

The Doctrine of Justification in Light of Present Problems

[St. Croix Pastors' Institute, April 1 and 2, 1986]

By Leroy A. Dobberstein

I. BACK TO THE BASICS

What was your reaction when you first learned of this topic, Justification, for your Pastors' Institute? Certainly it was not dismay, not even surprise. After all Justification has been rightly called the chief doctrine of the church. To ask how important is the doctrine of justification is like asking how important your heart is to your body. How greatly do you value your own heart? A weak heart means an impaired body and shortened life. The human body may function without an arm or leg, eyes and ears. It can function for years after removal of some members and parts of the body. It could even function briefly without kidneys or the liver. It ceases immediately without a heart. If justification is the heart and soul of Christian doctrine, and who of us will disagree, then the topic before us is well conceived.

But do present circumstances in our ministry, in our congregations, and in our synod warrant our discussion for the next two days? The full title of this assignment suggests some consideration is in order: THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION IN LIGHT OF PRESENT PROBLEMS. The Maier incident at Ft. Wayne, Kokomo, Indiana, a Lutheran-Catholic statement on justification which appeared recently suggest the topic is timely. I do not suggest that these incidents have rekindled interest among us in the doctrine of justification. I prefer to believe that sincere interest has never waned. But these incidents obviously have caused us to go back once again to study and evaluate this doctrine.

Francis Pieper begins his writings on the article of justification as any sound Lutheran dogmatician must: "In Lutheran theology the article of justification is the central, chief article by which Christian doctrine and the Christian church stands or falls; it is the apex of all Christian teaching."¹

And so it is for the Apostle Paul wrote: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" 1 Co 2:2. This is in full harmony with the Savior's own summary of himself, his coming, his incarnation: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" Mt 20:28.

Luther said: "This article is the head and cornerstone of the church which alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and protects the church; without it the church of God cannot subsist one hour. Neither can anyone teach correctly in the church or successfully resist any adversary if he does not maintain this article."² In Article VII on Justification the Apology states: "In this controversy the chief topic of Christian doctrine is treated, which, understood aright, illumines and amplifies the honor of Christ, (which is of special service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scripture and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and alone opens the door to the entire Bible,) and brings necessary and most abundant consolation to devout consciences"³.

So it is that Prof. John P. Meyer, in our senior dogmatics notes, observes that justification is the central doctrine of the Gospel and all other doctrines come to a head in it. Prof. Meyer goes on to note the relation of justification to other doctrines, to Law and sin, which make justification necessary; to God, who in love prepared justification; to Christ and his work, the very foundation of justification; to the church, which is the congregation of the justified; to Word and Sacraments which proclaim and seal justification; to sanctification, the fruit of justification; to the salvation of man and the glory of God, the very end of justification.

And yet, in our ministry there are other issues which seem more timely, doctrines which, it seems, have been and continue to be under greater attack, such as the authority of Scripture, the person of Christ, church and ministry, fellowship. There might seem to be more practical matters of greater urgency such as lack of sanctified living, evangelism, mission work, deficits, and building programs. Satan keeps a keen eye to every teaching and every program for Gospel outreach. Though Satan can inflict great losses on the church by stalking the flanks and rear guard, and greatly weakened the army of Christ, his goal is not just to win battles but to win the war. To return to the analogy of the human body, we certainly don't want to lose an arm or a leg, an eye or an ear. But it is by far more important that we avoid a fatal blow to the head or heart that makes any other loss incidental.

No doubt everyone of us has a sharper memory and more experience in the church's battle on the flanks and from the rear—the doctrine of inspiration, of Holy Scripture, church fellowship, church and ministry, creation, lodges and scouts. Look at the assignment of essays from conference to conference and district to district, and you will get a fairly good idea of the problems and battles our pastors and congregations face. But even without giving it more thought we know all along that at the very heart of it all is the doctrine of justification. We know well what this doctrine meant to a Paul, a Luther, a Walther or a Hoenecke. Its teaching is as vital today.

