¹⁶

What the study group found is that many sixteenth-century condemnations were based on misunderstandings about the opposite position. Others were directed at extreme positions that were not binding on the church. Again others do not apply to today’s partner. For some of the condemnations, however, even today the study group was unable to establish a sufficient consensus, but it asks whether this group of condemnations alone can justify continued division between the churches. On the other hand, the study group notes that the earlier condemnations are “still important as salutary warnings” for all members of both traditions.⁴¹⁷

2.3.2 Justification

The second chapter focuses on justification, out of the three topics that the Ecumenical Study Group discussed: justification, the sacraments, and the ministry.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

2.3.2.1 The antitheses as they were hitherto understood

Concerning the doctrine of justification, the study group notes that opposing positions between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church have so far been understood as follows:

First, the Reformers teach the complete *depravity of human nature*. Human beings have lost their liberty and power to do what is morally good and to fulfill God's commandments out of love for God. The natural free will is active only in the direction of displeasing God. The Roman Catholic doctrine, on the other hand, insists that human nature is *not entirely* depraved. The liberty to do good is certainly profoundly impaired, but has not been entirely lost.⁴¹⁸

Second, the Reformers consider *concupiscence* (evil desire) to be the essential element in the depravity of human nature. It is hence understood as sin, not in the ethical sense, as actual sin, but as the sin rooted in the person which lies at the root of all ethical sins; and it can also be used as a term for original sin. The Roman Catholic Church, however, explicitly describes concupiscence as *not* being sin, as long as the human being does not assent to it, thereby falling into actual sin.⁴¹⁹

Third, the Reformers teach the complete passivity of human beings toward God, because of the complete depravity of human nature and because salvation has its sole foundation in Christ. Any cooperation on the part of the human being is impossible. The Formula of Concord says:

Yet he [the human being] can do nothing whatsoever toward his conversion . . . and in this respect is much worse than a stone or block, for he resists the Word

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 31-32.

and will of God until God raises him from the death of sin, illuminates him, and renews him.⁴²⁰

The Catholic doctrine, on the other hand, insists that “if human beings are touched by God’s justifying grace and are literally ‘converted,’ they themselves cooperate with God, inasmuch as they freely assent to God’s justifying activity and accept it.”⁴²¹ Roman Catholic doctrine says:

If anyone shall say that man’s free will moved and aroused by God does not cooperate by assenting to God who rouses and calls, whereby it disposes and prepares itself to obtain the grace of justification, and that it cannot dissent, if it wishes, but that like something inanimate it does nothing at all and is merely in a passive state: let him be anathema.⁴²²

Fourth, the Reformers teach that “*justifying grace* is completely identical with God’s forgiving love” and “is therefore *a reality on God’s side alone*.”⁴²³ Roman Catholic doctrine, on the other hand, insists that justifying grace “inwardly renews and remolds the human being” and is therefore “a reality in the soul of the human being.”⁴²⁴

Fifth, citing Scripture passages, the Reformers emphatically stress that “human beings receive the gift of justification through faith alone – that is to say, solely through trust in the mercy of God, who for Christ’s sake does not impute our sins to us.”⁴²⁵ But Roman Catholic doctrine insists that “faith and trust justify only if they are united with the hope and love conferred by God, and are joined by a corresponding active cooperation with God’s grace.”⁴²⁶

Sixth, the Reformers emphasized that “because of God’s promise – this faith creates the *assurance of salvation*, grace, and the forgiveness of sins. Otherwise it would

⁴²⁰ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration II.59.

⁴²¹ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 32.

⁴²² Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, can. 4.

⁴²³ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 33.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

not be true faith.” But the Roman Catholic doctrine insists that, “since their love is imperfect, Christians can never be certain whether they are really in a state of grace.” They must therefore “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).⁴²⁷

Finally, the Reformers affirm that good works performed out of faith in God’s grace are the consequence and fruit of grace, and in no way a human “merit” in the sight of God. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic doctrine insists that the good works of the justified, performed in the power of grace, are truly meritorious before God by virtue of grace and the merits of Christ, and not because of the human achievement as such.⁴²⁸

If we sum up the antitheses in this oversimplified way, questions arise: “Are the antitheses in fact correctly defined?”⁴²⁹ In the next section, the study group discusses how these oversimplified antitheses can be harmonized or at least cannot justify the division of the church.

2.3.2.2 Ancient condemnations and why they no longer apply to our partner today

Upon a new examination of the respective positions and rejections, the study group found that many differences were “caused by insufficient mutual understanding – in part also by misinterpretation and excessive mistrust.”⁴³⁰ Others were “due to different modes of thought and expression.” But difficulties also remain, which still have to be worked through.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 42.

2.3.2.2.1 Concerning *the radical depravity of the unredeemed human being*, in the eyes of God, Catholic doctrine also admits the insights of the Reformers that “grace is not something *added* to human endeavors”; rather, grace *enables* human beings to take the first step, and hence all succeeding steps, toward salvation. “[A]ll human endeavors, every step from the first to the last, are the gift of grace, because Christ’s saving work is the beginning of everything.”⁴³¹ So the Protestant view that “before” justification human beings are completely imprisoned by the power of evil that they can receive justification only as a gift is not contradictory with the Catholic views. And when Catholic doctrine still recognizes some good in the sinner, it does so to the glory of God, who cannot allow his work to be entirely spoiled by human beings, but who awakens and redeems humanity to a new life.

When Catholic doctrine recognizes human liberty, “it is either a liberty, not over against God and toward God, but with regard to the things of this world”; or “it is already a liberty issuing from the call and power of grace. And it is this liberty, evoked by God and made efficacious for the very first time, that the Council of Trent ascribes the works (including the works of repentance) which are done on the basis of justification,” since “[o]utside the saving activity of God, liberty is merely what Peter Brunner calls ‘liberty inside a prison.’”⁴³²

Partly because the mutual condemnations are aimed at extreme positions on the opposing side which, in the course of the polemic, were often viewed as typical of the other position, the churches found it more difficult to understand one another. Thus the Augsburg Confession condemns “the Pelagians and others who teach that without the

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid., 43.

Holy Spirit, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things, and can also keep the commandments of God in so far as the substance of the acts is concerned”⁴³³ This is really aimed at the theology of Gabriel Biel. Conversely, the Council of Trent condemns the exaggerated utterances made by Luther and Melanchthon in 1520/21, which were later modified or corrected and were not adopted by the Lutheran Confession.⁴³⁴

The Protestant view can even today be misunderstood as that “God justifies a person quite arbitrarily, without that person’s being affected or involved.” According to Protestant conviction, however, “justification is necessarily bound up with the preaching of God’s law, which indicts the sinner and awakens his desire for the free pardon of the gospel.”⁴³⁵ The Catholic view can also even today be misunderstood as that “the cooperation of the human being is the determining condition of baptismal grace.”⁴³⁶ But against this is the Catholic conviction that “all human ‘preparation’ for baptismal grace must be seen as no more than the effect of divine grace.”⁴³⁷

If misunderstandings of this kind are avoided, then there is today no longer any reason for mutual condemnations or rejections concerning this question.

2.3.2.2.2 Insofar as the concept of “concupiscence” sums up our understanding of the depravity of sin, once the mutual condemnations about the interpretation of the depravity of sin become invalid (cf. § 2.3.2.2.1 above), the dispute about this term cannot create any new problem. What remains is a question of definition.

⁴³³ Augsburg Confession (1530) 18; The Book of Concord 40.

⁴³⁴ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 43.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Decree on Justification, cap. 6.

The research into the history of dogma and theology offers the following clarification about this point.

First, there were three different schools of thought in medieval scholasticism (which was the real target of Protestant polemic here) regarding the interpretation of original sin (and accordingly concupiscence):⁴³⁸

(1) Original sin is “the *cor incurvatum in seipsum* (the heart turned in upon itself),” so it is identical with concupiscence. Here a strong undertone stresses sensual desire, especially in the sexual sense (Augustinian, Peter Lombard).

(2) Original sin is “formally (i.e. – in the scholastic sense – essentially) lack of the original righteousness effected by grace (*iustitia originalis*); while materially it is concupiscence, understood as the inclination toward sin of the powers of the soul, which no longer act in a harmonious order that is related toward God” (Thomist).

(3) Original sin is “the mere deprivation and lack of the original state of righteousness which the human being ought to have (*carentia et privation originalis iustitia debitae inesse*); concupiscence is not included in the concept of original sin (Scotist, nominalist).

The Reformers attacked this third school, which was supported by Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel, interpreting it to mean that “original sin is merely an external imprisonment which leaves no traces in human beings themselves,”⁴³⁹ so that after the Fall “the natural powers of man have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that man by nature possesses a right understanding and a good will. . . . Again, that man is able by his natural powers to observe and keep all the commandments of God. Again, that man is able by his natural powers to love God above all things and his neighbor as

⁴³⁸ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 44-47.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 44.

himself.”⁴⁴⁰ On the other hand, according to the Protestant view, concupiscence is the third element in original sin, the others being lack of the fear of God and lack of true faith in God. Concupiscence is therefore not merely an inclination to evil in the ethical sense, but it signifies the striving of human beings to be as God. It remains as sin, even after baptism. This view is what the Catholic side saw as undermining the efficacy of baptism.⁴⁴¹

Second, the basis of the dogmatic use of the word “concupiscence” is the biblical understanding of *επιθυμία* as “the *selfish desire* of the old man, which under the law is continually inclined to ‘gratify the desires of the flesh’” (Gal 5:16ff; cf. Rom 7:7, 10). Concupiscence is still working in the lives of the justified as an inclination toward sin. The apostle Paul therefore urges believers to be vigilant toward their desires, and to fight against the power of sin which still assails us (cf. Rom 6:12-14). If we become aware of this *link* between desire and sin, but also their conceptual *difference*, then we can understand the theological importance of the term “concupiscence” in the context of the different concepts of sin and justification held in Protestant and Catholic theology – concepts which are not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁴⁴²

Third, in the conversations of the Reformation period which aimed at a settlement, Melancthon and Eck could reach an agreement by resorting to the high scholastic view that “the ‘matter’ of original sin remains, whereas the ‘form’ has been removed through baptism.”⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Smalcald Articles (1537) III.I.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. Also see Apology of Augsburg Confession (1530) 2.7, 14, 24

⁴⁴² Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Fourth, the Council of Trent “indirectly rejects the late scholastic concept of concupiscence” and adopts the Thomist concept, thereby substantially confirming the agreements already arrived at (see the above agreement between Melanchthon and Eck). The Council expressed an opinion only about whether concupiscence remained in those who had been baptized, that is, in the justified.⁴⁴⁴

Fifth, the Council of Trent and the Reformers agree that original sin and also the concupiscence that remains are in contradiction to God. They also agree that the remaining concupiscence is the object of the lifelong struggle against sin for the justified. Finally, Trent and the Reformers agree that after baptism, concupiscence in the person justified no longer separates that person from God: it is “no longer sin in the real sense,” according to Trent; in Lutheran language, it is *peccatum regnatum* (“controlled sin”), which is only damnable hypothetically – that is, only if God were not to forgive (cf. Apology 2.38).⁴⁴⁵

2.3.2.2.3 The passivity of the human being toward God’s justifying act has been frequently misunderstood. According to Protestant doctrine, it means that “human beings can do no more than simply allow God’s grace to be bestowed on them, fully and entirely.”⁴⁴⁶ It does not mean that in this bestowal the human beings do not respond personally to God. Exaggerated formulations by the Reformers – understandable enough

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

in the situation of conflict – were rejected both by the Council of Trent⁴⁴⁷ and the Formula of Concord.⁴⁴⁸

Thus the two sides were in substantial agreement: Both make it clear that before God human beings cannot in any way rely on their own endeavors – not even after their regeneration. However, both the Council and the Formula of Concord admit that human beings are in a very real sense involved in the process of justification. For example, Luther exhorts people to an “audacious” faith, that is, a human response involving the whole heart to the word of promise. But this response is not a “work,” and it is brought about through the incoercible word of promise which comes from outside the human beings. “There can be ‘cooperation’ only in the sense that in faith the heart is involved, when the Word touches it and creates faith.”⁴⁴⁹ Catholic theology pleads to its Protestant partner to concede that this is the meaning of Catholic doctrine also. On the other hand, it admits that the word “cooperation” is open to misunderstanding.⁴⁵⁰

Therefore, as far as their application is concerned, the condemnatory pronouncements in can. 4 of the Decree on Justification and the rejections 4 and 5 in the Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration II, are no longer valid.⁴⁵¹

2.3.2.2.4 When *the essence of grace or righteousness* before God is defined by Protestant doctrine as an objective reality on God’s side, “*outside ourselves,*” and by Catholic doctrine as *a reality in the human soul*, a “quality” intrinsically “adhering” to the soul (cf. 2.1-(4) above), this difference does not represent merely a misunderstanding or a

⁴⁴⁷ Council of Trent, canon 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration II.59.

⁴⁴⁹ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 47.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

different mode of expression. It is evidently a clear difference, an antithesis in the interpretation of the matter under discussion. As a result, Protestant theology links the righteousness of the believer with the righteousness of Christ *extra se* (“outside himself”), in which the believer participates, and at the same time sees the justified person as still a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*); and it sees the heart of the event of justification as a single divine act of forgiving or non-imputation of sin, with the result that the human person is again standing in a proper relationship to God. On the other hand, Catholic theology views the event of justification as a process composed of different stages, because grace never prevails at a single stroke in the human soul, because of the person’s continued resistance (cf. § 2.3.2.2.2 above). But does this difference make mutual condemnation inevitable?

New Testament exegesis teaches us today that the Protestant way of talking about the righteousness existing “outside us” (*extra nos*) has a proper biblical foundation. God has made Christ himself righteousness for us (1 Cor 1:30). Consequently, a person is righteous in God’s sight only if he is joined with Christ through faith and baptism, and has died with him to sin and to his own sinful self (cf. Rom 6:6ff; 7:4). Yet the idea of grace “poured into” the soul and “adhering” to it clearly also has a sound biblical basis. For “the love of God which remains ‘outside us’ is nonetheless ‘poured into our hearts’ (Rom 5:5), being identical with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2-5; 5-6; Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:5); and as such it unites us with Christ, fills us with confidence and joy, and makes us capable of a new life, which we nonetheless never owe to ourselves in any way, since it is fellowship with Christ and the gift of the Spirit.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² Ibid., 48.

In this way New Testament exegesis has removed the rigidity out of the old disputes. It has shown us the connections between the Catholic notion of “uncreated” and “created grace” (*gratia increata* and *gratia creata*) and the Protestant concept of “forensic” and “effective” justification. In addition, research into the history of theology no longer permits Catholic theology to reproach Protestantism with failing to take into account the fact that justification issues, and must issue, in a new life. When can. 11 of the Decree on Justification condemns the doctrine that grace is merely the favor of God, this does not really hit the target of the Lutheran view. For the distinction that Luther makes between “grace” and “gift” is intended to preserve the insight that “external” grace “touches and claims the person of the believer himself.”⁴⁵³ Through the Holy Spirit “external” grace “makes sin ‘controlled sin’ (*peccatum regnatum*), impels its expulsion, and thus determines the believer’s whole practical conduct.”⁴⁵⁴ It is significant that “Rom 5:5, the very biblical passage that can. 11 cites almost word for word, is Luther’s central authority for the distinction and relationship between grace and gift.”⁴⁵⁵

On the other hand, the history of theology no longer permits Protestant theology the reproach that “the notion of grace as a *habitus* – an enduring disposition of human existence which inclines it to new activity – is the equivalent of trust in one’s own strength, and is hence the equivalent also of loving God by means of one’s own natural powers,” a notion which Melanchthon untiringly contested in the Apology.⁴⁵⁶ Besides, recent Roman Catholic research has shown that the Council of Trent expressed itself in

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Apology 2.9-11, 17ff; 4.287-97, 316-18.

terms of the *habitus* doctrine, but it deliberately did not say by definition that justifying grace was to be understood as *habitus*.⁴⁵⁷

Consequently the following facts emerge from a proper understanding of Protestant and Catholic doctrines:⁴⁵⁸

First, Catholic doctrine does not overlook what Protestant theology stresses: the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word; nor does it maintain what Protestant theology is afraid of: grace as an objective “possession” (even if a conferred possession) on the part of the human being, something that one can dispose of.

Second, Protestant theology does not overlook what Catholic doctrine stresses: the creative and renewing character of God’s love; nor does it maintain what Catholic theology is afraid of: God’s impotence toward a sin which is “merely” forgiven in justification but which is not truly abolished in its power to separate the sinner from God.

These observations tell that the mutual rejections were directed even in the sixteenth century to “indistinct and misleading” formulations. They certainly do not apply today to the partner’s actual view. This is true especially of cans. 10 and 11 of the Decree on Justification and to the rejections of the Formula of Concord which were pronounced against the statement in can. 11.⁴⁵⁹

2.3.2.2.5 During the Reformation period, there was the confrontation between the formulas “by faith alone” and “faith, hope, and love.” Today, however, the difference about our interpretation of faith is no longer a reason for mutual condemnation.

⁴⁵⁷ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 49.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration III, first group of rejections, 3-7, and second group of rejections, 5-6.

There was a misunderstanding here. When the Council of Trent talks about the word “faith,” it followed medieval tradition in thinking first about the assent of the understanding to the revealed Word of God, and about the “objective” belief expressed in the church’s creed and its proclaimed doctrine (cf. semantic tension between *fides* and *credere* – the faith of the heart and notional belief). So the Council interpreted Protestant talk about justification “by faith alone” (*sola fide*) as if this excluded the efficacy of the sacraments and the importance of good works.⁴⁶⁰

The Reformers, on the other hand, going back to Paul, understood faith as “the forgiveness and fellowship with Christ effected by the word of promise itself” (cf. Heidelberg Catechism 21). Then faith is the ground for the new being, through which the flesh is dead to sin and the new man or woman in Christ has life (*sola fide per Christum*). But even if this faith necessarily makes the human being new, the Christian builds his confidence, not on his own new life, but solely on God’s gracious promise.

It must be noted in this context that in Luther and Melancthon the terms “sanctification,” “regeneration,” and “renewal” are not firmly distinguished from “justification” – unlike in the Reformed Confessions (from 1559 onward) and in the Formula of Concord, where the terms are applied to the moral renewal that follows justification.

It is also important to remember the following:

First, both sides claimed the support of Paul, the Protestant doctrine stressing the central importance of the concept of faith in Rom 3:21-4:25 and Gal 2;14-3:29, and the Catholic side appealing to 1 Cor 13:13 and emphasizing the unity of faith, hope, and love, with the preeminent importance of love.

⁴⁶⁰ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 50.

Second, the New Testament supports not only the unique character of justifying faith, but also the theological unity of faith and love, because the apostle Paul defines inclusively, not exclusively, the relationship between “faith,” “the confession of faith” (Rom 5:6), “love of God,” (1Cor 8:3), and “faith issuing in love of our neighbor” (Gal 5:6). In this sense “the exhortation to works of love in James 2:14-26 should not be understood as essentially a contradiction of the Pauline interpretation of faith, but as its parenetic complement.⁴⁶¹

Third, the Protestant understanding of faith as unconditional trust in the merciful God, here and in the final judgment, is no longer a problem for contemporary Catholic theology, being supported by the progress made in New Testament exegesis (see § 2.3.2.2.4 above), by advances in systematic theology, and above all by the texts of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁶²

Fourth, when the Reformers talk about justification “through faith,” “they are bringing out the meaning of the scholastic phrase about justification through *gratia gratum faciens* (“sanctifying grace”); inasmuch as in faith a person lays hold of, and receives, God’s mercy:

Similarly, at every mention of faith we are also thinking of its object, the promised mercy.⁴⁶³

And since this faith alone receives the forgiveness of sins, renders us acceptable to God, and brings the Holy Spirit, it should be called *gratia gratum faciens* (grace that makes us acceptable to God) rather than love, which is the effect resulting from it.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 50-51.

⁴⁶² Vatican II: Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* 5; Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis humanae* 10.

⁴⁶³ Apology 4.55.

⁴⁶⁴ Apology 4.116.

Fifth, because faith means that a person is possessed by the Holy Spirit, the Reformers also ascribed to faith the regenerating consequences for human life, which Catholic tradition understands as the specific effects of the love of God, issuing from God's grace.⁴⁶⁵

Sixth, even though Protestant tradition emphasizes justification "through faith alone," yet justifying faith is not mere naked faith. Luther rejected talk about justification on the basis of "faith formed by love" (*fides caritate formata*); but he did so because he was afraid of the view that something humanly ethical could play a decisive part in the salvific process, for it was nominalist doctrine that human beings can love God above everything "simply of their own natural powers" (*ex puris naturalibus*).⁴⁶⁶

If we take all these into account, we can say the following: if we translate from one language to another, then Protestant talk about justification through faith corresponds to Catholic talk about justification through grace; and on the other hand, Protestant doctrine understands substantially under the one word "faith" what Catholic doctrine (following 1 Cor 13:13) sums up in the triad of "faith, hope, and love."⁴⁶⁷ Then in this case the mutual rejections in cans. 9 and 12 of the Decree on Justification and the corresponding condemnations in the first group rejections 1-2 of the Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration III can no longer be applicable today.⁴⁶⁸

The still-existing differences in the two formulas reflect different concerns and emphases of Protestant and Catholic traditions. According to Protestant understanding, "the faith that clings unconditionally to God's promise in Word and Sacrament is

⁴⁶⁵ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 51.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

sufficient for righteousness before God, so that the renewal of the human being, without which there can be no faith, does not in itself make any contribution to justification.”⁴⁶⁹

Catholic doctrine is in agreement with the Protestant concern in emphasizing that “the renewal of the human being does not ‘contribute’ to justification, and is certainly not a contribution to which he could make any appeal before God” (cf. § 2.3.2.2.7 below).⁴⁷⁰

Nevertheless it feels compelled to stress the renewal of the human being through justifying grace, for the sake of acknowledging God’s re-creating power. If we accept this distinction, we can say: “Catholic doctrine does not overlook what Protestant faith finds so important, and vice versa; and Catholic doctrine does not maintain what Protestant doctrine is afraid of, and vice versa.”⁴⁷¹

2.3.2.2.6 Just as in the case of the concept of faith, fatal misunderstandings regarding the *assurance of salvation* made a tenable consensus (or at least a mutual noncondemnation) difficult in the sixteenth century. Here it is clear that different concerns gave rise to misunderstanding.

The Reformers knew well about all the assailments to which faith in the promise of Christ is exposed, and how weak and unreliable human heart is. The question is: How can human beings live before God in spite of their weakness? Cardinal Cajetan, in Augsburg in October 1518, replied to this question as follows: Faith may, and must, be completely certain of the forgiveness of God or certain of the special effect of the sacrament, insofar as this is viewed in terms of the sacrament itself (Lutherans would say: in terms of what is *extra me*, “outside myself”). But looked at from the side of the

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 53.

recipient, a doubt is justified, because that recipient can never be sure whether he has laid himself sufficiently open to the efficacy of the sacrament (in Lutheran terms: whether he has believed fully and completely). The Christian should endure this uncertainty with patience.⁴⁷²

Luther and his followers go a step further. They insist that the uncertainty should not merely be endured. We should avert our eyes from this uncertainty and look at the objective efficacy of the absolution (Christ's word of forgiveness) pronounced in the sacrament of penance, which comes "from outside," regardless of the quality of our own works or even the quality of our repentance and contrition.⁴⁷³

This indicates the true meaning of the Protestant doctrine of the assurance of salvation: because we ourselves can never "subjectively" meet the demands of the divine law, which demands our works, faith should rely on the most objective thing: the Word of God – and this irrespective of the condition of the person who relies on it. It is true that this faith is always exposed to trial and temptation. It is therefore *possible* for a person to doubt. But one is not obliged to doubt, and should not do so. A believer is not merely assured of salvation in the sense of a theological assurance; one may and should be assured of it, in the sense of a confidence and trust. For the person tempted should not look at himself, his sin and his doubt, but he should look to Christ and the fellowship with him, founded on baptism and continually promised anew in repentance.⁴⁷⁴

The Reformers' opponents, however – including Cajetan – interpreted this view to mean that "the assurance of salvation is founded on the believer's conviction, or even on

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

his subjective feelings.”⁴⁷⁵ And the Reformers seemed to them to be actually claiming for this subjective assurance the objective certainty of the church’s creed. Luther, however, explicitly rejected from the very beginning an assurance of faith that had its foundation only in subjective conviction, not in Christ.⁴⁷⁶ The Reformers, on the other hand, understood the rejection of their view to mean that their opponents had a positive interest in keeping believers in a state of uncertainty, and that for these ends they would even imply a doubt in the reliability of Christ’s promises.⁴⁷⁷

People on both sides therefore failed to perceive sufficiently how close to one another they really were. Luther attacked the ‘contritionism’ of Gabriel Biel, who saw complete contrition as the *condition* for absolution, a condition that was therefore bound to leave the Christian in uncertainty, since they can never be sure that they are perfectly contrite.⁴⁷⁸ So in the sixteenth century, mutual condemnations could be pronounced in a number of cases only because the two sides did not listen carefully enough to each other.⁴⁷⁹

When these misunderstandings are cleared, it emerges that what the Council of Trent rejects is precisely what the Reformers were also concerned to avert: “security and self-conceit about one’s own condition and a complacent certainty of being in grace, comforting ‘feelings’ as criterion, moral laxness under appeal to the assurance of salvation, and – even more – security of predestination.”⁴⁸⁰ For its own part, the Council stresses the points which are, for Luther and the Reformers also, the foundation for their

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 54-55.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

own view: “the reliability and sufficiency of God’s promise, and the power of Christ’s death and resurrection; human weakness, and the threat to faith and salvation.”⁴⁸¹

If we accept the biblically renewed concept of faith (see § 2.3.2.2.5 above), a person can certainly lose or renounce faith, and self-commitment to God and his word of promise. But if one believes in this sense, one cannot at the same time believe that God is unreliable in his word of promise. In this sense, it is true that “faith is the assurance of salvation,” as Luther said.⁴⁸²

In view of what has just been said, the condemnations found in cans. 13 to 16 of the Decree on Justification may no longer apply. There are no corresponding condemnations on this point in the Formula of Concord.⁴⁸³

2.3.2.2.7 Finally, the dispute about *merit* also rests largely on a misunderstanding. The Council of Trent asks: How can anyone question the concept of merit, when Jesus himself speaks about “reward” and when it only talks about acts that a Christian performs as member of Christ? The Reformers, on the other hand, ask: How can one call the works that follow from faith “meritorious,” when faith alone justifies, and works remain imperfect and mostly in need of divine forgiveness?⁴⁸⁴

The Reformers are afraid of “self-glorification of human beings in their works.”⁴⁸⁵ But the Council excludes the possibility of earning grace or justification (can. 2) and “bases the earning or merit of eternal life on the gift of grace itself, through membership

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.; cf. Decree on Justification, cap. 9, 12.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

in Christ (can. 32).”⁴⁸⁶ Good works are “merits” as a gift. The Reformers attack “Godless trust” in one’s own works, but the Council explicitly excludes “any notion of a claim or any false security” (cap. 16). The Council evidently wishes to establish a link with Augustine, who introduced the concept of merit, in order to express the human responsibility, in spite of the “bestowed” character of good works.⁴⁸⁷

So when the Council defends the concept of merit as a way of expressing human responsibility, while “Protestant theology rejects it as a practical, ethical idea,” the two sides are not saying yes and no to the same thing. For even without the concept of merit, the Reformers uphold the responsibility of human beings just as firmly as Trent. Conversely, the Council of Trent is against any trend in theology and spirituality which would encourage the Christian to see his works again as an achievement which he himself has to produce, and from which claims on God can be derived. In substance, therefore, the Council could have agreed to Luther’s assertion: “The sons do not merit the kingdom but the kingdom merits the sons.”⁴⁸⁸

Yet Catholic theology must explicitly concede that the term “merit” has often been used in an unbiblical way in theology and spirituality. The Reformers rightly criticized the thinking in terms of “claim,” which were associated with the concept of merit and the practice of reparation or “satisfaction.”⁴⁸⁹ Not least because of this criticism, Catholic theology, religious instruction, and above all, the official documents of the church now make only a restrained use of the concept of merit and express the

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. The word “satisfaction” (*satisfactio* in Latin, which means “making amends” or “reparation”) was used by Anselm of Canterbury in *Cur Deus homo* (1098), for his satisfaction theory of the atonement of the death of Christ. In Roman Catholic theology, the sacrament of reconciliation (penance) allows sinners to make satisfaction for sin through contrition, confession, act of penance, and absolution.

concept in another way. Conversely, Protestant theology also stresses the importance of good works, since God commanded us to exercise faith and because such works are a testimony and thanksgiving (Apology 4, 189). These works “do not make us sons, but they do make us better sons.”⁴⁹⁰

Many misunderstandings could be avoided if the misleading word “merit” were viewed as the biblical term “wage” or reward (cf. Matt 5:12; 20:1-16; John 4:36; 1 Cor 3:8, 14; Col 3:24). There are strong indications, however, that Catholic liturgy preferred to use the word “merit” rather than the term “reward” because “merit” sounds less “materialistic” than “reward.”⁴⁹¹

We may therefore arrive at the conclusion that, after all these clarifications, the relevant condemnatory pronouncements no longer apply to our partner today – that is, the pronouncements found in cans. 2, 24, and 32 of the Decree on Justification and those in the Formula of Concord.⁴⁹²

2.3.2.3 A summing up

The progress made through the ecumenical conversations and reexamination of the traditional antitheses and condemnations is summed up as follows:

First, concerning the interpretation of justification, the mutual condemnations in the sixteenth century no longer apply to our partner today in any sense that could divide the church. Historical investigation into the dispute of the time shows that in many individual points the “rejections did not, even at that time, meet the target of the

⁴⁹⁰ cf. Heidelberg Catechism 86.

⁴⁹¹ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 67.

⁴⁹² Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration IV.3.

opponent's real intention in what he said."⁴⁹³ As a result of listening self-critically to each other, today each understands better what the other means, and both partners have learned that we must express ourselves carefully in such a way that the other side does not misunderstand, but even respect our particular "concerns," though the other side may not adopt our particular way of thinking and speaking.

Second, the ending of the rejections does not mean that there are no longer any differences in interpreting justification or that the differences are confined to mere misunderstandings or different modes of expression. There continues to be differences (cf. §§ 2.3.2.2.4, 5, 7 above). But the remaining differences are not such that they would decide about the true and false church. "At the same time, they do certainly present us with theological tasks which have to be taken seriously and pursued further."⁴⁹⁴

Third, the experiences of history, and especially Reformation history, teach us that there really can be an interpretation of the doctrine of justification on which the unity of the church will founder, as it did in the sixteenth century. For this reason, the doctrine of justification, especially its biblical foundation, will always retain a special function in the church. The doctrine continually reminds Christians that "we sinners live solely from the forgiving love of God, which we merely allow to be bestowed on us," but which we in no way "earn" or "are able to tie down to any preconditions or postconditions."⁴⁹⁵ The doctrine of justification therefore is "the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name 'Christian.'" At

⁴⁹³ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 68.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 69.

the same time, it becomes “the touchstone for the church, for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord.”⁴⁹⁶

2.3.3 Summary and Evaluation

The Ecumenical Study Group discusses the differences between the Catholic and Protestant (especially Lutheran) theologies of justification. The final report recognizes the differences between the two traditions in the structure of their thinking and the mode of expression. What the study group found is this: a series of condemnations rest on misunderstandings about the opposing position; others no longer apply to the doctrine and praxis of today’s partner; in still other cases, new insights have led to a large degree of agreement; while in some other cases, it cannot be said that there is as yet any agreement at the present day.⁴⁹⁷

The study group concludes that the condemnations and rejections that were pronounced against each other in the sixteenth century no longer apply to today’s partner. The study claims that neither the remaining denominational differences in the understanding of the doctrine of justification offer sufficient reasons for the church’s division.

The final report caused a lively controversy, especially among the German Protestants.⁴⁹⁸ Lane comments: “. . . the argument is impressive when each individual point is considered but if one steps back and reads all thirty-three canons it becomes less

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 179-80.

⁴⁹⁸ For a discussion of this statement, see W. G. Rusch, “Should Catholics and Lutherans Continue to Condemn One Another?” *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996), 282-91, especially notes 7ff. Also read Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London and New York: T&T Clark), 101-07.

credible.”⁴⁹⁹ In contrast, reaction among the Roman Catholics was muted. Ultimately the Catholic response to this report came in the form of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, in October 1999. The widespread reservations about this report on the sixteenth-century condemnations are well expressed by Avery Dulles:

One of the most precious things we have in common may be our conviction that pure doctrine is crucially important and that ecclesial unity should not be purchased at the expense of truth. I sincerely hope that we can continue to learn from one another, appropriate one another’s insights, and correct one another’s oversights. By prematurely declaring the process already accomplished, we could easily drift into a false complacency.⁵⁰⁰

The study’s main purpose was to lessen the tension that originates from the mutual condemnations in the sixteenth century and that still exists between the churches concerning the understanding of justification and other theological issues. The final report, however, does not claim that there no longer exist significant differences between the two sides. In fact, there still exist fundamental differences between the churches in understanding the doctrine of justification, which will be the subject of the discussion in the next chapter of this dissertation. Then the final chapter seeks to resolve some of the most important differences that still exist between the Protestant and Catholic understanding of the doctrine of justification, in the hope of bringing the two sides even closer together in their understanding of this very important Christian doctrine.

2.4 Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification⁵⁰¹

In October 1999, officials of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed in Augsburg, Germany, the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of

⁴⁹⁹ Lane, 106.

⁵⁰⁰ Avery Dulles, “On Lifting the Condemnations,” *Dialogue* 35 (1996), 220.

⁵⁰¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. English-Language Edition (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000).

Justification” and an “Official Common Statement” with its “Annex,” declaring publicly that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Catholics and Lutherans. They also declared that the remaining differences in the understanding of justification were not of a church-dividing nature.

The result of decades of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, this document, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (hereafter *Joint Declaration, JD*, or *Declaration*), represents an ecumenical event of historical significance. The *Joint Declaration* recommends Christians careful study and continued ecumenical reflection on “the biblical message of justification and its meaning for the churches, for the life of individual persons, and for human society.”⁵⁰²

2.4.1 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

After a preamble, the *Joint Declaration* gives a summary of the biblical message of justification, followed by the ecumenical significance of the doctrine and a statement of the common understanding of justification. In the fourth section, seven points of the common understanding of the doctrine are explained. The next section lists the supporting documents on which the *Declaration* is based. As stated in the preamble, the *Joint Declaration* covers those areas of common accord; however, it does not describe all that either the Lutheran or the Roman Catholic churches hold as their doctrines of justification.

In the preamble, the *Joint Declaration* notes that the doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century, and that it

⁵⁰² Ibid., 6.

was held to be the “first and chief article”⁵⁰³ and the “ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines.”⁵⁰⁴ It says that the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, which were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church’s Council of Trent, have been still valid and thus have had a “church-dividing effect.”⁵⁰⁵ However, as a result of the dialogues on justification, the Roman Catholic Church and the subscribing Lutheran churches are now able to present a “common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.”⁵⁰⁶ The *Joint Declaration* “does not cover all that either church teaches about justification” but it “does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”⁵⁰⁷ The preamble declares that the *Joint Declaration* is not a new, independent document but it depends on the results of decades of dialogues on justification and on their arguments.⁵⁰⁸

2.4.1.1 Biblical message of justification

The common listening to the word of God in Scripture has led to new insights. Together we hear the gospel that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). This good news is set forth in diverse ways in the Old and the New Testament books. In Paul’s letters, “the gift of salvation is described in various ways: “for freedom Christ has

⁵⁰³ The Smalcald Articles, II.1; Book of Concord, 292.

⁵⁰⁴ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kristische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, Germany: H. Böhlau, 1883-1983), 39, I, 205.

⁵⁰⁵ *JD* no. 1.

⁵⁰⁶ *JD* no. 5.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *JD* no. 6.

set us free” (Gal 5:1-13; cf. Rom 6:7), “reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18-21; cf. Rom 5:11), “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11, 23), and “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (cf. 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 2 Cor 1:1). “Chief among these is the ‘justification’ of sinful human beings by God’s grace through faith (Rom 3:23-25),” which became prominent in the Reformation period.⁵⁰⁹

Paul presents the gospel as the power of God for salvation of the sinners, as the message that reveals “the righteousness of God” (Rom 1:16) and that grants “justification” (Rom 3:21-31). He proclaims Christ as “our righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30), “applying to the risen Lord what Jeremiah proclaimed about God himself (Jer 23:6).”⁵¹⁰ As Rom 4:25 says: “our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification,” our salvation is rooted in Christ’s death and resurrection. In Gal 3:6 and Rom 4:3-9, Paul understands Abraham’s faith (Gen 15:6) as faith in God who justifies the sinner (Rom 4:5) and claims that “this righteousness will be reckoned to all who, like Abraham, trust in God’s promise,” for “the righteous will live by faith” (Hab 2:4; cf. Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17). In Christ, God makes his righteousness ours (2 Cor 5:21) and his justification becomes ours through Christ, “whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (Rom 3:25; see 3:21-28).⁵¹¹

Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom 3:23-25; Acts 13:39; Luke 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3:10-14). It is acceptance into communion with God – already now, but then fully in God’s coming kingdom (Rom 5:1f). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5). It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and

⁵⁰⁹ *JD* no. 9.

⁵¹⁰ *JD* no. 10.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

incorporation into the one body (Rom 8:1f, 9f; 1 Cor 12:12f). All this is from God alone, for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith in "the gospel of God's Son" (Rom 1:1-3).⁵¹²

The justified live by faith that comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and is active through love (Gal 5:6), which is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22f). But because the justified are attacked from within by desires and from without by powers (Rom 8:35-39; Gal 5:16-21) and fall into sin (1 John 1:8, 10), they must constantly hear God's promises anew, confess their sins (1 John 1:9), participate in Christ's body and blood, and be exhorted to live righteously in accord with God's will. That is why Paul warns the justified: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12f). But the good news remains: "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), and in whom Christ lives (Gal 2:20). Christ's "act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (Rom 5:18).⁵¹³

2.4.1.2 The doctrine of Justification as ecumenical problem

The *Joint Declaration* explains why the doctrine of justification is an ecumenical problem:

Opposing interpretation and application of the biblical message of justification were a principal cause of the division of the Western church in the sixteenth century and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² *JD* no. 11.

⁵¹³ *JD* no. 12.

⁵¹⁴ *JD* no.13.

By employing insights from recent biblical studies and modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a remarkable convergence regarding justification, resulting in this *Joint Declaration* with a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. The document declares: “In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today’s partner.”⁵¹⁵

2.4.1.3 The common understanding of justification

The common listening to the Scripture and recent theological conversation have led the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches to a shared understanding of justification, including a consensus in the basic truths (*JD* no. 14). They say that the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with the following common understanding of justification:

(1) “In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. . . . The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ,” who was sent by the Father into the world to save sinners. Justification thus means that “Christ himself is our righteousness in which we share through the Holy Spirit.” Therefore we confess together: “By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ *JD* no. 15.

(2) “Through Christ alone are we justified,” when we receive in faith this salvation in Christ. Faith itself is God’s gift through the Holy Spirit, “who works through Word and Sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which will bring to completion in eternal life.”⁵¹⁷

(3) The message of justification directs us in a special way toward the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ: “because we are sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.”⁵¹⁸

(4) Therefore, the doctrine of justification is more than one Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith. It is “an indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ.” When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion, they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. When Catholics talk of “several criteria,” they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. Lutherans and Catholics confess together that Christ alone is “to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5f).”⁵¹⁹

2.4.1.4 Explicating the common understanding of justification

2.4.1.4.1 Human powerlessness and sin in relation to justification

“We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation,” for as sinners “they stand under God’s judgment and are

⁵¹⁷ *JD* no. 16.

⁵¹⁸ *JD* no. 17.

⁵¹⁹ *JD* no. 18.

incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities.”⁵²⁰

When Catholics say that “persons ‘cooperate’ in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God’s justifying action,” they see such personal consent “as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.”⁵²¹

When Lutherans teach that humans are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, they want to exclude any possibility of a person’s contributing to one’s own justification, but “do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God’s Word.”⁵²²

2.4.1.4.2 Justification as forgiveness of sins and making righteous

“We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ.” When people come by faith to share in Christ, “God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love.” These two aspects of God’s gracious action – both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself – are not to be separated.⁵²³

When Lutherans emphasize that “the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness,” they want to insist that “the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness and that only in union with Christ is one’s life renewed.” When Lutherans stress that God’s grace is forgiving love, they do not

⁵²⁰ *JD* no. 19.

⁵²¹ *JD* no. 20.

⁵²² *JD* no. 21.

⁵²³ *JD* no. 22.

thereby deny the renewal of the Christian's life. "They intend rather to express that justification remains free from human cooperation and is not dependent on the life-renewing effects of grace in human beings."⁵²⁴

When Catholics emphasize the "renewal of the interior person through the reception of grace imparted as a gift to the believer," they wish to insist that "God's forgiving grace always brings with it a gift of new life, which in the Holy Spirit becomes effective in active love." They do not thereby deny that "God's gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation."⁵²⁵

2.4.1.4.3 Justification by faith and through grace

"We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ." They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. "Such a faith is active in love, and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it."⁵²⁶

According to Lutheran understanding, God justifies sinners in "faith alone (*sola fide*)." And "God himself effects faith as he brings forth such trust by his creative word," which affects all dimensions of the person and "leads to a life in hope and love." In the Lutheran doctrine of "justification by faith," a distinction but not a separation is made

⁵²⁴ *JD* no. 23.

⁵²⁵ *JD* no. 24.