Having said that our own memories and experience suggest that Satan is content to take an arm or a leg, one at a time, for he knows that it is a way to his horrible end, it may surprise us how often he does aim straight at the heart. In the last one hundred years there has not been a single generation within Lutheran orthodoxy when the doctrine of justification has not been under direct attack. Most familiar to most of us are dates so

recent as 1982, 1979, or even 1938 to 1961. But even dates such as 1905, 1888 and 1871 stand out as historic markers along the way to mark battles fought to preserve the Scriptural truth concerning justification.

And the fact that later dates have effected our own Synod only indirectly, for the most part, ought not permit us to lower our guard in the least. Nor dare we become less concerned when we learn that in some instances at least it is not God's verdict of righteousness which is being questioned or denied, but only *when* it takes (took) place and *whether* the damned are included.

May the Lord bless our study of this precious truth. In our five sessions we shall consider:

- Justification—Back to the Basics
- Justification—Down to the Meaning
- Justification—On with the Message
- Justification—By faith
- Justification—Along the way to sanctification

I. BACK TO THE BASICS

An understanding of, as well as an appreciation for, the doctrine of justification demands that we go back to the basics, to sin and grace. We begin with man's sin and God's holiness that illustrates man's great need. We will shortly move on to the work of Christ and the grace of God, the only solution to man's great need. Though a misunderstanding of sin and grace is not apparent in the question being raised within the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod concerning objective justification, it is very obvious in the treatment justification has received and continues to receive in the Lutheran World Federation and now also in the Lutheran and Catholic document on justification. In the meeting at Helsinki in 1963, when Lutherans came together from all over the world to formulate a statement on justification, any hope for the orthodox cause was already lost when the statement was accepted that man's concern today is not how to find a gracious God but how to find meaning in one's life. Nor is it any wonder that the dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians which followed there could be no Lutheran gains, only losses to Catholic arguments. It would have been far better if the participants in the Lutheran and Catholic dialogue had spent their time on defining sin and grace. Instead they used the terms sin and grace without agreeing on what they understood by the terms. Now they pretend to make great contributions, yes, dare to offer a joint document on that very issue which has divided Lutherans and Catholics for nearly 500 years. To add to the disgrace, these select Lutherans who pretend to speak for Lutherans across the land and around the world obviously don't hold to objective justification themselves. One just doesn't send a high school dropout to audit the books of the Grand National bank when there is a suspicion of embezzlement. You don't send a traitor to the cause to spy on the opposing forces.

Much that can be said of man's sin can be learned from simple observation. What honest person can deny sin in the world and in man? Many have held utopian ideas of a better world if not a perfect world. All have suffered ultimate disappointment. Visions of world peace and good will by all men have vanished in thin air time and again. Not a day goes by, I fear, when every major newspaper in the country does not report some new crime, serious crime, murder, rape, robbery, drug trafficking. Prisons, courtrooms, unhappy homes, broken marriages, abortion clinics are undeniable evidence of sin in this world, sin in the heart and soul of man.

Not every man alive is willing to recognize every sin as sin. Many will find a way to excuse themselves from even the gravest crimes. Behaviorists tell us: man is a product of his heredity and environment, and his behavior for the most part determined, foreordained by both. His genes go a long way to determine his happiness or unhappiness. His environment will tend to make him better or worse, good or evil. Man is held out to be a kind of feather in the wind, certainly not to be held accountable for all his deeds, certainly not to be called a "sinner."

Scripture reveals from page to page, beginning to end, man's great dilemma because of sin. John writes: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" 1 Jn 1:8. It includes all under sin. Speaking of Jew and Gentile Paul insisted: "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Ro 3:22-23. Solomon, the Preacher, said it too, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" Ecc 7:20. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus says that every corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. At another place he describes that fruit: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" Mt 15:19. Sin describes man's very life. Actual sin marks his every step.

Sin is not only something every man does. Since the fall it is his very condition. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin" Ro 5:12. Adam sinned. He lost the perfect state. If Adam had never sinned again he would have remained a sinner. His sinful condition did not remain in him alone. But it passed on to all his descendants. "Flesh gives birth to flesh" Jn 3:6. Therefore a David must admit: "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me!" Ps 51:5.