⁵²⁶ *JD* no. 25.

between justification itself and “the renewal of one’s way of life that necessarily follows from justification and without which faith does not exist.”⁵²⁷

The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. “For without faith, no justification can take place.” People are justified through baptism when they hear and believe in the word. “The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace.” In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him. “This new personal relation to God is grounded totally in God’s graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God.” Thus “justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God.” While Catholics emphasize the renewal of life by justifying grace, “this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent on God’s unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification about which one could boast before God (Rom 3:27).”⁵²⁸

2.4.1.4.4 *The justified as sinner*

“We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.” But the righteous must always look to “God’s unconditional justifying grace,” for they are continuously exposed to the power of sin and are not exempt from “a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God.” The justified also must ask for God’s forgiveness daily as in the Lord’s Prayer.⁵²⁹

Lutherans understand this condition of a Christian as being “at the same time righteous and sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Believers are totally righteous, in that

⁵²⁷ *JD* no. 26.

⁵²⁸ *JD* no. 27.

⁵²⁹ *JD* no. 28.

God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament and grants the righteousness of Christ, which they appropriate in faith. “Looking at themselves through the law, however, they realize that they remain totally sinners. Sin still lives in them (1 John 1:8; Rom 7:17, 20). “This contradiction to God is as such truly sin.” Nevertheless, it no longer is a sin that “rules” the Christian, for it is itself “ruled” by Christ with whom the justified are bound in faith. Despite sin, the Christian is no longer separated from God because this sin is forgiven when the person daily returns to baptism. Thus “this sin no longer brings damnation and eternal death.” Thus, when Lutherans say that justified persons are also sinners and that their opposition to God is truly sin, “they do not deny that, despite this sin, they are not separated from God and that this sin is a ‘ruled’ sin.” Therefore, in these affirmations, they are “in agreement with Roman Catholics, despite the difference in understanding sin in the justified.”⁵³⁰

Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin “in the proper sense” and that is “worthy of damnation” (Rom 8:1). There remains, however, in the person “an inclination (concupiscence) that comes from sin and presses toward sin.” Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense. They do not thereby deny that this inclination “is objectively in contradiction to God and remains one’s enemy in lifelong struggle.” However, according to Catholic understanding, this inclination in contradiction to God “does not merit the punishment of eternal death and does not separate the justified person from God.”⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ *JD* no. 29.

⁵³¹ *JD* no. 30.

2.4.1.4.5 Law and gospel

“We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the gospel ‘apart from works prescribed by the law’ (Rom 3:28).” For Christ has fulfilled the law and “by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation.” “We also confess that God’s commandments retain their validity for the justified and that Christ has by his teaching and example expressed God’s will, which is a standard for the conduct of the justified also.”⁵³²

Lutherans emphasize that “the distinction and right ordering of law and gospel are essential for the understanding of justification.” All persons stand under the accusation of the law which uncovers their sin (the “convicting function of the law”)⁵³³ so that, in faith, in the gospel, they will turn unreservedly to the mercy of God in Christ, which alone justifies them.⁵³⁴ When Catholics stress that the righteous are bound to observe God’s commandments, they do not thereby deny that through Jesus Christ God has “mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life.”⁵³⁵

2.4.1.4.6 Assurance of salvation

“We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God.” In spite of their own weakness and the many threats to their faith, they can depend on the strength of Christ’s death and resurrection and trust “the effective promise of God,” and so be sure of this grace.⁵³⁶ This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: “in the midst of temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look

⁵³² *JD* no. 31.

⁵³³ This function of law is important to Lutheran thinking.

⁵³⁴ *JD* no. 32.

⁵³⁵ *JD* no. 33.

⁵³⁶ *JD* no. 34.

solely to Christ and trust only him.” For “[in] trust in God’s promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.”⁵³⁷

Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to “ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise,” and to “look away from one’s own experience.” No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit. “Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation.”⁵³⁸

2.4.1.4.7 The good works of the justified

“We confess together that good works – a Christian life lived in faith, hope, and love – follow justification and are its fruits. When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in biblical terms, good fruit.” This “consequence of justification” is also “an obligation they must fulfill,” as Jesus and the Scripture admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love.⁵³⁹

According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and working of the Holy Spirit, “contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened.” When Catholics affirm the “meritorious” character of good works, they wish to say that, “according to biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works.” Their intention is “to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.”⁵⁴⁰ Lutherans also hold the concept of preservation of grace and a growth in

⁵³⁷ *JD* no. 35.

⁵³⁸ *JD* no. 36.

⁵³⁹ *JD* no. 37.

⁵⁴⁰ *JD* no. 38.

grace and faith. They emphasize that “righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete.” But they state that “the effect of righteousness” can grow in Christian living. Lutherans view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one’s own “merits,” but they also “understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited ‘reward’ in the sense of the fulfillment of God’s promise to the believer.”⁵⁴¹

2.4.1.5 The significance and scope of the consensus reached

The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in the *Declaration* shows that “a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics.” In light of this consensus “the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paras. 18 to 39 are acceptable.” Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference “open to one another” and “do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths.”⁵⁴²

Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, insofar as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: “The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this *Declaration* does not fall under the condemnations of the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this *Declaration*.”⁵⁴³ The

⁵⁴¹ *JD* no. 39.

⁵⁴² *JD* no. 40.

⁵⁴³ *JD* no. 41.

condemnations of the sixteenth century, however, remain for us “salutary warnings’ to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.”⁵⁴⁴

“Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. . . . The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification and to make it bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches.”⁵⁴⁵ They give thanks to the Lord “for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church.”⁵⁴⁶ Then, in the next section, they list the supporting documents on which the *Joint Declaration* and its formulations are based.⁵⁴⁷

2.4.2 Official Common Statement⁵⁴⁸

(1) On the basis of the agreements reached in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD)*, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: “The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this *Declaration* shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics” (*JD* no. 40). On the basis of this consensus the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: “The teaching of the Lutheran Churches presented in this *Declaration* does not fall under the condemnations of the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this *Declaration*” (*JD* no. 41).

⁵⁴⁴ *JD* no. 42.

⁵⁴⁵ *JD* no. 43.

⁵⁴⁶ *JD* no. 44.

⁵⁴⁷ See *JD*, 27-39, which is omitted here.

⁵⁴⁸ The Official Common Statement is quoted here word for word.

(2) With reference to the resolution on the Joint Declaration by the Council of the Lutheran World Federation of 16 June 1998 and the response to the Joint Declaration by the Catholic Church of 25 June 1998 and to the questions raised by both of them, the annexed statement (called “Annex”) further substantiates the consensus reached in the *Joint Declaration*; thus it becomes clear that the earlier mutual doctrinal condemnations do not apply to the teaching of the dialogue partners as presented in the *Joint Declaration*.

(3) The two partners in dialogue are committed to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification. They will also seek further common understanding of the doctrine of justification, also beyond what is dealt with in the *Joint Declaration* and the annexed substantiating statement. Based on the consensus reached, continued dialogue is required specifically on the issues mentioned especially in the *Joint Declaration* itself (*JD* no. 43) as requiring further clarification in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be “reconciled” and no longer have a divisive force. Lutherans and Catholics will continue their efforts ecumenically in their common witness to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, and with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times.

By this act of signing The Catholic Church and The Lutheran World Federation confirm the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in its entirety.

2.4.3 Annex to the Official Common Statement⁵⁴⁹

The following elucidations underline the consensus reached in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD)* regarding basic truths of justification; thus it becomes clear that the mutual condemnations of former times do not apply to the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification as they are presented in the *Joint Declaration*.

“Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works” (*JD* no. 15).

(A) “We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power . . .” (*JD* no. 22). Justification is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous, through which God “imparts the gift of new life in Christ” (*JD* no. 22). “Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1). . . . We are truly and inwardly renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, remaining always dependent on his work in us. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17). The justified do not remain sinners in this sense.

Yet we would be wrong were we to say that we are without sin (1 John 1:8-10; cf. *JD* no. 28). “(A)ll of us make many mistakes” (Jas 3:2). “Who is aware of his unwitting sins? Cleanse me of many secret faults” (Ps 19:12). And when we pray, we can only say, like the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”

⁵⁴⁹ Here again, except for some omissions and elaboration of some references, the Annex is quoted word for word.

(Luke 18:13). This is expressed in a variety of ways in our liturgies. Together we hear the exhortation “Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (Rom 6:12). This recalls to us the persisting danger that comes from the power of sin and its action in Christians. To this extent, Lutherans and Catholics can together understand the Christian as *simul [i]ustus et peccator*, despite their different approaches to this subject as expressed in *JD* nos. 29-30.

(B) The concept of “concupiscence” is used in different senses on the Catholic and Lutheran sides. In the Lutheran Confessional writings, “concupiscence” is understood as the self-seeking desire of the human being, which in light of the law, spiritually understood, is regarded as sin. In the Catholic understanding concupiscence is an inclination, remaining in human beings even after baptism, which comes from sin and presses toward sin. Despite the differences involved here, it can be recognized from a Lutheran perspective that desire can become the opening through which sin attacks. Due to the power of sin the entire human being carries the tendency to oppose God. This tendency, according to both the Lutheran and the Catholic conception, “does not correspond to God’s original design for humanity” (*JD* no. 30). Sin has a personal character and, as such, leads to separation from God. It is the selfish desire of the old person and the lack of trust and love toward God.

The reality of salvation in baptism and the peril from the power of sin can be expressed in such a way that, on the one hand, the forgiveness of sins and renewal of humanity in Christ by baptism are emphasized and, on the other hand,

it can be seen that the justified also “are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom 6:12-14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God . . .” (*JD* no. 28).

(C) Justification takes place “by grace alone” (*JD* nos. 15 and 16), by faith alone; the person is justified “apart from works” (Rom 3:28; cf. *JD* no.25). “Grace creates faith not only when faith begins in a person but as long as faith lasts” (Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II/II 4, 4 ad 3). The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. Phil 2:12ff). “As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit . . .” (The Formula of Concord Solid Declaration [hereafter FC SD] II, 64f; BSLK 897,37ff).⁵⁵⁰

(D) Grace as fellowship of the justified with God in faith, hope, and love is always received from the salvific and creative work of God (cf. *JD* no. 27). But it is nevertheless the responsibility of the justified not to waste this grace but to live in it. The exhortation to do good works is the exhortation to practice the faith (cf. BSLK 197,45). The good works of the justified “should be done in order to confirm their call, that is, lest they fall from their call by sinning again” (Apology, XX, 13; BSLK 316,18-24; with reference to Pet 1:10. Cf. also FC SD IV, 33; BSLK 948,9-23). In this sense Lutherans and Catholics can understand together what is said about the “preservation of grace” in *JD* nos. 38 and 39. Certainly,

⁵⁵⁰ BSLK is an abbreviation for *Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*.

“whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it” (*JD* no. 25).

(E) By justification we are unconditionally brought into communion with God. This includes the promise of eternal life; “(I)f we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5; cf. John 3:36; Rom 8:17). In the final judgment, the justified will be judged also on their works (cf. Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom 2:16; 14:12; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 5:10, etc.). . . . The Formula of Concord also states: “It is God’s will and express command that believers should do good works, which the Holy Spirit works in them, and God is willing to be pleased with them for Christ’s sake and he promises to reward gloriously in this and in the future life” (FC SD IV, 38). Any reward is a reward of grace, on which we have no claim.

The doctrine of justification is that measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion. In this sense, the doctrine of justification is an “indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ” (*JD* no. 18). . . . We “share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts” (*JD* no. 18).

The Response of the Catholic Church does not intend to put in question the authority of Lutheran Synods or of the Lutheran World Federation. The Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation began the dialogue and have taken it forward as

partners with equal rights (*par cum pari*). Notwithstanding different conceptions of authority in the church, each partner respects the other partner's ordered process of reaching doctrinal decisions.

2.4.4 Summary and Evaluation

The result of decades of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, this document, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, represents an ecumenical event of historical significance. The "Official Common Statement" declares that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Catholics and Lutherans, and that the remaining differences in the understanding of justification are not of a church-dividing nature. It also declares that "in light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner,"⁵⁵¹ even though the condemnations of the sixteenth century remain for us as "salutary warnings" to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.⁵⁵²

The document gives a summary of the biblical message of justification and a statement of the common understanding. "The Official Common Understanding of the Doctrine of Justification"⁵⁵³ declares: "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works."⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ *JD* no. 13

⁵⁵² *JD* no. 42.

⁵⁵³ *JD* nos. 14-18.

⁵⁵⁴ *JD* no. 15.

The bulk of the document explicates “The Official Common Understanding of the Doctrine of Justification,” focusing on seven issues, followed by the list of the supporting documents on which the declaration was based. The document also explains the significance of the doctrine of justification:

The doctrine of justification is that measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion. In this sense, the doctrine of justification is an ‘indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ’ (JD no. 18).⁵⁵⁵

The *Joint Declaration* has met a mixed reception by both sides. There was “fierce public debates” in Germany.⁵⁵⁶ In response to the questions raised by both Catholic and Lutheran theologians and in order to accommodate their objections and reluctance, the *Joint Declaration* added the “Annex to the Official Common Statement” at the end of the document. Only after adding the “Annex,” the reluctant parties agreed to accept the *Joint Declaration*. The “Annex” offers clarification on some issues, but it does not seem to answer all the questions satisfactorily.⁵⁵⁷

Lane comments on the significance of this document: “It goes beyond the earlier documents in that it has been solemnly ratified by both churches at the highest level.”⁵⁵⁸ He adds: “So while the *Joint Declaration* is uniquely significant because of the status accorded to it, it is not the most satisfactory document from the point of view of teasing

⁵⁵⁵ *Joint Declaration*, 46-47.

⁵⁵⁶ Lane, 121-23; also see notes 88-96.

⁵⁵⁷ For example, the *Joint Declaration* says in Annex 2D, “Certainly, ‘whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it’ (JD no.25).” But a little later in 2E it states, “In the final judgment, the justified will be judged also on their works (cf. Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom 2:16; 14:12; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 5:10, etc.).” So the Annex tries to accommodate both sides but does not seem to answer the controversial question.

⁵⁵⁸ Lane, 123.

out the real points of difference. For that purpose *Justification by Faith* remains unsurpassed.”⁵⁵⁹

Objections and questions to the *Joint Declaration* reflect the difficulty of harmonizing the two, sometimes fundamentally different, teachings of the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification. The next chapter will discuss some of the important issues of the doctrine of justification that still need to be resolved.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 125-26.

CHAPTER THREE

Importance of the Doctrine of Justification and Problems Still to Be Worked Out

3.1 Importance of the Doctrine of Justification

The doctrine of justification deals with what God has done for humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how it can be actualized in the believers. Hence this doctrine points to the central theme of the Scripture. The importance of the doctrine of justification is well attested in the Scripture and in the historical events that have greatly affected the Christian church since the Pelagian controversy. The *Joint Declaration* notes that the doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century and that it was held by Lutherans to be the “first and chief article”⁵⁶⁰ on which the church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*).⁵⁶¹

For the Reformers, the doctrine of justification by faith was the center of the Christian faith and the foundation of their reform. The doctrine of justification was for them a call to proclaim the gospel of grace and restore to the church the theological basis of the church’s mission to the world. For the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of justification has retained its special status. In our day this doctrine remains to be essential to the life of the church and the believers, and consequently it has been central to the contemporary dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches.

In the following sections, the importance of the doctrine will be discussed in three perspectives: (1) justification as the central theme of Christian theology; (2) the doctrine

⁵⁶⁰ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. English-Language Edition (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000) (hereafter *JD*) no. 1.

⁵⁶¹ George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), § 28.

of justification as an ecumenical issue; (3) the doctrine of justification as a criterion of authenticity for church doctrines and practices.

3.1.1 Justification as the central theme of Christian theology

Israelite history is a salvation history. One of the main themes of the Old Testament is the sinfulness of the human beings; even the Israelites, the chosen people of God, failed to observe the law. However, God proclaims a new covenant and promises the sinful humanity the Messiah, who will come to restore the relationship between God and the humanity and fulfill the promise of God.

The purpose of Christ's coming to this world is therefore to save the humanity from the dilemma of sin, as Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man came to seek and save the lost,"⁵⁶² and in John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." Thus soteriology – whether it is expressed by "justification by faith" (Rom 3:28, 5:1) or "salvation by grace" (Eph 2:5) – can be said to be the center of the Christian theology. The doctrine of justification answers the ultimate human question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17; cf. Matt 19:16; Luke 18:18). The importance of the doctrine of justification lies in that it tries to answer the critical question of how one can appropriate the saving grace of God in Christ and inherit eternal

⁵⁶² Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV), unless specified otherwise.

life, which is the ultimate goal of all Christians. The subject and content of the doctrine of justification is none other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶³

It is righteousness/justification that emerges in the New Testament as an image and concept of prime importance, and in Romans as the central image for expressing what God has done in Christ and hence for representing the gospel. And it is Paul among biblical authors who most fully and carefully discussed “righteousness” and “faith” and who, in the light of his understanding of these terms, thought of justification as “by grace” and “through faith.” A faith-centered and forensically conceived picture of justification is of major importance for Paul and, in a sense, for the Bible as a whole, although it is not the only biblical or Pauline way of representing God’s saving work.⁵⁶⁴

It is true historically that the doctrine of justification has not always been regarded as the center of theological speculation. However, the church continually proclaims the centrality of the soteriological dimension of Christianity, and the community of faith is understood to be based on a soteriological foundation.⁵⁶⁵ Hence the priority of the soteriological dimension of Christianity can hardly be denied. The U.S. *Common Statement* declares that “the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is the source and center of all Christian life and of the existence and work of the church,” and the gospel of God’s saving mercy in Jesus Christ needs to be proclaimed together in one, undivided voice.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds., *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* trans. Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 36.

⁵⁶⁴ Anderson, § 146.

⁵⁶⁵ Alister E. McGrath’s *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian doctrine of Justification*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 397.

⁵⁶⁶ Anderson, § 4.

3.1.2 The doctrine of justification as an ecumenical issue

Both Catholics and Lutherans recognize “the urgent need for improved ecumenical cooperation with regard to Sunday services, eucharistic fellowship, and mixed marriages,” but they realized that these burning practical issues of pastoral importance could not be addressed without first solving fundamental theological questions involved.⁵⁶⁷ For the mutual condemnations, rejections, and differing doctrines that were pronounced in the sixteenth century stand in the way to full mutual recognition and communion.

The doctrine of justification was the fundamental difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation that divided the Western church in the sixteenth century. Every agreement therefore will stand on a shaky ground unless it is supported by a genuine consensus about the doctrine of justification.⁵⁶⁸ The reexamination of the doctrine of justification is therefore an urgent task for the churches on their way to ecumenical rapprochement.

The *Joint Declaration* explains why the doctrine of justification is an ecumenical problem:

Opposing interpretation and application of the biblical message of justification were a principal cause of the division of the Western church in the sixteenth century and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division.⁵⁶⁹

The *Joint Declaration* claims that the Roman Catholic Church and the subscribing Lutheran churches are now able to present a “common understanding of our justification

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵⁶⁸ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 36.

⁵⁶⁹ *JD* no.13.

by God’s grace through faith in Christ,” as a result of the dialogues on justification,⁵⁷⁰ On the basis of the agreements reached in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together that the teachings of the Lutheran Churches and of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this *Declaration* do not fall under the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷¹ This declaration represents an approval of the Ecumenical Study Group’s earlier conclusion that the condemnations and rejections that were pronounced against each other in the sixteenth century no longer apply to today’s partner and that neither the remaining denominational differences in the understanding of the doctrine of justification offer sufficient reasons for the church’s division (see § 2.3.2.2 and § 2.3.2.3).

However, the *Joint Declaration* “does not cover all that either church teaches about justification” and also has “remaining differences in its explication,” as noted in the preamble of the *Joint Declaration*.⁵⁷² Therefore the *Joint Declaration* mentions the need of seeking further common understanding of the doctrine of justification in order to resolve the “remaining differences” and “to reach full church communion.”⁵⁷³ Besides, as Lane comments, “while the *Joint Declaration* is uniquely significant because of the status accorded to it, it is not the most satisfactory document from the point of view of teasing out the real points of difference.”⁵⁷⁴ Objections and questions to the *Joint Declaration* reflect the difficulty of harmonizing the two, sometimes fundamentally different, teachings of the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification.

⁵⁷⁰ *JD* no. 5.

⁵⁷¹ *JD* no. 41.

⁵⁷² *JD* no. 5.

⁵⁷³ *JD*, 42; see § 2.4.2 of this dissertation.

⁵⁷⁴ Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 125-26.

The doctrine of justification was at the heart of the divisions in the sixteenth century and still calls for a greater clarity in understanding than has yet been achieved in official discussions. The experiences of history, and especially Reformation history, teach us that there really can be an interpretation of the doctrine of justification on which the unity of the church will founder, as it did in the sixteenth century; for this reason, the doctrine of justification, especially its biblical foundation, “will always retain a special function in the church.”⁵⁷⁵

3.1.3 The doctrine of justification as a criterion for church doctrines and practices

Catholics as well as Lutherans can acknowledge the need to test the practices, structures, and theologies of the church by the extent to which they help or hinder “the proclamation of God’s free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith.”⁵⁷⁶ As noted in the *Joint Declaration*, the message of justification directs us in a special way toward the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ. Therefore, the doctrine of justification is more than one Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith. It is “an indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ.”⁵⁷⁷

The doctrine of justification has an important implication in many church doctrines and practices. The Reformation emphasis on justification “apart from works of law” was a challenge not simply to trends in theology but also to religious practices of the time. One of the main problems which occasioned the Reformers’ appeal to St. Paul’s

⁵⁷⁵ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 69.

⁵⁷⁶ Anderson, § 28.

⁵⁷⁷ *JD* no. 18.

teaching that human beings are “justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28) were, from their point of view, rampant Pelagianism or “works-righteousness” in the sixteenth century: “Salvation was viewed widely as something to be earned by good works,” which included not only fulfillment of “the moral law” and the various “penitential disciplines and ecclesiastical rules and regulations” but also paying money for Masses and indulgences to obtain “the remission of purgatorial penalties.”⁵⁷⁸

The Lutheran movement, founded at a time when corruption was rampant, was legitimately concerned to find a critical principle by which to check what is authentically Christian.⁵⁷⁹ The principle of justification by faith emphasizes “the sole mediatorship of Christ.”⁵⁸⁰ The doctrine of justification is therefore “the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name ‘Christian’” and “the touchstone for the church, for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord.”⁵⁸¹

In the sixteenth century the doctrine of justification was held by the Lutheran Reformers to be the “first and chief article”⁵⁸² and the “ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines.”⁵⁸³ Luther later said, “If this article stands, the church stands; if it falls, the church falls.”⁵⁸⁴ To see justification by faith in this fashion is, for Reformers, to treat it as “a criterion or corrective for all church practices, structures, and theology.”⁵⁸⁵ They regarded it as the heart of the gospel because the gospel message is the

⁵⁷⁸ Anderson, § 22.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, § 117.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸² The Smalcald Articles, II.1; Book of Concord, 292.

⁵⁸³ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, Germany: H. Böhlau, 1883-1983), 39, I, 205.

⁵⁸⁴ This phrase is found in Luther’s exposition of Ps 130:4; see *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 40, III, 351 and 352.

⁵⁸⁵ Anderson, § 28.

proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be received only through faith: "All aspects of Christian life, worship, and preaching should lead to or flow from justifying faith in this gospel, and anything which opposes or substitutes for trust in God's promises alone should be abolished."⁵⁸⁶ Lutherans believe that this doctrine still retains its critical importance, because the tendency of Christians to rely on their devices rather than on Christ continues. The *Joint Declaration* concurs:

The doctrine of justification is that measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion. In this sense, the doctrine of justification is an "indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ" (*JD* no. 18).⁵⁸⁷

3.2 Problems Still to Be Worked Out

It should be noted that there is a general agreement among most Protestant denominations concerning the doctrine of justification. Although there are some differences between the Lutheran and Reformed positions, these differences are "somewhat technical or else are tied in with the related doctrines of predestination and election."⁵⁸⁸ The most important historical disagreement on justification has been between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches.⁵⁸⁹

The recent ecumenical dialogues culminating in the *Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration* certainly made important progress toward rapprochement. The main focus of these dialogues has been to listen to each other and understand the concerns and approaches of both communities and then to carefully harmonize the two opposing interpretations, while downplaying the differences to avoid disharmony between the dialogue

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ *JD*, 46-47.

⁵⁸⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 248-258.

⁵⁸⁹ Alistair E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 63.

partners. The *Joint Declaration* states that its intention is “to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.”⁵⁹⁰

In achieving this goal the dialogue has been quite successful as demonstrated by the joint declaration on the doctrine of justification. However, the *Joint Declaration* indicates that there are still remaining differences, when it declares that the “remaining differences” in the understanding of justification are not subject to doctrinal condemnations.⁵⁹¹

3.2.1 Has the *Joint Declaration* resolved the traditional disputes?

As mentioned above, the *Joint Declaration* still has “remaining differences.” Besides, as mentioned in the preamble of the document, the agreement does not cover all that either the Lutheran or the Roman Catholic communities hold as their doctrines of justification.⁵⁹² For example, the *Joint Declaration* does not mention the Catholic doctrine of “inherent righteousness of the justified,” which apparently contradicts the Lutheran teaching of *simul iustus et peccator* (“at the same time righteous and sinner”). Another example is the controversial issue of human works in justification: “Are good works required or not for salvation?” The *Joint Declaration* does not address these important issues in a manner that resolves the differences between the two traditions.

Critics on both sides argue that the *Joint Declaration* is not very faithful to their

⁵⁹⁰ *JD* no. 5. The “Common Understanding of Justification” is presented in nos. 14-18 of the *Joint Declaration*.

⁵⁹¹ *JD* no. 5.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

own traditions.⁵⁹³ Discrepancies found in the document itself⁵⁹⁴ lead the reader to recognize the difficulty of harmonizing the two, sometimes fundamentally different, teachings of the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification.

As a result, further agreement in any substantial degree is not likely to be achieved without resolving the *underlying, fundamental differences* between the Catholic and Lutheran understanding of justification. Cardinal Kasper, who signed the official text of the *Joint Declaration*, says, “To be honest, there are not only complementary oppositions, there are also contradictions to overcome.”⁵⁹⁵ This study will investigate some of these contradictions with the aim of better understanding the doctrine of justification, which will then aid in the further dialogue that is required to address the remaining differences.

Two of the remaining differences of substantial importance are described below. For a comprehensive understanding of justification and a further agreement on the doctrine of justification, a common understanding of the following two issues seems to be essential.

⁵⁹³ For example, Christopher Malloy, a Catholic systematic theologian, claims in his book, *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), that the historical disagreement over justification was substantial; thus doctrinal revision is a *sine qua non* condition of rapprochement. Besides, he argues that portions of the *Joint Declaration* are irreconcilable with Catholicism.

⁵⁹⁴ For example, the *Joint Declaration* maintains in Annex 2D, “Certainly, ‘whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it’ (*JD* no.25).” But a little later in 2E it says, “In the final judgment, the justified will be judged also on their works (cf. Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom 2:16; 14:12; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 5:10, etc.).”

⁵⁹⁵ Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” in William G. Rusch, ed., *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 21.

3.2.2 Are good works necessary for salvation?

3.2.2.1 The problem as it is now

The Reformers taught that God justifies by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. It is “not on the basis of [God’s] gifts of infused grace, of inherent righteousness, or of good works that God declares sinners just and grants them eternal life, but on the basis of Jesus Christ’s righteousness, a righteousness which is ‘alien’ or ‘extrinsic’ to sinful human beings but is received by them through faith.”⁵⁹⁶ It can be seen from this that justification *sola fide* (as Luther reads Rom 3:28)⁵⁹⁷ is justification “on account of Christ” (*propter Christum*). The *sola*, which was added by Luther in his translation of Rom 3:28, was to exclude good works in justification. “Saving or justifying faith, to be sure, is never alone, never without good works; but it does not justify for that reason.”⁵⁹⁸ “Rather, faith is saving because it clings to its object, God’s promise of forgiveness in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹⁹

On the other hand, Catholics claim that the good works of the righteous give a title to salvation in the sense that God has covenanted to save those who, prompted by grace, obey his will. Meritorious works presuppose grace and bring to fruition what God’s grace has initiated.⁶⁰⁰ The Council of Trent declares: The justified person “by the good deeds which are done by him, through the grace of God, and the merit of Jesus Christ (of whom he is a living member) truly merits an increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life . . .”⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁶ Anderson, § 24.

⁵⁹⁷ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 4:73-74. Melancthon regarded the *sola* as an exclusive particle denying “trust in the merit of love or works.”

⁵⁹⁸ Anderson, § 40.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, § 109.

Vatican II shows “sensitivity to Protestant concerns and to the need of resisting any Pelagianizing tendencies that might exist among Catholics.”⁶⁰² The council says that the dignity of Christians is “to be attributed not to their own merits, but to the special grace of Christ.” It continues, “Thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, the baptized can look forward to their salvation in hope.”⁶⁰³ The council, however, reiterates the traditional Catholic position on human works and merits: The baptized are linked to the heavenly church in the hope that, when “judged according to their works,” they may be numbered among the blessed.⁶⁰⁴ The saints in heaven “show forth the merits which they won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Tim 2:5).”⁶⁰⁵

Lutherans insist that justification is unconditional and “God declares or imputes an alien righteousness, that of Christ, to wholly undeserving sinners.”⁶⁰⁶ “For if the promise were conditional upon our merits and the law, which we never keep, it would follow that the promise is useless. Since we obtain justification through a free promise, however, it follows that we cannot justify ourselves. Otherwise, why would a promise be necessary?”⁶⁰⁷

Catholics fear that emphasis on forensic justification or imputed righteousness, if not accompanied by other themes, could “unintentionally encourage a certain disregarding of the benefits actually imparted through God’s loving action in Christ.”⁶⁰⁸ Lutherans, conversely, fear that the Catholic emphasis on the non-forensic aspects could “throw believers back on their own resources.”⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰¹ H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, eds. *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 1582. This decree of the Council of Trent is cited in Anderson, §56.

⁶⁰² Anderson, § 73.

⁶⁰³ *Lumen Gentium* 48.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, cited in Anderson, § 74.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁰⁶ Anderson, § 90.

⁶⁰⁷ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 4:73-74, quoted in Anderson, § 89.

What make this problem more complicated are the biblical texts that teach the final judgment based on “works” or what one has done (Jer 17:10; Matt 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 26:20; Rom 2:6-11; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 2:23; 20:12-13, etc.) and has not done – that is, “sin of omission” (Matt 25:31-46). For example, Jesus says in John 5:29 (NIV): “. . . those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned,” and Paul, while talking about the final judgment, declares in Rom 2:6-11 (NIV): “God will give each person according to what he has done.” The question is, How can we harmonize these texts with Paul’s other texts that stress justification “by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28; cf. Gal 2:16; 3:11)?⁶¹⁰

In Rom 3:28 Paul apparently dismisses the traditional Jewish belief that one is justified by “works of law.”⁶¹¹ If Paul meant here “good works” by “works of law,” how can we justify Paul’s exhortation of Christians to do good works throughout the later chapters of the same book, beginning from ch. 12,⁶¹² as well as in Rom 2:6-11 and in his other epistles?

The fundamental difference between the Lutheran and Catholic understanding of the relation between justification and good works/merits is not likely reconcilable, unless we come up with a correct understanding of the true nature of “Christian works” in contrast to “works of law” (Rom 3:28) so that we may find a right place for “Christian” good works in the divine economy of salvation.

⁶⁰⁸ Anderson, § 100.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ For discussion on this issue, see Paul K. L. Yinger. *Judaism and Judgment according to Deeds* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶¹¹ Some scholars in the camp of “the new perspective on Paul” vigorously claim that the Lutheran reading of Paul is highly questionable. Longnecker, for example, argues that Judaism could not be regarded as “legalist” (see R. N. Longnecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964, 65-85). However, “the new perspective on Paul” has drawn a stiff opposition from other biblical scholars.

⁶¹² In Rom 12:1ff, Paul urges Christians to live as “living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God,” and he emphasizes the importance of Christian good deeds in the rest of the epistle.

3.2.2.2 A possible solution to the problem

From the discussion in the previous section, one can see the obvious contradiction between the claims of Lutherans and Catholics: Lutherans claim that a person is justified only by grace apart from works, while Catholics claim that a person is saved by “good deeds which are done by [the justified person], through the grace of God, and the merit of Jesus Christ” (see § 3.2.2.1). Just adding the phrase “through the grace of God” does not seem to acquit the Catholic teaching from the accusation of “semi-Pelagianism,” for Jews must also have thought that they could keep the law through the grace of God.

What one can see is that both sides have problems: Lutheran teaching is not compatible with the biblical texts that teach the final judgment based on works; Catholic teaching, on the other hand, tries hard to avoid “Pelagianizing tendencies” by insisting that the good deeds which are done by the justified person are done “through the grace of God,” but it still does not satisfy Paul’s thesis that we are “justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28).

To resolve the problem, one must distinguish between “Christian good deeds” and “the works of law,” so that “Christian good deeds” may have a right place in Paul’s theology. One wonders whether “Christian” good works are done by the Holy Spirit through the justified person (that is, using the Christian as an instrument),⁶¹³ rather than

⁶¹³ Jesus calls Paul “my chosen instrument” (Acts 9:15), and Paul urges Christians to offer themselves to God as “instruments of righteousness” (Rom 6:13). In 2 Tim 2:21 the author of the letter encourages Timothy to “be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” These texts (all in NIV) suggest that Christians are the instruments of God, and God is the one who does the works using Christians as instruments. It should be noted, however, that Christians are *animate* instruments and *not like inanimate* tools.

they “are done by [the justified person], through the grace of God” (see the Catholic formula in § 3.2.2.1). For it is the Holy Spirit who works in us believers to bear “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). If “Christian” good works are done by the Holy Spirit rather than by the justified person, emphasizing this kind of good works for justification should not be rejected by Protestants as “works-righteousness.” This thought will be further developed in the next chapter.

Another issue related to the problem is the definition of the word “justification.” During the sixteenth century a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding was caused by the two different understanding of the word “justification.” The Council of Trent defines justification as involving both the event by which Christian life begins and the process by which it develops and is finally consummated. In many ways, this understanding of justification parallels that of Augustine. The Protestant denominations define justification primarily in forensic terms, as the act of God by which the sinner is declared to be righteous. In the Reformed Confessions from 1559 onward and in the (Lutheran) *Formula of Concord*, the *event* of justification is distinguished from the *process* of sanctification. Justification is an act of God external to the sinner, and sanctification is the action of God within the sinner, although these two cannot be separated: whoever is justified is also sanctified. Therefore, the Roman Catholics understand by “justification” what the Protestants understand by “justification” and “sanctification” linked together. This has led to great confusion.⁶¹⁴

One can observe, however, that in the recent ecumenical documents on the doctrine of justification there is still confusion concerning what the word “justification” means: sometimes the word is used in these documents for the initial act of God by which

⁶¹⁴ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 65-66.

the sinner is declared to be righteous – apart from the rest of the salvation process; and at other times the same word is used for the whole process of salvation.

To avoid the continuing confusion that comes from the understanding of the word “justification,” one can propose that the traditional understanding of the word “justification” be divided into three distinct but interrelated concepts – *initial justification*, *sanctification*, and *final justification*: when we are “born again” and Christian life begins, our past sins are forgiven and we are declared “innocent” (*initial justification*), and become progressively holy (or holier) by grace through the work of the Holy Spirit (*sanctification*), and then are finally declared to be “righteous” by grace at the final judgment (*final justification*). Then both Catholics and Protestants will agree that human good works do not contribute in any way to the *initial* justification, which is entirely by the grace of God in Christ. For the *final* justification, Protestants and Catholics may still disagree about the role of good works, but both sides will have to admit that good works have at least something to do with the final justification (or final salvation), because biblical texts teach “the final judgment based on works” (see the previous section).

In both biblical texts and theological discussions, the words “justification” and “salvation” have been used in a wide range of meaning. Therefore, for the clarity of the meaning of “justification” in ecumenical dialogues and agreements, it seems essential that we clearly define the meaning of the word “justification.” The next chapter will suggest a solution to the question of “the role of good works in salvation,” based on clear definitions of the related important words, such as “justification” and “Christian good works” – in contrast to “works of law.”

3.2.3 *Simul iustus et peccator* vs. “inherent righteousness of the justified”

3.2.3.1 The problem as it is now

The U.S. common statement says: “For however just and holy, they fall from time to time into the sins that are those of daily existence. What is more, the Spirit’s action does not exempt believers from the lifelong struggle against sinful tendencies.”⁶¹⁵ The *Joint Declaration* quotes the following statement of Lutherans: “The question is how to speak of sin with regard to the justified without limiting the reality of salvation. While Lutherans express this tension with the term ‘controlled sin’ (*peccatum regnatum*) which expresses the teaching of the Christian as ‘being justified and sinner at the same time’ (*simul iustus et peccator*), Roman Catholics think the reality of salvation can only be maintained by denying the sinful character of concupiscence.”⁶¹⁶

Lutherans understand the human condition of the Christian as being “at the same time righteous and sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*).” Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins and grants the righteousness of Christ, which they appropriate in faith. In Christ, they are made righteousness before God. Looking at themselves through the law, however, they realize that they remain totally sinners. Sin still lives in them, as 1 John 1:8 says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (cf. Rom 7:17, 20). This contradiction to God is truly sin. Nevertheless, the enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ and is no longer a sin that “rules” the Christian. In this life, then, Christians can in part lead a just life.⁶¹⁷

On the other hand, the Council of Trent declares: “[T]he single formal cause [of justification] is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which

⁶¹⁵ Anderson, §102; *Joint Declaration*, 34.

⁶¹⁶ *JD*, 34-35.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

He makes us just, . . . we are truly called and are just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, . . . and according to one's disposition and co-operation."⁶¹⁸

Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism removes all sins and the justified are *truly made righteous*, even though there remains in the justified an inclination (*concupiscence*, understood as the self-seeking desire of the human being) that comes from sin and presses us toward sin. Catholics, however, do not take this inclination as sin in an authentic sense, even though they “do not deny that this inclination does not correspond to God's original design for humanity and that it is objectively in contradiction to God and remains one's enemy in lifelong struggle.”⁶¹⁹

Lutherans fear that “the Catholic doctrine of inherent righteousness may cause the Christians to be either anxious or complacent, and in either case insufficiently reliant on God's promise of mercy.”⁶²⁰ Lutherans' fears are increased when they find Catholics speaking of sinners actively cooperating in their own salvation, although Catholics insist that cooperation is itself a gift of grace. Lutherans find that the Catholic thinking is liable to Pelagian distortions. Besides, some Lutherans maintain that the traditional Catholic teaching that faith alone is insufficient tempts Christians to rely on their own activity rather than on the saving work of Christ.⁶²¹

Catholics, on the other hand, “fear that the Lutheran position may lead to a certain neglect of good works or may not adequately motivate the believer to give praise and thanks

⁶¹⁸ John H. Leith, ed. *Creeds of the Churches*, 3d ed. (Louisville, KY/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 412. This decree of The Council of Trent is also quoted in Anderson, § 56.

⁶¹⁹ *JD* no. 30; also see *Joint Declaration*, Annex 2.B for the definition of *concupiscence*.

⁶²⁰ Anderson, § 103.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, § 106.

to God for the healing and transforming effects of his redemptive action in us. To describe this transformation, Catholics sometimes appeal to the concept of divinization (*theosis*).”⁶²²

In the “Annex to the Official Common Statement” the *Joint Declaration* tries to adopt both Catholic and Lutheran positions. It says:

The reality of salvation in baptism and the peril from the power of sin can be expressed in such a way that, on the one hand, the forgiveness of sins and renewal of humanity in Christ by baptism are emphasized and, on the other hand, it can be seen that the justified also “are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom 6:12-14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God . . .” (*JD* no. 28).⁶²³

This statement of the *Joint Declaration* does not really resolve the fundamental difference between the Lutheran and Catholic understanding of the human condition after justification; it simply tries to accommodate both positions and harmonize the two different positions. However, the Lutheran description of the human condition after justification as “being righteous and sinner at the same time” (*simul iustus et peccator*) and the Catholic understanding of the justified as being *truly made righteous* does not seem to be compatible or reconcilable.

3.2.3.2 A possible solution to the problem

The difference between the Catholic and the Lutheran understanding of the human condition after justification is not merely a question of whether concupiscence should be reckoned as sin or not. More importantly, the difference between the two positions is related to the question of whether the justified can actively cooperate in their own salvation through the grace of God. In other words, an important question here is whether or not good deeds *can be* “done by the justified through the grace of God,” in light of the human condition

⁶²² Ibid., § 103.

⁶²³ *Joint Declaration*, Annex 2.B.

after justification.

Once this question is answered, another important question is what kind of role the justified play in their salvation or in producing good works. Related to these two problems is a question of whether God grants the justified eternal life on account of their “inherent righteousness.” To answer all these questions we need to characterize the human condition after justification, from which we would be able to answer what kind of role Christians can play in their salvation and in producing good works.

In order to elucidate the human condition after justification, we need to appeal to the relevant biblical texts and try to get insights from them. For no matter how logical a description of human condition is, if it is unbiblical (that is, against the biblical witness), it does not belong to Christian theology.

In John 15:1-10 Jesus characterizes the nature of the “justified” Christians (note that Jesus says, “You are already clean” in v. 3) in relation to the source of their justification and sanctification – that is, the Trinity God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. An exegesis of this text, combined with other texts, may help characterize the human condition after justification and solve the problem of *simul iustus et peccator* vs. “inherent righteousness of the justified.” The answer to this second problem will also contribute to answering the first problem, “Are good works required or not for salvation?” For the answer to the second problem will help understand the proper human role in “Christian” good works⁶²⁴ in light of the human condition of the justified Christians, and therefore their human role and responsibility in salvation. These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

⁶²⁴ An exegesis of John 15:1-10 is expected to answer the question of whether “Christian” good works are done by “the justified, through the grace of God” (according to the Catholic formula; see § 3.2.2.1) or by “the Holy Spirit through the justified” (see the discussion in § 3.2.2.2 of this chapter).

CHAPTER FOUR

Bases for Resolving the Still-Existing Denominational Differences

The purpose of this chapter is to suggest ways of resolving the remaining denominational differences on the doctrine of justification. The study will focus on resolving the two important issues discussed in the previous chapter: (1) “inherent righteousness of the justified” vs. *simul iustus et peccator*; (2) questions concerning “works” in justification – for example, “Are good works required or not for salvation?”

The answers to these problems suggested in this chapter are intended to help Christians to better understand this important doctrine, which closely represents the Christian gospel. At the same time these answers are hoped to encourage further ecumenical dialogues on the doctrine of justification and as a result promote the unity of the church.

4.1 Methodology

The doctrine of justification is a doctrinal/systematic theology problem that is based on the biblical message of what God has done in Christ to save humanity from the dilemma of sin and how we can appropriate God’s saving grace in faith. The experience of recent ecumenical dialogues taught participants the significant contribution of modern biblical studies on justification to bringing about denominational convergences.⁶²⁵ The Bible is a common document for all Christian communities and “we can make further

⁶²⁵ The *Joint Declaration* mentions specifically the contributions of “recent biblical studies” and “modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma” (*JD* no. 13).

progress by more fully involving Scripture study in dogmatic questions.”⁶²⁶ The *Official Common Statement* of the *Joint Declaration* calls “the two partners in dialogue . . . to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification.”

This experience sets a good example of combining biblical and theological studies in resolving controversial doctrinal/systematic theology problems. In light of the warning that the distance between the theological and biblical disciplines of contemporary theological schools has become dangerously great,⁶²⁷ the recognition of the important contribution of modern biblical studies to resolving the theological problems of the doctrine of justification is an encouraging development for theology.

Heeding the above-mentioned warning and the call of the *Official Common Statement*, this study will use the method of biblical theology as well as that of systematic theology. First, the historical documents of justification will be studied together with the recent ecumenical discussions on the doctrine of justification in order to discern the underlying problems. These documents will be analyzed systematically, with careful attention given to *the fundamental problems* that lie behind the denominational differences in interpreting the doctrine. Then, based on an in-depth study of the relevant biblical texts through exegesis,⁶²⁸ the fundamental problems will be addressed and a

⁶²⁶ Walter Cardinal Kasper, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 19.

⁶²⁷ Michael Root, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” in *Rereading Paul together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 76.

⁶²⁸ The exegetical works presented in the following pages are not intended to be “pure,” full-scale exegeses that discuss all the important issues of the biblical passages; they are rather “applied” exegeses – exegeses done for a certain purpose, which is to help answer the doctrinal problems presented in ch. 3. Therefore the discussions are limited to and focused on those issues directly related to the problems to be resolved and would therefore advance the cause, for the purpose of the biblical exegesis in this study is to resolve the denominational differences discussed in ch. 3.

theology of justification developed that harmonizes the biblical data and systematically explicates the divine economy of salvation.

One of the biblical texts to be studied is Rom 3:21-31 (Justification by faith apart from works of law), together with Rom 2:6-11 (Final judgment based on works) and some of other biblical texts that emphasize the importance of good works for salvation (e.g., Matt 7:15-23; 16:27; 2 Cor 5:10; Jas 2:14-26). These texts, when read together, are expected to illuminate the true nature of “Christian” good works (vs. “works of law” in Rom 3:28) and thereby the human role and responsibility in salvation. In addition, the text of John 15:1-10 will help answer the question of “inherent righteousness of the justified” vs. *simul iustus et peccator*. An exegesis of this text will probably reveal the human condition of the justified Christians in relation to Christ.

The outcome of this study is hoped to demonstrate that biblical exegesis is an integral part of theological method and that systematic theology alone, without incorporating biblical studies, has a limitation in solving doctrinal problems; this is one of the important goals of this study.

4.2 The Relationship between Christ and the Justified: The Vine and the Branches (Exegesis of John 15:1-10)

4.2.1 Translation with notes

1. I am⁶²⁹ the true [or: genuine]⁶³⁰ vine and my father is the farmer [or: vinedresser].⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ The emphatic *εγώ εἰμι* is used here.

⁶³⁰ This implies “a fruitful Israel obedient to God” (Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III. *The Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, 217-18).

⁶³¹ The word refers here in a special way to a vinedresser (Raymond E. Brown. *The Gospel According to John* (xiii-xxi). The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970, 660).

2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he cuts off [or: takes away], but every [branch]⁶³² that bears fruit he cleanses (by pruning)⁶³³ so that it may bear more fruit.
3. You (pl.) are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.
4. Remain [or: abide] in me, and (then)⁶³⁴ I (will) [remain] in you. Just as the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you [bear fruit] unless you remain in me.
5. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you are not able to do [or: accomplish] anything.
6. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like the branch and becomes dry [or: withers], and they⁶³⁵ gather them⁶³⁶ together and throw into the fire and it is [or: they are] burned.⁶³⁷
7. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you desire, and it will happen [or: be done] for you.
8. In this my Father is [or: was] glorified,⁶³⁸ that⁶³⁹ you bear much fruit and you become⁶⁴⁰ my disciples.
9. Just as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; remain in my love.
10. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

⁶³² The word in [] is not in the Greek text, but was added for a translation of the Greek into an English sentence.

⁶³³ The words in the () may be added to help understanding. In the ancient world, to maximize yield, the vinedresser had to prune excessive branches (Roger and Roger, 218).

⁶³⁴ και sometimes introduces a result, which comes from what precedes – therefore meaning “and then” or “and so” – especially after an imperative or expression of an imperative nature (cf. Mt 4:19) (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's Fifth edition, 1958, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 392f).

⁶³⁵ The subject (“they”) may refer to the unnamed servants (J. H. Bernard. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh, U.K.: T. & T. Clark, 1969, 481). Or it may be the Semitic custom of using the third person plural as the passive (Brown, 661).

⁶³⁶ Some MSS have αυτό (“it”) instead of αυτα (“them”).

⁶³⁷ Literally, “it is burned,” since καίεται, the 3rd person singular form of the present passive indicative of κάω, is used in the Greek text, when a plural form is expected grammatically (but see note 636 above).

⁶³⁸ εδοξάσθη (“was glorified”), an aorist passive indicative, is used here. The aorist passive here “emphasizes either the certainty or customariness of an action” (Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 145).

⁶³⁹ ινα usually expresses result or purpose, but it can also take the place of the explanatory infinitive after a demonstrative, as in this verse; this is a favorite usage in John (Bauer's Greek-German/English Lexicon); then the verse means that “My Father is glorified in that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

⁶⁴⁰ γένησθε, an aorist middle (deponent) subjunctive form of γίνομαι, is used here.

4.2.2 Literary context and internal structure

John 15:1-17 (The vine and the branches) is in the middle of Jesus' farewell discourse (chs. 14-16), in which Jesus instructs his disciples about what they need to know as they face the world without his physical presence among them.⁶⁴¹ The setting of 13:1-17:26 is the Last Supper.

After disclosing his plan for departure from the disciples (ch. 13), in ch. 14 Jesus comforts his disciples and says that whatever they ask in his name will be done (14:13-14). He then promises the Holy Spirit for them. He says that the Holy Spirit will be with the disciples forever (14:16), and they are in him (Jesus) and he in them (14:20). He also declares, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (14:21).

Some of the themes in ch. 14 (prayers being answered, the Holy Spirit's role, believers' union with Jesus, obeying his commands) reappear and are expanded in chs. 15-16. Jesus says in 15:1-8, "Remain in me and I in you" and explains what this signifies: if they remain in him and his words remain in them, their prayers will be answered and they will bear much fruit to the Father's glory. He also says that his disciples can remain in his love by obeying his command, "Love one another" (15:9-17; cf. 13:34). This sets up a contrast with the hatred of the world (15:18-16:4).⁶⁴² In 16:5-16 the role of the Holy Spirit (14:16-17, 26) is taken again and expanded. Finally, in ch. 17 Jesus prays for himself, his disciples and all future believers, before he departs for the Mount of Olive and be arrested.

⁶⁴¹ D. Moody Smith, *John*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TX: Abingdon Press, 1999), 248.

⁶⁴² Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylen, *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 152.

Schnackenburg summarizes the internal structure of John 15:1-11 as follows:⁶⁴³

- 1-2 The vine and the vinedresser
- 3 (gloss)⁶⁴⁴
- 4 Admonition to abide in Jesus in order to bear fruit
- 5-6 The vine and the branches, with a renewed admonition to abide in Jesus
- 7-8 Promise that prayer will be heard, and glorification of the Father by the bearing of abundant fruit
- 9-10 Admonition to abide in Jesus' love by keeping his commandments
- 11 Conclusion: the joy that comes to the disciples

4.2.3 Analysis

v. 1 *I am the true vine.* According to Brown, Jesus' claim to be the true vine emphasizes that he is the source of "real" life, and to strengthen his claim Jesus mentioned the Father. Brown says that we saw the same mentality in 6:32 (RSV)⁶⁴⁵: "It is my Father who gives you the *real* bread from heaven."⁶⁴⁶ Brown says that one of the main points of this passage is that the branch gets its life from the vine, that is, that the disciples get their lives from Jesus.⁶⁴⁷ He says that, secondarily, the Johannine writer may have been thinking of the true vine (Jesus) in contrast with the unproductive, false vine of the contemporary Judaism.⁶⁴⁸ Culpepper agrees with Brown's second point: Declaring that Jesus is the true vine fits the context of conflict with synagogue that runs near the surface of the John's Gospel.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴³ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, vol. 3. Commentary on Chapters 13-21* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 95-96.

⁶⁴⁴ Schnackenburg thinks that v. 3 is an incidental, editorial comment on the word καθαίρει ("cleanse") in v. 2, which does not fit into the development of the thought directed toward "bearing fruit" (Schnackenburg, 95).

⁶⁴⁵ Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV), unless specified otherwise.

⁶⁴⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 674.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 675.

⁶⁴⁹ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*. International Biblical Texts (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 215.

In the Old Testament Israel is frequently represented as a vine or a vineyard (cf. Ps 80:8-18; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-15; Hos 10:1-2).⁶⁵⁰ What is striking is that whenever the vine refers to Israel, Israel is under the threat of God's imminent judgment because of its failure to produce good fruit despite God's care (e.g., Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15:1-8; 19:10-14).⁶⁵¹ In contrast to such a failure, Jesus claims to be "the true vine," namely, the one who produces good fruit.⁶⁵² The true vine then is Jesus and those incorporated in him.⁶⁵³ Whereas one's salvation had depended on identity with Israel, the people of God, Jesus now declares that life depends on abiding in him; he is the source of life.⁶⁵⁴ The replacement theme, however, does not exhaust the significance of the vine: "the imagery itself suggests incorporation, mutual indwelling, fruitfulness."⁶⁵⁵

my father is the farmer [or: vinedresser]. God plants and cultivates the vine: he is the farmer or vinedresser. Carson says that in this relationship between the vine and the vinedresser the Son seems to display a kind of subordination toward his Father.⁶⁵⁶

v. 2 *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he cuts off.* Jesus' concern in this passage is with those who are already in relationship with him.⁶⁵⁷ Similar emphasis on bearing fruit appears in Matt 7:15-20 (cf. Luke 6:43-44), where Jesus speaks of cutting down and burning the tree that does not bear good fruit (cf. John 15:2, 6).⁶⁵⁸ This verse

⁶⁵⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 272.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² D. A. Carson. *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, U.K.: Apollos, 1991), 513.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 514.

⁶⁵⁴ Culpepper, 214.

⁶⁵⁵ Carson, 514.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ O'Day and Hylan, 152.

⁶⁵⁸ Smith, 281.

sets the fruitfulness of Christians as a criterion of determining who authentic disciples of Christ are, as Jesus instructs in the Sermon on the Mount: “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:20). Therefore, Jesus declares, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21). Paul warns Christians: “[Unbelieving Jews] were broken off because of their unbelief . . . so do not become proud . . . For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you” (Rom 11:20-21).

cuts off . . . cleanses (by pruning). Verse 2 describes two different actions of the vinedresser: he cuts off branches that cannot bear fruit; then, the vine dresser pinches off the little shoots so that the main fruit-bearing branches will get all the nourishment.⁶⁵⁹ First, the Father cuts off every branch in the vine (Jesus) that does not bear fruit, for true Christians are to bear fruit. Because Jesus is the true vine that produces fruit (unlike the vine of Israel), those who do not bear fruit do not belong to Jesus and are therefore cut off. Second, the Father prunes or trims every branch that bears fruit so that each branch will be even more fruitful – but this procedure is painful. The thought is not unlike Heb 12:4-11: the Lord disciplines his own as a father disciplines his children. All this is “for our good that we may share in his holiness” (Heb 12:10 NIV).⁶⁶⁰ Then the meaning of “cleanses” in this verse is close to “sanctifies.”

What does bearing and not bearing fruit mean? One tends to interpret the imagery in terms of good works and a virtuous way of life. But Brown adds that virtuous deeds cannot be separated from the life itself that comes from Christ, for love and keeping the

⁶⁵⁹ Brown, 675.

⁶⁶⁰ Carson, 514.

commandments are so much a part of the life coming from faith.⁶⁶¹ So Brown emphasizes that a branch that does not bear fruit is not a living, unproductive branch, but a dead one. Likewise, in Johannine dualism one who does not behave in a virtuous manner does not have life at all, and such a person (e.g., Judas; “antichrists” of 1 John 2:18-19), who had once been converted and was in Jesus but is now dead, no longer belongs to the Christian community, but belongs to the realm of darkness and is used as a tool of Satan (13:2, 27, 30).⁶⁶²

bear more fruit. Since bearing fruit symbolizes the possession of divine life, bearing more fruit implies “growth in that life and growth in union with Jesus”; increased fruit-bearing also includes the communication of life to others (i.e., missionary work).⁶⁶³

v. 3 *You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.* This verse invites one to recall 13:10, where Jesus said while washing the disciple’s feet, “And you are clean.” Brown says that 13:10 means “the disciples were cleansed through Jesus’ parabolic action foreshadowing his death.”⁶⁶⁴ Here in 15:3 it is the word of Jesus that cleanses the disciples. “Because of my word” does not mean that by his word Jesus “declares” his disciples clean; it means rather the working of the word of Jesus within the disciples.⁶⁶⁵

What is meant by Jesus’ word that has cleansing power? According to Brown, “word” here means Jesus’ whole teaching.⁶⁶⁶ Borchert says likewise that in its context it

⁶⁶¹ Brown, 675.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 675-76.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 676.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 677.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 660.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

does not seem to refer to any particular words of Jesus but to “his overall teaching concerning himself and salvation (cf. 14:24, 26).”⁶⁶⁷ Carson comments: Jesus says that his disciples are already clean, because Jesus’ teaching “in its entirety, including what he is and what he does” has already taken hold in the life of these followers.⁶⁶⁸

Beasley-Murray interprets that Jesus’ earlier action of washing his disciples’ feet and declaring “you are clean” (13:10) anticipates the remission of sins and the disciples’ partaking in his eternal life. He says that 13:10 and 15:3 are complementary in that they together illustrate the inseparable nature of Jesus’ “word” and “deeds”; the disciples are cleansed through the word of Jesus and through his redemptive action.⁶⁶⁹ Brown also insists that there is no dichotomy between the salvific action of Jesus and his salvific word that works through the Spirit and makes the disciples fruit-bearing. He quotes 1 Pet 1:23: “For you have been born again . . . through the living and enduring word of God,” which attributes to the word of God the power to beget humans anew.⁶⁷⁰ He says that v. 3 provides a transition to vv. 4-5 (cf. Schnackenburg’s comment on v. 3 in § 4.2.2): If the disciples were made clean, they must now respond and live out this state by remaining in Jesus.⁶⁷¹

As Brown commented above, “You are already clean” does not mean that Jesus merely “declares” his disciples clean or “righteous” even though they still remain “sinners” in nature (*simul iustus et peccator*) – as the traditional Lutheran doctrine of justification claims. For when the life of Jesus the vine enters and remains in the justified,

⁶⁶⁷ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*. The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁶⁶⁸ Carson, 515-16.

⁶⁶⁹ Beasley-Murray, 234, 272.

⁶⁷⁰ Brown, 677.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*

they can no longer remain “sinners” (cf. the Lutheran concept of “controlled sin”). Contrary to the traditional Lutheran concept of *simul iustus et peccator* (“at the same time righteous and sinner”), our passage teaches that as long as Christians remain in Jesus and Jesus’ life runs through them, they remain in a state of grace and bear much fruit in Christ, even though they are not free from the power of sin and fall to sin from time to time. It is only when Christians fail to remain in Jesus (vv. 4-6) that they go back to their original state of sinfulness or “depravity.” The Holy Spirit given to the believers as a gift makes them capable of a new life by uniting them with Christ.⁶⁷²

v. 4 *Remain in me, and I in you.* Just as Jesus abides in the Father (14:10), so are the disciples commanded to abide in Jesus (cf. the Pauline idea of “in Christ”). Since the Greek text has no verb for the second phrase, the first sentence of v. 4 can be interpreted in two ways: (1) “If you remain in me, I will remain in you”; (2) “Remain in me, as I remain in you.” Borchert and Carson prefer the first reading – that is, Jesus’ presence is conditional on the action of the disciples.⁶⁷³

To “remain” in Jesus has a deeper meaning than simply continuing to believe in him, although this meaning is included; it means “continuing to live in association or in union with him.”⁶⁷⁴ “No branch has life in itself; it is utterly dependent for life and fruitfulness on the vine to which it is attached.”⁶⁷⁵ Likewise, Christians do not have in themselves life or power to bear fruit or to do good works, but the power to do good

⁶⁷² Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds., *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 48.

⁶⁷³ Borchert, 143; Carson, 516. My translation note on v. 4 (n. 634) supports this reading.

⁶⁷⁴ Beasley-Murray, 272.

⁶⁷⁵ Carson, 516.

works comes from Jesus; the life that bears fruit comes from the enabling power of the “Spirit of Jesus” (as Acts 6:17 says) – contra the Catholic doctrine of “inherent righteousness of the justified.” This is why the good deeds of the Christians are sometimes called the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22).

It appears (so we spontaneously tend to say) that the ability to do good works is within the justified because the Holy Spirit indwells them, but, accurately speaking, this ability is possessed by the Holy Spirit, independently of the justified. Peter and John, after healing the crippled beggar at a temple gate, tell people who were astonished, “Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” (Acts 3:12). This story tells that the power to do good works is not *inherent* in the Christians but comes from God through the Holy Spirit. Again in Acts 4:25 (NIV), quoting what King David said, the writer of Acts says that this is what God “spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant our father David.” Even though David apparently said this, it is actually God who said this by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David – that is, using David as his instrument.

At this point we need to define “Christian” good works in contrast with “human” works or efforts: by “Christian” good works are meant the works Christians do over and above what non-Christians can do with their natural virtues, for Jesus commanded his followers to do more than what Pharisees and scribes do in order for them to enter the kingdom of heaven: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20 NIV). For this reason Jesus teaches his disciples to love even their enemies and says that if we love only those who love us, we will not get reward since even pagans

do that (Matt 5:43-47). We realize here that loving our enemies is not possible with our natural virtues or by human efforts; it can be done only by the power of the Holy Spirit in us.⁶⁷⁶ Therefore “Christian” good works are works done by the Holy Spirit who indwells the Christians, and come from “Christian” or “theological” rather than “natural” virtues (cf. 1 Thess 1:3). This definition of “Christian” good works will be implied throughout the dissertation.

With miraculous works, we readily admit that it is God who does the works by the Spirit through his servants, that is, using them as instruments; but with less spectacular things, we tend to think that the good works are done by humans rather than by the Spirit in them. But our passage says otherwise: “You can do nothing apart from me.” And even though the Scripture sometimes says that humans did good works, we should interpret it as that the Holy Spirit did the good works through humans, just as Paul corrects what he just said: “I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor 15:10 NIV). We recall in the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus told his disciples not to worry about what to say: “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, *for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you*” (Matt 10:19-20 NIV; cf. Mark 13:10; Luke 21:14-15); so Jesus means that the Spirit will use the disciples as his instruments to speak what the Spirit directs them to say.

Jesus implies in this farewell discourse that “remaining” in Jesus is how the Christian community can survive after his departure. But how can the disciples remain in Jesus when he is leaving them soon? In 14:15-17 Jesus promises the Holy Spirit for the

⁶⁷⁶ In Gal 3:3 Paul contrasts the way of “human efforts” with the way of “the Spirit,” in trying to attain our goal: attaining righteousness or being saved.

disciples and says that the Holy Spirit will be with them forever. This is why he says, “It is for your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you” (16:7). Thus after Jesus’ physical departure the believers can remain in him by abiding in the Spirit of Jesus, who will come after Jesus’ departure (14:16-17; cf. Eze 2:2). We note that Brown perceives the “Paraclete” in the farewell discourse, whom he identifies as the Holy Spirit (as in John 14:26), as the *alter ego* (the “other I”) of Jesus – Christ’s spiritual presence in the believing community.⁶⁷⁷

The thought of this verse is not far from the Old Testament new covenant texts, which promise a renewed heart or the presence of the Spirit in the new covenant people, so that they will obey what God says.⁶⁷⁸ So “God remains among and in his people by renewing them with his life, with his Spirit,” and they remain in him by obeying his commands (15:9-11).⁶⁷⁹

v. 5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in me . . . bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* Brown says that the total dependence of the Christian on Jesus is expressed “nowhere more eloquently than here.”⁶⁸⁰ The last line, “apart from me you can do nothing,” has played an important role in the history of the theological discussion of grace. Augustine, for example, used it to refute Pelagius who claimed human’s natural power to do good works worthy of eternal reward.⁶⁸¹ To remain in Christ is to be fruitful, while “apart from me you can do nothing.” The statement

⁶⁷⁷ Raymond E. Brown, “The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel,” in *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966-67): 113-32.

⁶⁷⁸ Carson, 516.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 516-17.

⁶⁸⁰ Brown, 678.

⁶⁸¹ For example, see St. Augustine, “Tractates on the Gospel of John 81.2-3,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVb, John 11-21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 168.

echoes Jesus' own dependence on the Father, without whom he says he "can do nothing" (5:19, 30).⁶⁸²

What does fruit-bearing signify? Bultmann gives a broad answer: "every demonstration of vitality of faith, to which, according to vv. 9-17, reciprocal love above all belongs."⁶⁸³ Carson suggests that the fruit is the consequence of prayer in Jesus' name and includes "all of the believer's life and the product of his witness," resulting from "persevering dependence on Christ, driven by faith."⁶⁸⁴ In other words, one can say that "fruit" represents all the good works of the Christian. This interpretation is supported by Smith: In the Synoptic texts "fruit" stands for *good deeds* accomplished through obedience to God, and a similar meaning of "fruit" appears to be appropriate in reading John.⁶⁸⁵ Smith observes, however, that emphasis falls on "works of love" in 15:1-17.⁶⁸⁶

apart from me you can do nothing. Since the power to bear fruit is not in ourselves, we can do nothing apart from Jesus (contra Pelagius' claim). In other words, we can do nothing good independently, apart from Jesus. And if we can do nothing apart from Christ, we are like instruments which can do nothing by themselves. This then means that God does the work using us as his instruments, as Paul indicates when he urges Christians to offer themselves to God as "instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:13). Brown sees the same idea in 2 Cor 3:5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God."⁶⁸⁷ These texts refute the doctrine of "inherent righteousness (or goodness) of the justified." The justified

⁶⁸² This strongly suggests the "human nature" of Jesus, the incarnate Son (vs. "twofold nature of Jesus").

⁶⁸³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1971), 532-33.

⁶⁸⁴ Carson, 517.

⁶⁸⁵ Smith, 281.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁸⁷ Brown, 661.

Christians do not possess “inherent goodness” that bears good fruit, but the goodness or the power of bearing fruit comes from God; Christians do not “inherently” possess goodness in themselves.

v. 6 *If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out . . . withered . . . gathered . . . thrown into the fire and . . . burned.* In our passage the branches that are burned were once united to Jesus the vine (“every branch *in me*” in v. 2). The early Christians could hardly have avoided thinking of Judas when reading this verse. We are also reminded of King Saul. But the verse applies to any unfaithful person.⁶⁸⁸ Jesus tells again in this verse that apart from him (“If anyone does not remain in me”) Christians are useless and not good at all (contra “inherent righteousness of the justified”) that they will be thrown out and burned in the fire; Christians are good only in Christ.

Jesus warns the Christians who fail to remain in Jesus the vine and become unfruitful: they will be thrown away, become withered, then will be gathered together and thrown into the fire to be burned. In Ezek 19:12 we read that the stem of the vine is withered and the fire consumes it. In Matt 13:30 we hear: “Gather together the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned.” Carson thinks that Jesus alludes to Ezek 15:1-8, where the vine stands for Israel and God warns that Israel failed to produce fruit and so is under an impending judgment of fire.⁶⁸⁹

What kind of judgment does this verse refer to? Beasley-Murray says that the picture “is not applied to the judgment of Gehenna.” So he seems to believe that this verse does not apply to the final judgment, but he does not explain properly why he

⁶⁸⁸ Borchert, 144; cf. Beasley-Murray, 273.

⁶⁸⁹ Carson, 517.

believes so.⁶⁹⁰ On the other hand, Borchert thinks that the scene applies to any judgment on the unfruitful people, including the final judgment.⁶⁹¹ Brown suggests that the imagery of this verse applies to the final judgment. Brown's interpretation is based on his comparison of this verse with the Synoptic Gospels that concern eschatological judgment: Matt 25:41; Mark 9:43; and especially Matt 3:10: "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire." He thinks that John's strange use of the expression "cast out" in this verse (or "thrown out" in my translation), which does not fit the agricultural imagery, may have been prompted by the frequent use of the verb in eschatological descriptions: for example, "The children of the kingdom will be cast out into the exterior darkness" (Matt 8:12).⁶⁹²

v. 7 *If . . . my words remain in you, ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you.* This verse reminds us again that we "can do nothing apart from [Jesus]," but if we remain in Jesus' words and ask in his name, "it *will be done* for [us]." So it is not that we do good works, but that God does good works for us (or through us) when we remain in Jesus. We are not inherently good, so we ourselves cannot do good works [Note that we are here talking about "Christian" good works, which was defined in the analysis of v. 4].

In vv. 4-5 Jesus talked about his remaining in the disciples. Here it is his words remaining in them. Brown says that Jesus and his words are virtually interchangeable,

⁶⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, 273. His interpretation may have been influenced by the traditional doctrine of predestination, which claims that all who were elected are predestined to attain the final salvation and do not go to hell. My STM thesis, entitled "Election in Paul" (2003), sought a correct understanding of the doctrine of predestination; it disputes the traditional understanding of predestination and suggests a new interpretation of the biblical concepts, election and predestination. Some of the main points of the thesis will be reflected in this dissertation, in § 4.2.5 – Theological Reflection on John 15:1-10 and elsewhere.

⁶⁹¹ Borchert, 144-45.

⁶⁹² Brown, 679.

because “he is incarnate revelation (the Word).”⁶⁹³ Remaining in Jesus involves a life lived in harmony with his words and in obedience to Jesus’ commands (v. 10). The requests of those with such a life will always harmonize with what Jesus wants, and so they will always be granted by the Father.⁶⁹⁴

Beasley-Murray says that vv. 7-10 illustrate the meaning of “remaining” in Jesus. He says: while vv. 1-6 emphasize faith or trust in Christ that keeps the believers to be in union with Christ, v. 7 emphasizes remaining in the *words* of Christ; such believers are assured that their prayers will be answered, for their prayers will reflect the desire to serve the kingdom of God (cf. 14:12-14).⁶⁹⁵

Carson comments that “remaining” in Jesus is in vv. 9ff. equivalent to doing all of Jesus’ commands: “If . . . my words remain in you” is another way of remaining in Jesus, because Jesus and his revelation, i.e., his words, are “virtually interchangeable, for he is incarnate revelation” as Brown says (Brown, 2:662). If such words abide in the disciple’s heart, he or she will naturally conform to Christ and obey him; and such a truly obedient believer will be effective in prayer, because all he or she asks for conform to the will of God.⁶⁹⁶

Wescott puts it in another way: The “petitions of the true disciples are echoes (so to speak) of “the words of Jesus because his teaching is “transformed into a supplication, and so it will be necessarily heard.”⁶⁹⁷ This means that when the model of Jesus’ life and his words permeate the life and words of the disciple, prayers cease to be selfish asking

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 662.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 679.

⁶⁹⁵ Beasley-Murray, 273.

⁶⁹⁶ Carson, 517-18.

⁶⁹⁷ John Wescott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 201.

and become “aligned with the will and purpose of God in Christ.”⁶⁹⁸ Thus such prayers will always be answered, as 1 John 5:14 (NIV) says: “if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” For such petitions are made with a desire to “bear much fruit” so that the “Father is glorified” (v. 8).

v. 8 *My Father is glorified in that you bear much fruit and you become my disciples.*

The requests in v. 7 can be interpreted in light of v. 8: they are requests associated with bearing fruit and becoming disciples; in v. 16 also, the requests involves fruit-bearing.⁶⁹⁹ Genuine discipleship is shown by bearing much fruit, so “bearing much fruit” and “becoming my disciples” cannot be separated from each other; one is the consequence of the other.⁷⁰⁰ In the believers’ fruit-bearing the Father is glorified and the believers become true followers of Jesus.⁷⁰¹ And becoming Jesus’ disciples involves love of Jesus (vv. 9-10) and love of one another (vv. 12-17).

The text, however, does not imply that the believers glorify the Father directly by their actions.⁷⁰² It says that the believers can do nothing by themselves; but if they remain in Jesus, then (the Spirit of) Jesus bears fruit *through them*. This may be why the good deeds of the Christians are called “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22) and our passage emphasizes that the believers “can do nothing apart from Jesus.” Just as the branches cannot bear fruit by themselves apart from the vine, Christians cannot do good works by themselves as if they have their own “inherent righteousness.” But when they remain faithful and obedient to Christ, the Spirit of Christ who indwells them enables (or

⁶⁹⁸ Borchert, 145.

⁶⁹⁹ Brown, 680.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 662-63.

⁷⁰¹ Beasley-Murray, 273.

⁷⁰² Borchert, 146.

empowers) them to bear fruit – or we can say that *the Spirit bears fruit through the believers*, that is, *using them as instruments* (we should not, however, view humans like inanimate tools, for humans have free will – unlike inanimate tools).

This understanding of the role of the Christians as instruments of God or of the Holy Spirit is based on the Scripture. In the book of Acts, the risen Christ, who met Saul (Paul) on the way to Damascus, speaks about Saul: “This man is my chosen *instrument* to carry my name before the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15). The author of the book likewise records that Paul and Barnabas, when they returned from their first missionary trip, reported to the church “all that *God had done through them*” (Acts 14:27; also see 15:4, 12). We also recall that the book of Acts, which is traditionally known as “The Acts of the Apostles,” is sometimes called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in what the apostles seem to have done.

Luke characteristically stresses the Holy Spirit’s work and his enabling power (Luke 1:35; 2:25-27; 3:16; 4:14, 18; 11:13; 12:12; Acts 1:8; 2:4, 17; 4:8, 31; 5:3; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 8:16; 9:17, 31; 10:44; 13:2, 4; 15:28; 16:6; 19:2, 6). We read that the Lord *enabled the apostles* to do miraculous signs and wonders – that is, God did the miracles through them (Acts 19:11) – to confirm the message the apostles delivered (Acts 14:3; cf. 19:11). In other texts we hear that the apostles performed various works while they were *filled with the Holy Spirit* (e.g., Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9; cf. 6:10; 9:17), that is, while they were *under the full control of the Holy Spirit*; this means that the Holy Spirit used them as his instruments to do various works he wanted them to do.

Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who does the work through the believers, for believers “cannot bear fruit” by themselves (vv. 4, 5), just as instruments cannot do any

work by themselves. This is why Jesus told the disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV). So Jesus told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5, 8), for otherwise they would not have the power to do good works, as Jesus teaches in our passage.

Here we note that “Christian” works, which are done by the Holy Spirit, are to be distinguished from the “works of law” (Rom 3:28), which are done by humans apart from the Spirit of Jesus – since the Holy Spirit does not dwell in non-Christians. This is exactly why Christians cannot boast about good works as if they were done by themselves. When Peter and John healed a crippled man at a temple gate, Peter addressed the people, “Men of Israel, . . . why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” (Acts 3:12 NRSV).

vv. 9-10 *Just as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.* The Father’s love for Jesus is the basis of Jesus’ love for his disciples.⁷⁰³ *remain in my love . . . If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.* Verse 10 tells how Christians can remain in Jesus and in his love: when they obey Jesus’ commands, they will remain in his love. To remain in Jesus is related to remaining in his love. The last line in v. 9, “remain in my love,” demands the disciples to respond to Jesus’ love for them.⁷⁰⁴ Without obeying Jesus’ commands, the disciples cannot remain in Jesus’ love. So the tendency of Protestants’ deemphasizing “works” for salvation is dangerous. Remaining in Jesus’ love means “rejoicing in its reality, depending on its support and . . . engaging in that which

⁷⁰³ Brown, 663.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 681.

delights [Jesus]”; then, remaining in Jesus’ love further entails keeping his commands, as he has kept his Father’s commands and remains in his love.⁷⁰⁵ Jesus’ obedience to his Father was completed by his yielding his life on the cross.

Remaining in Jesus’ love and obeying his commands are so inseparably related that we cannot have one without the other.⁷⁰⁶ Barrett observes: “. . .love and obedience are mutually dependent. Love arises out of obedience, obedience out of love.”⁷⁰⁷ In other words, our obedience is the demonstration of our love for Jesus.⁷⁰⁸ Likewise, our obedience is the demonstration of our faith in Jesus. Moreover, this relationship of love and obedience between Jesus and the disciples is patterned after the relationship between the Father and the Son (v. 10).

4.2.4 Summary

In this passage Jesus continues his farewell address and admonishes the disciples to abide in him and bear fruit. Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe the disciples’ relationship to Jesus. This relationship is characterized by love and obedience. The vine imagery symbolizes how the life of the Christian community is shaped by love and maintained by the abiding presence of Jesus in the Christian community.

The main point of this passage is that Christians “can do nothing apart from [Jesus],” so the disciples must “remain in [Jesus] to bear fruit.” This passage teaches the “total depravity” of human beings when they are separated from Jesus, the true vine.

⁷⁰⁵ Beasley-Murray, 273.

⁷⁰⁶ Borchert, 146.

⁷⁰⁷ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 397.

⁷⁰⁸ Carson, 520.

Even the disciples who are “already clean” (v. 2; cf. 13:10) cannot do anything apart from Jesus. This text therefore does not support the doctrine of “inherent righteousness of the justified.” However, when the disciples remain in Christ, they are empowered by the Spirit to bear fruit.

4.2.5 Theological reflection

First, vv. 1, 2 and 6 teach that those Christians who do not bear good fruit are not genuine Christians (cf. “true vine”). They do not belong to Christ and therefore will be cut off from Jesus the vine (cf. Rom 11:21), become withered, and be thrown into the fire of judgment. Jesus addresses those who are in him but may fail to bear fruit or to remain in him (“every branch *in me* that does not bear fruit” in v. 2; cf. the Parable of the Sower in Matt 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8); these texts warn those who joyfully accept the word in the beginning but eventually fail to persevere and bear fruit (see the Parable of the Sower), which is required to pass the final judgment (see § 3.2.2, which discusses the final judgment that will be based on works or on bearing fruit). Our passage, along with these other texts, refutes the so-called “assurance of salvation,” which claims that once a person becomes a believer, he or she will be finally saved. The belief in the traditional “assurance of salvation” will certainly mislead many Christians into complacency and will eventually destroy them. Final salvation is not guaranteed to all who are in Christ (cf. “every branch in me” in v. 2), that is, to all who were “initially justified”⁷⁰⁹: some will fail to remain in Jesus, while others will persevere – so the warnings of Jesus in this passage and in other texts. Based on our passage, we can modify the traditional Protestant understanding of the “assurance of salvation” as follows: If we remain in Jesus until we

⁷⁰⁹ For the definition of “initial justification” (cf. “final justification”), see my discussion in the § 3.2.2.2.

finish the race of faith, we will certainly be finally saved.⁷¹⁰ The final salvation is not an unconditional promise.

Second, v. 2, together with Matt 7:15-23 (A tree and its fruit; cf. Luke 13:6-9) and Matt 25:31-46 (The sheep and the goats), tells the criterion that Jesus will use to judge who authentic disciples of Christ are: Do they bear good fruit? Jesus says in Matt 7:20, “You will know them by their fruit,” and then declares, “Not everyone who *says* to me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21).⁷¹¹ Because Jesus is the true vine that produces fruit (unlike the vine of Israel), those who do not bear fruit do not belong to Jesus and are therefore cut off. For true Christians are to bear fruit. This is in harmony with those texts that teach the final judgment based on works (see § 3.2.2).

Third, as discussed above, v. 3 (“You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”) does not mean that the disciples were merely “declared” clean or declared “righteous” even though they still remain sinners in nature. Therefore, this text refutes the traditional Lutheran teaching that the justified are declared righteous but are still sinners in nature (*simul iustus et peccator*). As long as they are attached to Jesus the vine, Christians are no longer sinful but “clean” (even though they are still liable to sin) and they can bear good fruit. It is only when they fail to remain in Christ that Christians return to their original state of sinful nature. The mysterious nature of the believers in

⁷¹⁰ Near the end of his faith journey Paul says in 2 Tim 4:6-8 (NIV): “. . . the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” He could say this only near the end of his life (cf. “I have finished the race”); while still in a race, Paul said that he beat his body to make it his slave so that he may “not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor 9:24-27; cf. Phil 3:10-14), and urges Christians to “continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

⁷¹¹ This verse contrasts “saying” with “doing.”

Christ and their relationship with Jesus are described nowhere as eloquently as in this imagery of the vine and the branches.

Fourth, vv. 4-5 dispute the Catholic doctrine of “inherent righteousness of the justified.” The justified, like the branches attached to the vine, do not possess in themselves life or power to bear fruit; they cannot do good works without the enabling power of the Spirit of Jesus. This is why the good deeds of the Christians are the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). The justified are not “inherently” good or righteous, since the goodness or righteousness that bears good fruit comes from Jesus the vine. The goodness is possessed by the Spirit of Jesus who dwells in the believers, so it seems to be possessed by the justified themselves. But, accurately speaking, the Holy Spirit is independent of the believers even though he indwells them, as our passage clearly distinguishes the branches (the believers) from the vine (Jesus). Therefore, after doing an in-depth study of this passage, one would be very reluctant to say that the justified possess righteousness or goodness “inherently.” We recall that even Jesus refused to be called “Good Teacher” and replied to the rich young man, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:17-18 and Luke 18:18-19, in both RSV and NRSV), probably because the “Incarnate” Son was indeed no longer “inherently” good.⁷¹²

Fifth, as discussed above, the human condition of the justified Christians can be characterized neither by *simul iustus et peccator* nor by “inherent righteousness.” Even after conversion or being justified, depending on whether they remain in Jesus or not – or depending on whether they are controlled by his Spirit or not – Christians can live as the children of God or like “sinners.” Therefore they are never free from the struggle with

⁷¹² This is my own interpretation of the texts. The parallel text in Matt 19:16-17 omits the word “Good”: the young man calls Jesus simply, “Teacher,” and Jesus replies, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good” (NRSV).

their sinful desires as long as they live in this world (However, one difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that a Christian is given the gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore can overcome the sinful desires and win the struggle in Christ, while a non-Christian is not given the ability or possibility). This is why Paul laments in Rom 7:7-25 that he does not do what he wants to do but what he hates he does; and he has the desire to do what is good, but he cannot carry it out (Rom 7:16-18).⁷¹³ In this text of describing human struggle against the sinful nature Paul expresses the human condition very well: in his inner being he delights in God's law, but he sees another law at work in his body, waging war against the law of God. From this dilemma only Jesus Christ can rescue him (Rom 7:24-25). Thus, right after 7:24-25, Paul talks about "Life through the Spirit" (8:1ff), for only the Spirit of Jesus can rescue us from the dilemma. Paul's description of human condition is not far from that of John 15:1-10: the human condition of the justified is in the state of "concupiscence" or being liable to sin, but Christians can overcome it. Scientifically speaking, the justified Christians are in an *unstable* state: they can fall away any time from God's grace and fall into sin, temporarily or permanently (contra the traditional doctrine of predestination and "assurance of salvation") – not because God is unreliable, but because humans are unreliable; they are inherently weak and unstable (God created "humans," not "gods"). God is always faithful, but humans are not. This is why Jesus admonishes his disciples to remain in him, and Paul urges Christians to "not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4 NIV).⁷¹⁴ For

⁷¹³ Whether Paul is here describing a Christian or non-Christian experience has been hotly debated over the centuries, but this text seems to apply even to a Christian because a Christian certainly falls to sin from time to time and therefore have to constantly struggle against the power of sin, as no one can deny.

⁷¹⁴ In this struggle for remaining in Jesus and in God's grace humans learn to seek God and depend on him, from which a loving relationship develops between God and humans; this may be why God created humans inherently weak and unstable, and at the same time having hearts yearning for the divine being.

Christians have both possibilities: if they are controlled by the sinful nature, they will die; but if they are controlled by the Spirit they will live (Rom 8:9-14). In this sense remaining in Jesus means being filled with or controlled by the Spirit. Paul's main point here is that human beings are too weak to control their sinful desires, but the Spirit of Jesus is stronger than the sinful desires and can overcome them; we must therefore be filled with and controlled by the Spirit (Rom 8:6) to win the battle.

Sixth, since believers cannot bear fruit or do any good work independently – apart from Jesus (that is, without the enabling power of the Spirit of Jesus), they are like instruments, which cannot do any work by themselves. This then means that God carries out good works using them as his instruments, just as Jesus called Paul “my chosen instrument” (Acts 9:15) and Paul urged Christians to offer themselves to God as “instruments of righteousness” (Rom 6:13), even though one must acknowledge that humans are, unlike inanimate tools, animate instruments with some free will at their disposal. Therefore, it is not that Christians do good works through God or “through the grace of God” (see § 3.2.2.1) but that God does good works through Christians, just as the vine bears fruit through the branches and not the branches through the vine or through the vinedresser; the primary actor is (the Spirit of) God, and not the believers, who are God's instruments and cannot do any work by themselves.

Seventh, vv. 7-8 teach the importance of Jesus'/God's words and our prayers for bearing fruit, and answer the question of how Christians can actually remain in Jesus: they can remain in Jesus by remaining in his words and by praying to God according to his will, which is expressed in his words (i.e., the Scriptures). Therefore Christians need to maintain a devotional life of studying and meditating on the word of God and of

praying (cf. Josh 1:7-8, in which God instructs Joshua to meditate on the Book of Law day and night that he may obey all the law and be successful). It is in this sense that Christians can *indirectly contribute* to the Holy Spirit's producing good works: when they remain in Jesus' words and pray in accordance to his words, they will be filled with the Spirit and the Spirit will bear much fruit through them.

So the answer to the question, "How can we remain in Jesus?" teaches us the *human role and responsibility* in bearing fruit. As God the vinedresser and Jesus the vine bear fruit through the branches and not the branches through the vine or through the vinedresser, God performs miracles and do good works through Christians and not Christians through God or "through the grace of God" (as the Catholic formula reads; see the discussion in § 3.2.2.1). In other words, God bears fruit by *using Christians as his instruments* – when they remain in Jesus and are filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is where we can locate the *role of humans* in God's producing good fruit in and through them: *Christians are God's instruments through whom God desires to bear much fruit*; the main character or the primary actor is (the Spirit of) God and not the believers, who are God's instruments.

However, humans are not like inanimate tools; they are animate instruments with free will, which they can use for God's purpose or for their sinful desires (Rom 6:13).⁷¹⁵ Therefore, one of the *human responsibilities* in the Spirit's bearing fruit is to submit their will for God's purpose, just as Jesus surrendered his human desires at Gethsemane to follow the will of God; and this is where prayer plays a role in producing good works and

⁷¹⁵ Paul uses the words, "instruments of wickedness" and "instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:13); and sometimes the words, "slaves to sin" and "slaves to righteousness" (Rom 6:17-18; 7:14) or "slaves to God" (Rom 6:22) – depending on whether we are controlled by sinful desires or by the Spirit. In other places he uses the phrases, "controlled by the sinful nature" and "controlled by the Spirit" (Rom 8:6, 9); and "according to the sinful nature" and "according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4, 5).

why Christians have the responsibility to pray for God's will to be done through them. Besides, humans have certain God-given abilities and therefore the responsibility to develop their God-given talents and improve their own quality so that they may be prepared as good (and not mediocre) instruments for God. In 2 Tim 2:21 the author of the letter encourages Timothy to "be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work." This takes a constant learning and "pruning," and this is why God "cleanses" his own children (v. 2) by disciplining them, as a human father disciplines his children (Heb 12:4-11).

4.3 Justification and Good Works

The doctrine of justification is based on Paul's thesis in Rom 3:21-31: a person is "justified by faith apart from works of law" (3:28). In this part of the dissertation, this central message of Paul's Epistle to the Romans will be interpreted in harmony with other Pauline texts and John 15:1-10 in order to answer the controversial question concerning the place of good works in human salvation.

Luther called this passage (3:21-31) "the chief point . . . of the whole Bible," because it shows what Luther thought was the heart of the Bible: justification by faith.⁷¹⁶ Luther believed that this "article" is vital for the church: "If this article stands, the church stands; if it falls, the church falls."⁷¹⁷ In the sixteenth century, "justification by faith" was a polemical thrust against a Roman Catholic teaching that insisted on the place of human cooperation in justification.

⁷¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 242.

⁷¹⁷ Luther's exposition of Ps 130:4.

4.3.1 Righteousness through faith (Rom 3:21-31 NRSV) ⁷¹⁸

21. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,
22. the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction [or: difference],
23. since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
24. they are now justified by his grace as a gift [or: justified freely by his grace], through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
25. whom God put forward [or: presented] as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness [or: justice], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over [or: left unpunished] the sins previously committed;
26. it was to prove [or: demonstrate] at the present time that he himself is righteous [or: just] and that he justifies the one who has [or: and the one who justifies those who have] faith in Jesus.
27. Then what becomes of boasting? [or: Where, then, is boasting?] It is excluded. By what law? [or: On what principle?] By that of works [or: On that of observing the law]? No, but by the law of faith [or: No, but on that of faith].
28. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law [or: apart from observing the law; apart from works of law].⁷¹⁹
29. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,
30. since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.
31. Do we then overthrow [or: nullify] the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

4.3.2 Literary context

In 1:18-3:20 Paul makes a charge that all human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners: all sinned and no one is righteous, for Gentiles sinned apart from the law and Jews broke the law. Therefore, Jews and Gentiles are all under sin (3:9) and no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (3:20).

⁷¹⁸ The text is from the NRSV, with some of the alternative translations given in the [].

⁷¹⁹ The first alternative translation in the [] is from the NIV, and the second is from the RSV.

Thus after demonstrating the need for a new way to salvation, in 3:21-31 Paul proclaims “the righteousness from God apart from the law,” that is, the “righteousness through faith.” In chapter 4, Paul defends his thesis (a person is “justified by faith apart from works of law”) from the example of Abraham: Abraham was justified by faith apart from works of law. Faith is the focus of this chapter. Then in the following chapters, Paul states how those justified through faith should live in order to overcome the power of sin and live a holy life that leads to the promised glory.

4.3.3 Analysis⁷²⁰

v. 21 *But now*. This contrasts two eras in salvation history. Rom 1:18-3:20 describes the human condition of the old era of sin’s domination, but now God has inaugurated a new era of grace and salvation, in which all who respond in faith will be saved.⁷²¹ We can say that Paul contrasts “the new way of the Spirit” (new covenant) to “the old way of the written code” (old covenant). [This will help distinguish “works of law” (3:28) from “Christian” works or “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22).]

The righteousness of God. “Righteousness of God” means the same here as in Rom 1:17: “the justifying activity of God.” As “the wrath of God” dominated the old era (1:18), so the “righteousness of God” dominates the new.⁷²² Cranfield says that “righteousness of God” means a status of righteousness before God which is God’s gift.⁷²³

⁷²⁰ In the beginning of his commentary on this passage, Moo introduces “the new perspective on Paul,” but he argues against the validity of the claims of “the new perspective” scholars (Moo, 211-17).

⁷²¹ Moo, 221.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁷²³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 202.

apart from the law. This may mean “apart from doing the law”⁷²⁴ or “without any recourse to ‘deeds prescribed by the law.’”⁷²⁵ What it means is that since the law has failed to rescue Jews from the power of sin because obedience to its demands to the extent necessary for justification has not been – and cannot be – forthcoming, God’s righteousness is now attained through faith in Jesus, without “works of law.”⁷²⁶ Cranfield cautions that this does not mean that the law was superseded by the gospel and is irrelevant now.⁷²⁷ “Law” refers to the “Mosaic covenant,” which was “set up between God and his people to regulate their lives and reveal their sin” until the promise in Christ comes to pass. But Paul balances the discontinuity in salvation history with a reminder of its continuity by saying that this new way to salvation is attested by the law and the prophets, that is, the whole OT (Old Testament).⁷²⁸

vv. 22-23 *through faith in Jesus Christ*. According to Fitzmyer, the literal translation of this phrase is “through the faith of Jesus Christ.”⁷²⁹ Thus some modern scholars interpret this as “through the faith *of* Jesus,” that is, God’s righteousness is attained through the faith or faithfulness of Jesus. Such interpreters appeal to 3:3 (“the faithfulness of God”) and 4:12, 16 (“the faith of Abraham”), where there is mention of the faith *of* an individual, not faith *in* an individual.⁷³⁰ Fitzmyer and Moo reject this alternative interpretation, especially because the Greek word πιστις is consistently used throughout

⁷²⁴ Moo, 222.

⁷²⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 344.

⁷²⁶ Moo, 222-23.

⁷²⁷ Cranfield, 201.

⁷²⁸ Moo, 223.

⁷²⁹ Fitzmyer, 345.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

3:21-4:25 to designate the faith exercised by people in God or Christ, as the sole means of justification.⁷³¹

for all who believe. For there is no distinction. God's righteousness is available only through faith in Jesus but to anyone who has faith in Christ. "The opportunity is given equally to all humanity."⁷³² "There is no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles, because all have sinned and are falling short of the glory of God. Sharing in God's glory involves conformity to the "image of Christ" (Rom 8:29-30; Phil 3:21), so Paul suggests that all people failed to exhibit that "being-like-God," for which they were created.⁷³³ Cranfield says that all people here include all believers, who still lack this "glory of God."⁷³⁴

v. 24 *justified freely by his grace.* Fitzmyer interprets this as follows: they are "made upright (in status)" gratuitously through God's declaration of acquittal. Now human beings find that "this status is not achieved by something within their own power or measured by their own merits"; but it comes to humanity "through an unmerited dispensation of God himself." He says, "The sinful human being is not only declared

⁷³¹ Moo, 224-25; cf. Fitzmyer, 345. For the interpretation of πιστεως Ιησου Χριστω, one can argue in support of "faith *in* Jesus" over "faith *of* Jesus" as follows: In this debate a grammatical criticism will not be as fruitful as a literary criticism, for grammatically both interpretations are possible. In a literary criticism, one needs to interpret a biblical passage in its immediate and larger literary contexts. Then what we observe is that Paul, in support of his thesis in Rom 3:21-31, uses Abraham's example in ch. 4. And since this story of Abraham emphasizes Abraham's faith *in* God in contrast to his works, it makes more sense that we interpret Paul's thesis in 3:21-31 as "one is justified by faith *in* Jesus and not by works (of law)." Therefore, "faith *of* Jesus" does not seem to be a good interpretation, even though it is nothing wrong apart from its literary context. Besides, the alternative interpretation will invalidate the ecumenical debates and the *Joint Declaration*, which are based on the premise that what Paul meant in his thesis is that one is justified by faith *in* Jesus and not by works.

⁷³² Fitzmyer, 346.

⁷³³ Moo, 226.

⁷³⁴ Cranfield, 204.

upright, but is ‘made upright’” (as in 5:19), for the sinner’s condition has changed.”⁷³⁵ On the other hand, Moo says: As Paul uses the verb “justify” (δικαιόω) in his distinctive understanding of Christian salvation, the verb means not “to make righteous” (in an ethical sense) nor simply “to treat as righteous” (though one is really not righteous), but “to declare righteous.” “To be justified” means “to be acquitted by God from all ‘charges’ that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins.”⁷³⁶

Paul also emphasizes the gift character of this justifying verdict: we are “justified freely by his grace.” God’s justifying verdict is totally unmerited. People can do nothing to earn it. This belief is the basis for his conviction that justification can never be attained through works, but only through faith. That justification is a matter of grace on God’s side means that it is a matter of faith on the human side.⁷³⁷

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. “Redemption” means “liberation through payment of a price.” Even though justification was given to humans “freely by his grace,” it was costly on the part of God because he had to sacrifice his own son. Paul is presenting Jesus’ death as a “ransom” that takes the place of the penalty of sins owed by all people to God.⁷³⁸

vv. 25-26 *sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.* “By his blood” means by means of the shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross or by the “pouring out of that which signified his life.”⁷³⁹ “Effective through faith” modifies “atonement” and

⁷³⁵ Fitzmyer, 347.

⁷³⁶ Moo, 227.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 228.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 229.

⁷³⁹ Fitzmyer, 348.

indicates the means by which people appropriate the benefits of the sacrifice.⁷⁴⁰ It is crucial to Paul's argument that people can share in the benefits only "through faith."⁷⁴¹

He did this to show his righteousness [or: justice], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed. What Paul means by this sentence is disputed, the pivotal issue being the meaning of "his righteousness" in this verse. There are two general approaches. The first interprets "his righteousness" as his "justice" or his impartiality and fairness. The whole sentence then means: God set forth Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement in order to demonstrate that God is just in passing over sins committed before. The second takes "his righteousness" as God's saving, covenant faithfulness, so the sentence meaning: God set forth Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement in order to manifest his saving faithfulness through forgiving sins committed before. While most contemporary scholars prefer the second view, Moo prefers the first.⁷⁴² Fitzmyer agrees with Moo: The death of Jesus on the cross displays and makes known the upright or just character of God.⁷⁴³ Cranfield is also with Fitzmyer and Moo: the death of Jesus was also meant to prove God's own righteousness which would be called into question by his passing over sins that deserve punishment, for God to have forgiven human sins lightly – "a cheap forgiveness would have implied that moral evil does not matter very much – would have been altogether unrighteous."⁷⁴⁴ One can say that in the death of Jesus on the cross God displayed his fundamental character of love and justice.

prove . . . that he himself is righteous[or: just] and that he justifies the one who has faith. If we choose the first interpretation above, this means that the sacrifice of Jesus

⁷⁴⁰ Moo, 229.

⁷⁴¹ Fitzmyer, 350; also see Cranfield, 210.

⁷⁴² Moo, 237-40.

⁷⁴³ Fitzmyer, 351.

⁷⁴⁴ Cranfield, 211-14.

enabled God to maintain his righteous [or: just] character in postponing punishment of sins in the past and at the same time preserved God's saving faithfulness for those who have faith in Jesus. Paul's point is that God could maintain his righteous character even while he acted to justify sinful people.⁷⁴⁵

vv. 27-28 *Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. . . . a person is justified by faith apart from works of law.* Paul's question recalls 2:17, which talks about Jews who rely on the law and boasts about their relation to God.⁷⁴⁶ It affirms that all glorying, that is, all thinking to establish a claim in God on the ground of one's works, has been ruled out.⁷⁴⁷ Paul's exclusion of boasting rests on a contrast between "works" and "faith": everything in the new age comes from God's grace and depends on faith, so this excludes all dependence on one's own merits or striving and thus all boasting.⁷⁴⁸

As in v. 20, what is meant by "works of law" is not certain kind of works, but any work a person does.⁷⁴⁹ Then Luther's famous addition of *sola* ("alone") to *fide* ("faith") – in which he was preceded by others, including Thomas Aquinas⁷⁵⁰ – brings out the true sense intended by Paul.⁷⁵¹ Fitzmyer says that it is important to recognize that the effects of the Christ-event are appropriated through faith in Christ Jesus, and only through

⁷⁴⁵ Moo, 240.

⁷⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, 362.

⁷⁴⁷ Cranfield, 218.

⁷⁴⁸ Fitzmyer, 359, 363.

⁷⁴⁹ Moo, 247-50.

⁷⁵⁰ According to Fitzmyer, others who added the "alone" here include Origin, Theodoret, Hilary, Basil, Ambrosiaster, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Bernard, and Theophylact (Fitzmyer, 360-61).

⁷⁵¹ Moo, 250-51.

faith.⁷⁵² He says that Paul's emphasis on "by faith" and the qualification "apart from deeds of (the) law" show that in this context Paul means "by faith alone."⁷⁵³

Fitzmyer comments: By "works of law," Paul is not speaking about deeds that are the fruit of Christian faith. He never denied the relation of deeds performed after Christian conversion to salvation (see 2:6; Gal 5:6; Phil 2:12-13). Yet for him such deeds were the fruit of "faith working itself out through love" (Gal 5:6). Such love would lead to deeds, and the wellspring of that love is Christian faith itself, faith in its fullest sense.⁷⁵⁴

vv. 29-30 *Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.* If justification is by works of the law, only those in the law can be justified, and then God becomes the God of Jews only. Paul rejects this possibility.⁷⁵⁵ He thus asserts not only that the same God justifies both Jews and Gentiles, but also that he is "one."⁷⁵⁶ "God is one" was confessed everyday by the pious Jew: "The Lord our God is one" (Deut 6:4).

v. 31 *Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.* By emphasizing faith alone to the exclusion of "works of law" in justification (v. 28), Paul could be questioned, "Do you then nullify the law?" To this question, Paul answers emphatically, "Not at all!" (cf. Matt 5:17). How can he answer like this? Among the possibilities, Moo thinks the best answer may be that Paul is thinking of the way in which our faith in Christ provides for the full satisfaction of the demands of the law. Moo says

⁷⁵² Fitzmyer, 342.

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 363.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 364.

⁷⁵⁵ Moo, 251.

⁷⁵⁶ Fitzmyer, 365.

that the brevity of Paul's assertion and the lack of any immediate explanation make a decision difficult, but the stress on *faith* as establishing the law suggests that law is fulfilled in and through our faith in Christ. Then he says that in 8:4 ("so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit") Paul argues that those who are in Christ and "who walk according to the Spirit" have fulfilled the law "in them," in the sense that "their relationship to Christ by faith fully meets the demands of God's law." He says that while he cannot be certain, "it is likely that Paul means essentially the same thing here."⁷⁵⁷ He does not, however, explain *how* people with a right relationship with Christ fully meet the demands of God's law.

Fitzmyer has a different approach to the problem. He says: Paul does not fully answer the objection; but he will come back to the topic and will show that "faith working itself out through love" (Gal 5:6) enables a human being to fulfill the law, because "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10). This love is the fruit of faith itself, and so through faith the law is fulfilled; it is not nullified.⁷⁵⁸ One may agree with Fitzmyer that love is the fruit of faith, but he does not explain why love does not belong to the works that Paul rejects as a way to justification. On the other hand, Cranfield does not offer any proper solution to this problem.

The question of Paul's is a serious one that deserves a good, clear answer. Moo's interpretation is in line with what one can find from the exposition of John 15:1-10 (see § 4.2). The key to interpreting v. 31 seems to be in understanding *the role of the Spirit as the fruit-bearer for us*, when we remain in the right relationship with Christ. Romans

⁷⁵⁷ Moo, 253-55.

⁷⁵⁸ Fitzmyer, 366.

ch. 8 speaks about “Life through the Spirit” – that is, when they live according to the Spirit, the Spirit empowers Christians to live a life holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1) that leads to eternal life. The Holy Spirit, who was given to us the believers as a gift and indwells us, fulfills the requirements of the law by carrying out good works according to the will of God, while we cannot do them by ourselves (and so justification is not by “[human] works” or by what humans can do by themselves apart from the Spirit of Jesus). As a result, “justification by faith” does not nullify the law, but it upholds the law by fulfilling the demands prescribed by the law. Here we are reminded of what Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17 NIV).

Fitzmyer makes the following general comments on the relation between this passage and Jas 2:24 (“You see that a human being is justified by deeds, and not by faith alone”): Paul is speaking about “deeds of the law” (Jewish deeds in observance of the Mosaic law), whereas James is referring to “deeds” that flowed from faith (Christian deeds). Again, James uses a restricted and narrow sense of faith, meaning an intellectual assent to monotheism (2:19b), while Paul has a broader sense of faith.⁷⁵⁹

One can also harmonize Paul and James as follows: Paul rejects “works of law” but not Christian deeds. If Paul meant the genuine faith – that is, faith accompanied by Christian deeds – when he claimed that “one is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28), then it means that one is justified by faith that is accompanied by deeds, and not merely by intellectual agreement without deeds. This then means in effect that one is justified by faith and deeds (that come from faith), as James claims in Jas 2:24.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 361.

At the end of his comments on 3:21-27 Moo makes the following remarks:

Despite important and welcome moves toward reconciliation between Protestants and Roman Catholics, the division between the two groups over justification remains. In an age that minimizes doctrine, there is a danger that this difference will be too easily swept under the carpet. But it is a significant one, affecting one's understanding of salvation, the sacraments, assurance, and other matters both doctrinal and practical.⁷⁶⁰

4.3.4 Theological reflection

Paul's thesis, "we are justified by grace through faith apart from works of law," dismisses "works-righteousness" or *human efforts* of trying to earn salvation through observing the law, but it does not reject the "law" or "observing the law" itself; Paul simply proclaims the futility of human efforts in trying to earn their salvation apart from the enabling power of the Spirit of God (Compare the old and the new covenants).

Paul says that the law is good (7:12-16) and claims that "justification by faith" does not nullify the law at all but upholds it (3:31) and that those who live according to the Spirit fulfill "the requirements of the law" (8:4). This reminds us of Jesus' declaration that he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). The question is *how* "justification by faith" upholds and fulfills the law. The key to answering this question seems to be in recognizing the role of the Holy Spirit that was promised in the new covenant and is given to those who believe in Jesus so that they would be enabled to keep the law; the Spirit in them carries out the good works required by the law, which they cannot do with their own power – and this is exactly what the OT new covenant texts proclaim (see, for example, Eze 36:27; cf. Eze 37:14; 39:29).

⁷⁶⁰ Moo, 243.

Therefore, Paul is proclaiming in this passage not something unheard of but the new covenant promised in the Old Testament, which supersedes the old covenant.

One can also argue that “justification by faith” upholds the law, because the genuine faith is always accompanied by “the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom 1:5). “Justification by faith” is then compatible with Jas 2:24 (NRSV): “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” We know that Paul does not reject Christian works; “Christian” works – that is, “the fruit of the Spirit” – are indeed required for justification (cf. “cheap” grace). Therefore, the Lutheran doctrine of justification should not have excluded from the requirements for justification “all works,” but only “human works” or human endeavor of trying to earn salvation by their own power apart from the Spirit. When asked by a lawyer, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25), Jesus responded by telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan and then said at the end, “Go and *do likewise*.” This story teaches us that it takes good deeds to inherit eternal life, that is, to attain the final justification.

We recall that the central message of the OT new covenant texts is the promise of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31-34; Eze 11:19-20; 36:26-27; cf. 2 Cor 3:6). God promises to put his Spirit into the hearts of his people, because Israelites failed to keep the written law by their human efforts: “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Eze 36:27). This is why the Holy Spirit is the best gift of God (cf. Luke 11:13) that enables Christians to keep Jesus’ commands. By contrasting the new with the old covenant we can distinguish “Christian” works from “works of law”: “Christian” works are “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22) or works done by the Spirit through Christians, while “works of law” are works done by non-Christian Jews

(who do not have the indwelling Spirit) in their efforts to satisfy the demands of the law and earn salvation. Therefore Paul dismisses the “works of law” but not “Christian” works. For without good works or without bearing good fruit, one does not even belong to Jesus the vine any longer (John 15:2). As a matter of fact, throughout his epistles Paul urges Christians to do good works. Besides, when Paul speaks of “justification by faith,” we know that the genuine faith cannot exist apart from good works that come from faith (Rom 1:5).

One may find the right place for good works in justification from somewhere in between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic positions: good works are required for salvation (contra the Lutheran teaching); however, the required good works are carried out by the Holy Spirit, and not by Christians (contra the Catholic doctrine). Christians, as God’s instruments for the Spirit’s work, participate in the Spirit’s work as his instruments and thus have the responsibility to prepare themselves as good instruments for God and also to make themselves available for God’s use – by yielding their human will to the will of the Spirit, so that the Spirit may use them as he wants. Humans do not merely receive God’s saving grace in Christ, but as instruments for God’s work they *participate* (but not *cooperate* as “equal” partners of God) in the process of justification or salvation. This approach to the question of the place of good works in justification will alleviate the concerns of both sides: Lutheran concern about the Catholic teaching of human “cooperation” with God; and Catholic concern about the possible neglect of human responsibility by the Lutheran teaching.

4.4 Summary

Based on the exegesis and theological reflection of John 15:1-10 and Rom 3:21-31, we can make the following theological statements on the doctrine of justification, which harmonize the biblical data that have been discussed:

First, to avoid continued confusion and misunderstanding of the word “justification” and to advance theological dialogues without hindrance, we need to divide the whole process of salvation into three distinct but inseparable stages: *initial justification, sanctification, and final justification*. This division is biblical, because the Scripture also uses the words “have been justified” (Rom 5:1, 9; cf. 8:30) or “have been saved” (Rom 8:24, Eph 2:5, 8; 2 Tim 1:9); “being saved” (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15); and “will be saved” (Matt 10:12; Rom 5:9, 10; 9:27; 10:9), which correspond respectively to initial justification, sanctification, and final justification.

Second, we can then say that *initial justification is an unconditional event*: it is totally by the grace of God and on account of Christ (*propter Christum*), because the sinners can do nothing to bring about the forgiveness of their past sins. Human works do not contribute in any way to initial justification, as both Lutherans and Catholics would agree.

Third, Christians cannot bear good fruit by themselves, because they are not “inherently good” (contra the Catholic doctrine). Neither can the human condition of the justified be rightly described by the Lutheran concept of *simul iustus et peccator*, for the justified can no longer be characterized as sinners as they were before justification (cf. “You are already clean,” in John 15:3): as long as they remain in Christ, the Holy Spirit,

given to Christians as a gift, keeps them “clean” (though they are not perfect or sinless⁷⁶¹) and use them as “righteous instruments” (Rom 8:4), bearing good fruit through them.

Fourth, Paul dismisses “works of law,” which are “human” efforts of unsuccessfully trying to satisfy the demands of the law and earn salvation. But throughout the Epistle to the Romans Paul urges Christians to do good works and live as good Christians, so he never rejected “Christian” works, which are “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22) and fulfill the requirements of the law (Rom 8:4). We recall the OT new covenant texts (e.g., Eze 11:19-20), in which God promises to put his Spirit in the people’s hearts, instead of the written code of the old covenant, so that they may be able to keep the law by the power of the Spirit. This Spirit is given to Christians, who are the people of the new covenant.

Fifth, once justified by God’s grace on account of Jesus, Christians should live a life that responds to the grace of God in Christ and *participate as animate instruments* in the Spirit’s work. Such a life will certainly lead to the sanctification of the justified and will produce “the fruit of the Spirit,” which the Holy Spirit indwelling the Christians bears in and through them – using them as God’s instruments.

Sixth, with an understanding that “Christian” works are works done by the Spirit – unlike “works of law,” which are works done by humans apart from the Spirit of Jesus – we can say that *the final justification is conditional*, depending on bearing fruit or producing “Christian” works (vs. “cheap” grace). Catholics will readily accept this proposal, while Lutherans may be reluctant to. But if Lutherans reject this proposal, they will have to prove the biblical texts wrong that teach “the final judgment based on deeds”

⁷⁶¹ This is because the justified, unlike Jesus, are seldom filled fully with or controlled completely (i.e., 100 %) by the Holy Spirit.

(Jer 17:10; Matt 16:27; John 5:28-29; Acts 26:20; Rom 2:6-11; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 2:23; 20:12-13, etc.). If Lutherans understand “Christian” works (vs. human works or “works of law”) as what the Holy Spirit does in them rather than what humans do, they will be more favorably oriented toward the role of “Christian” works in salvation.

Seventh, no Christian is guaranteed unconditionally for the everlasting prize, as Jesus teaches in John 15:2 and 6 (“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he cuts off . . . and is thrown out . . . thrown into the fire”) and Paul warns the Christians in Rom 11:20-21 (“They [Unbelieving Jews] were broken off because of their unbelief . . . So do not be proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.”) and in 1 Cor 9:24-10:13. In 1 Cor 9:24-27, Paul says that even he struggles hard not to be disqualified for the prize, after all the works he has done: “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (NIV). Therefore, a right understanding of the “assurance of salvation” is a *conditional* assurance: If we keep our faith and remain in Christ until we finish the race of faith, we will certainly be saved (cf. 2 Tim 4:7-8).

Eighth, the *human role* in justification is as instruments of God: God desires to use Christians as his instruments so that the Holy Spirit may bear much fruit through them. Then, one of the *responsibilities of humans* in justification is to prepare themselves as good instruments of God by developing their God-given talents as best as they can. Christians also have the responsibility to faithfully study and meditate on the word of God so that they may remain in Christ and know the will of God, and to pray according to his will so that they may be used as “instruments of righteousness” (Rom 6:13) and the Holy Spirit may bear good fruit through them.

Ninth, in doing good works humans are neither totally passive nor as active as one may think. Since Christians can do nothing apart from the Spirit of Jesus (according to John 15), the enabling power must come from the Spirit; in this sense the Spirit, and not humans, is the primary actor and is responsible for the good works done through Christians. However, Christians are *not totally passive*, because they are *animate instruments* and therefore have certain roles and responsibilities for the works done by the Spirit; and without their fulfilling the roles and responsibilities, even the Spirit will not perform good works through them. For example, if we do not pray and ask God to control and use us according to his will – as Jesus did at Gethsemane, while the disciples failed to do – we may be controlled by our sinful desires and follow them (that is, follow what Satan wants us to do), rather than being controlled by the Spirit and do good works; so in this case we, and not the Spirit, are responsible for the evil that we (or Satan through us) do – and this is how we can fail to remain in Christ. And *if we repeatedly fail* to remain in Christ and so repeatedly fail to bear fruit (cf. Luke 13:6-9) or repeatedly follow the sinful desires, we may be cut off the vine like Iscariot Judas or King Saul and become the instruments of Satan, for God is patient for long but not for ever. How is it possible when the Holy Spirit indwells us? If we neglect the fellowship with Christ or with his Spirit through the word and prayer, it can happen, for the Holy Spirit indwells but is independent of us, and respects our *free will* and does not force us to remain in him (cf. “Remain in me, *and then* I will remain in you” and see my footnote on John 15:4 in § 4.2.1). For another, if we do not develop the God-given talents and prepare ourselves (by God’s grace) to be good instruments (cf. The parable of talents in Matt 25:14-30), we cannot be used as God’s good instruments.

Conclusion

The doctrine of justification tells how the saving grace of God in Christ can be actualized in the believers and they are saved. Hence this doctrine points to the central theme of the Scripture. The importance of the doctrine of justification is well attested in the historical debates between Augustine and Pelagius, and in the medieval ages, as well as during the Reformation period – which led to the mutual condemnations and the division of the Western church in the sixteenth century. The *Joint Declaration* notes that the doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Reformation and that it was held by Lutherans to be the “first and chief article” on which the church stands or falls.

The doctrine still remains to be essential to the life of the church and the believers, and consequently it has been central to the recent dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches, which culminated in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. However, the *Joint Declaration* still has “remaining differences” and, as mentioned in the document, the agreement does not cover all that either the Lutheran or the Roman Catholic communities hold as their doctrines of justification. Therefore, further agreement in any substantial degree will not be achieved without resolving the remaining differences.

This study investigated the *fundamental differences* between the Catholic and Lutheran understanding of justification and suggested solutions to the remaining problems with the aim of better understanding the doctrine of justification, which will then aid in the further dialogue that is required to address the remaining differences and bring the unity of the church.

In conclusion, the proposed theology of justification can be summarized as follows – this can be the basis for resolving the remaining denominational differences on the doctrine of justification:

According to his salvation-historical plan and sovereign will, God elected Abraham and Israelites first and then Gentile Christians, to bless them and also others through them. The elect therefore have the mission and responsibility to be God's instruments of salvation for other people, for election is not meant to be the blessing for the elect themselves only. This is obvious from the story of God's calling Abraham: by electing Abraham, God intended to bless not only him but all peoples on earth through him (Gen 12:3). If Christians do not realize the purpose of God's election correctly, they can make a big mistake of misunderstanding God's intention in their election and therefore of neglecting their mission, just as Israelites did in the Old Testament period.

God justifies those he elected. This *initial justification* is totally by God's grace in Jesus Christ, and humans can contribute nothing to it: by grace the elect are given the faith to believe the word of promise and accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. God then forgives their past sins and equips them to be his instruments of righteousness by putting his Spirit in their hearts, according to the promise of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Eze 11:19; 36:26-27) and without any merit of their own. We can therefore say that initial faith is a result, and not a cause or a basis, of God's election.

However, not all who initially believed and were justified continue to remain in Jesus or persevere and attain the final justification, as Jesus warned in John 15:1-10 (the vine and the branches) and Mark 4:1-12 (the parable of the sower). In other words, initial justification does not guarantee final justification, and not all elect who initially believed

and accepted the good news will be finally saved. Final salvation depends on human response to God's grace: only those who have *persevering faith*, like seed sown on good soil, will retain the word of promise, persevere, and bear fruit that is required for *final justification*, while the rest will fall away and fall short of the prize.

While *initial justification* is totally by God's grace in Jesus Christ, *final justification requires good works*, for the final judgment will be based on deeds, as many biblical texts attest. However, "Christian" good works are "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), and not the product of human efforts of trying to observe the law, for Christians cannot bear fruit by themselves apart from the Spirit of Jesus, as Jesus declared in John 15:4-6 (that is, Christians are not "inherently righteous"). In other words, humans are justified by God's grace in Christ, and not by their human efforts of keeping the prescriptions of the law (cf. "apart from works of law" in Rom 3:28). But this does not mean that good works are not necessary for justification; good works are indeed required for salvation. However, the Holy Spirit who indwells the believers, and not the believers themselves, does the good works, using the Christians as instruments – as long as they remain in Christ and submit their human will to the will of the Spirit so that the Holy Spirit may work in them. And because "Christian" works are done by the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians cannot boast of good works as if the works were done by them.

Because Christian works have been traditionally assumed to be done by the justified persons rather than by the Holy Spirit indwelling them, the Catholic emphasis on good works other than grace has been regarded by Protestants as semi-Pelagianism, and Protestants have held fast that one is justified not by good works but only by the grace of God in Christ. However, if we understand Christian good works as "the fruit of the

Spirit” (Gal 5:22), and not as human achievements or “works of law” (Rom 3:28) – that is, as what the Holy Spirit does through Christians, and not as what the justified do “through the grace of God” (as the Catholic formula reads) – then in light of the biblical texts that teach the final judgment based on deeds, Protestants may no longer reject such works as a requirement for final justification, while the Catholic emphasis on good works will no longer be accused as “semi-Pelagianism,” thereby removing a big obstacle to further ecumenical agreement on the doctrine of justification.

Human role and responsibility has a place in “justification by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28). In bearing the fruit of the Spirit, humans have a *role* as God’s instruments of righteousness and thus have the following *responsibilities*: they should develop their God-given talents as best as they can so that they may be prepared and be used as good instruments for God; and in order to bear good fruit they must remain in Christ by devoting themselves to the study and meditation of the word and to prayer, which will enable them to understand God’s will and submit to it so that the Holy Spirit may bear much fruit through them.

The human condition of the justified Christians can be characterized neither by “inherent righteousness of the justified,” because they “can do nothing apart from Jesus,” nor by *simul iustus et peccator* (“at the same time righteous and sinner”), for they are no longer “sinners” but are “clean” (even though not perfect or sinless) as long as they remain in Christ. Rather, Christians are in an *unstable state* so that depending on whether they are controlled by the Holy Spirit or by their sinful desires, they can live as good Christians or like sinners. Therefore, as long as the justified live in this world, they must always struggle to remain in Christ and live as Christians, until they finish the race of

faith. They can then win the battle against their sinful desires by the power of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is stronger than human sinful desires and other evil forces of the world.

If Christians remain in Christ, they can *participate* in God's salvific work for humanity, bearing much fruit and fulfilling the purpose of their election and calling, thereby glorifying God in their lives. While the main point of the *old covenant* was in keeping the *Mosaic law*, the central point of the *new covenant* is in God's promise of the *Holy Spirit*, who indwells the new people of God and fulfills the requirements of the law that humans could not carry out apart from the Spirit. When Christians remain in Christ, they can be filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit and be used as the instruments of God, bearing much fruit (John 15:5). Christians can then fulfill "the requirements of the law" (Rom 8:4; cf. Eze 11:19-20) and will certainly be finally justified and saved. This is the *assurance of salvation* that all believers should have in Christ.

Even though Christians are used as God's instruments for bearing fruit and good works are indeed required for final justification, their good works come short of God's glory, not because the Holy Spirit is deficient but because humans are deficient and are seldom fully controlled by the Holy Spirit. Besides, all Christians fall to sin from time to time. Thus when judged based on works, Christians will always fall short of God's standard and therefore need God's forgiveness and grace that come from the redemption in Christ Jesus. Good works are therefore a *necessary but not sufficient* condition for final justification. In the end, one is justified by God's grace in Christ, because good works are necessary but not sufficient for final justification.

Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Allison, Dale C. *Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, New York: Crossroads, 1999.
- Anderson, H. George, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985.
- Anselm of Canterbury, *Opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt. 6 vols. Stuttgart: Frommann, 1968.
- Augustine. *The Works of St. Augustine*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6. New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888.
- Aune, David E., ed. *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Barrett, C. K. *The Gospel According to St. John*. London: S.P.C.K., 1956.
- Barth, Karl. "Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes," in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*. Munich: Kaiser, 1925.
- _____. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. 13 vol. Zurich: Evangelische Verlag, 1928-68.
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's Fifth edition, 1958, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.
- Bernard, J. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh, U.K.: T. & T. Clark, 1969.
- Bonaventure, *Opera omnia*. 10 vols. Quaracchi: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882-1902.

- Borchert, Gerald L. *John 12-21*. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002.
- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967.
- Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John* (xiii-xxi). The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970.
- Bucer, Martin. *Metaphrasis et enarratio in epistolam D. Pauli ad Romanos*. Basel, 1562.
- Bullinger, Heinrich. *Sermonum decades quinque*. Zurich, 1552.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1971.
- Byrne, Brendan S. J. *Romans*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Leicester, U.K.: Apollos, 1991.
- _____, ed. *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979.
- Crossan, D. M., P. De Letter, and G. H. Tavard. "Justification" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America in association with Thomson-Gale (New York: Thomson-Gale, 2002), vol. 8, 75-91.
- Culpepper, R. Alan. *The Gospel and Letters of John*. International Biblical Texts. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998.
- Dauids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Denzinger, H. and A. Schonmetzer, ed. *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 39th ed. Freiburg: Herder, 2001.
- Donald K. McKim, ed. *Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*. Louisville, KY/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Dulles, Avery. "On Lifting the Condemnations," *Dialogue* 35 (1996), 220.

- Duns Scotus, *Opera omnia*, ed. C. Balic. Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950-.
- Elowsky, Joel C., ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVb, John 11-21*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993.
- Flogaus, R. *Theosis bei Palamos und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.
- “The Gospel and the Church,” published jointly in *Lutheran World* 19 (1972), 259-73, and *Worship* 46 (1972), 326-51.
- Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum sententiarum*, ed. A. D. Trapps. 6 vols. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1979-84.
- Heubach, J. *Luther und Theosis*. Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1990.
- Hooker, Richard. *Works*, ed. J. Keble, 3d ed. 3 vols. Oxford, 1845.
- Husbands, Mark and Daniel J. Treier, eds. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press/Leicester, U.K.: Apollos, 2004.
- Iserloh, E. *Gnade und Eucharistie in der philosophischen Theologie des Wilhelm von Ockham: Ihre Bedeutung für die Ursachen der Reformation*. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1956.
- John of La Rochelle, *Quaestiones disputatae de gratia*, in *Die neuen Quästionen der Gnadentheologie des Johannes von Rupella*, ed. L Hödl. Munich: Hueber, 1964.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997
- Kant, Immanuel. *Gesammelte Schriften*. 22 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902-42.
- Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Landgraf, A. M. *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*. 8 vols. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1952-56.
- Lane, A. N. S. *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment*. London: T. & T. Clark, 2002.
- Laws, Sophie. *The Epistle of James*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

- Lehmann, Karl and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do they Still Divide?* trans. Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990.
- Leith, John H. ed. *Creeds of the Churches*, 3d ed. Louisville, KY/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.
- John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in *Works VII*, London, 1823, 1-159.
- Longnecker, R. N. *Paul: Apostle of Liberty*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. English-Language Edition. Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Malloy, Christopher J. *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Mannermaa, Tuomo. *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*. Edited and introduced by Kirsi Stjerna. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005.
- Martin Luther, *Kristische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimar, Germany: H. Böhlau, 1883-1983.
- Martin, Ralph P. *James*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3d ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- _____. *Justification by Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988.
- _____. "Humanist elements in the Early Reformed Doctrine of Justification," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982) 5-30.
- _____. *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985.
- Melanchthon, Philip. *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. R Stupperich. 8 vols. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951-
- Michalson, G. E. *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Oberman, A. *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963.

- O'Day, Gail R. and Susan E. Hulen. *John*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Pelagius, *Epistula ad sacram Christi virginem Demetriadem*, in *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers*, ed. and trans. B. R. Rees. Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1991.
- Peter Lombard, *Libri IV Sententiarum*, 2nd ed. 2 vols. Quaracchi: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventure, 1916.
- Reumann, John. *Righteousness in the New Testament: "Justification" in the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue. With responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Ritschl, A. B. *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung Theologie Versöhnung*, 3d ed. Bonn: Marcus, 1888.
- Rodson, J. A. *Wycliffe and the Oxford Schools* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Rogers, Cleon L., Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III. *The Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.
- Rusch, William G., ed., *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- _____. "Should Catholics and Lutherans Continue to Condemn One Another?" *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996), 282-91.
- F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 4th ed. 2 vols. Berlin, 1842-3.
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel according to St. John, vol. 3. Commentary on Chapters 13-21*. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Schroeder, H. J. trans. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978.
- Schwarz, R. "Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre als Eckstein der christlichen Theologie und Kirche," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 10 (1998), 14-46.
- Seifrid, Mark A. *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
- _____, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

- Smith, D. Moody. *John*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville, TX: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Stakemeier, Eduard. "Die theologischen Schulen auf dem Trienter Konzil während der Rechtfertigungsverhandlung," in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 117 (1936), 118-207, 322-50, 446-504.
- Stephens, W. P. *Zwingli: An Introduction to his Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Stupperich, R. ed. *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*. 8 vols. Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951-.
- Tavard, George H. *Justification: An Ecumenical Study*. New York: Paulist Press, 1983.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Opera omnia*. 31 vols. Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1882-1947.
- _____. *Scriptum super libros sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, ed. P. Mandonnet and F. Moos. 4 vols. Paris: Lethielleux, 1929-47.
- Torrance, T. F. *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948.
- Towards a Common Understanding of the Church: Reformed/Roman Catholic International Dialogue. Second Phase, 1984-1990*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1991, articles 77-79, 86.
- Vignaux, P. *Luther, Commentateur des Sentences*. Paris: Vrin, 1935.
- Wescott, John. *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954.
- William of Ockham, *Commentaria in quattuor libros sententiarum*. Leiden, 1495.
- Yinger, K. L. Paul, *Judaism and Judgment according to Deeds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Ziegler, E. "Zur Reformation als Reformation des Lebes und der Sitten," in *Rorschacher Neujahrsblatt* (1984), 53-71.