Original sin is no mere outward blemish. It is a raging disease that infects all men. Our Lutheran confessions speak of a twofold nature of original sin. Not only is it an active desire and lust for that which is evil, but it is a complete lack, a total absence, of the holiness and righteousness which God requires. Man has no sight in spiritual things. He has no right knowledge of God's grace and mercy. He does not know just how corrupt and helpless his spiritual condition actually is. Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles: "This hereditary sin is so deep and [horrible] a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be [learned and] believed from the revelation of the Scripture."⁴

Man's fall was complete. Man's nature is totally depraved. Even after his conversion the Apostle Paul complains of the depravity of his sinful nature. He disapproves completely of his natural self and the way it resists, every step of the way, his life of sanctification. "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature" Ro 7:15,18.

Man is sinful. Each sin, of deed, word, or thought, is against God. It is an act of disobedience against God's holy will revealed in his sacred law. Man's very nature stands in rebellion against God. He cannot keep God's law, nor does he desire to do so. He stands defenseless before a holy God. God says: "Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy" Lev 19:2. His only response to the holiness of God is that of Isaiah. Seeing the vision of the Lord sitting upon his throne, hearing the song of the angels' "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty," he cried: "Woe to me!" ... "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." Isa 63:3,5.

The Law represents the demands of a holy, righteous God. God's law demands nothing short of perfection. Even if man could keep any part of God's law, he would still be guilty of all. Before God man stands as one who has broken every rule in the book. Ignorance or weakness is no excuse. He is a lawbreaker. He stands condemned beneath the full weight of God's wrath. "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do every thing written in the book of the Law" Gal 3:10. Finally Paul speaks of all men when he writes to the Romans: "Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, When his righteous judgment will be revealed" Ro 2:5. Such is the story of man, his life, because of Adam's transgression. Wrath, judgment, death, damnation is his lot, fully genuine, and completely deserved. There is nothing in man by which one is able to resolve that question over which so many have stumbled and fallen: Why are some saved and not others? In man we can find answer only to half the question. Why not others? When a man is not saved it is his own fault. All have deserved God's wrath and judgment. Except for God's grace and love no one, not one, shall be saved.

Man's great need is not food and drink, job and family, peace and prosperity, though these are gifts of a benevolent God. The real plight of the nation is not a better standard of living, social programs and a better image. Man's great need remains what it was when our first parents were driven out of the garden. Man's great need is forgiveness of sins. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" Heb 9:2. The great question today is not: "How can I find meaning for my life?" "How can I improve my life upon the earth?" "How can the church narrow the gap between the world's rich and poor, countries and individuals alike?"

These are questions with which modern Protestantism seems to be consuming its energy. Such thought is the very essence of the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. We are seeing more and more of it in Lutheran circles. These are the kinds of questions that were asked at Helsinki. The questions asked at Budapest have not changed. Given this situation there can be no understanding of or appreciation for Scripture's teaching of justification. Men can talk of justification and salvation, of Christ and Calvary, but they will be speaking in tongues that cannot be understood or profit a man. To a modern world which fails to ask "How can I find a gracious God? How can I find forgiveness of my sins?" there is nothing to be gained by preaching the Gospel. Such a world needs to hear only law, real law, law which convicts man of his sins, law which prompts man to cry, "God, have pity on me, a sinner!" To the existentialist who refuses to accept sin as a condition of the heart, to the neo-orthodox who rejects original sin, to the modern Protestant who has become lost in the maize of the social Gospel, to all Catholics and Lutherans who are jumping on the band wagon of the social gospel and play a similar tune, there is need for a return to the basics, for the preaching of the law, pure and simple.

But when the Law has done its work, when the sinner, by the power of the Holy Spirit confesses his sin and guilt, is terrified at the wrath of God and the day of judgment, what shall we say. Again, there is much confusion, from the out and out Pelagian to the most subtle synergist, from those who continue to trouble the hearts of the sinner with more law to effect a deeper sorrow, to those who preach-a conditional Gospel. It is this very latter, a denial of objective justification among Lutherans which lends itself to the proclaiming of a conditional Gospel, which has for the most part prompted this study at our pastors' institute. We will concern ourselves with that at length in the next essays. But first, for now, back to the basics. Our message for contrite hearts is pure and precious Gospel, the message of Christ's work and God's grace.

There, is only one cause for man's salvation—one answer to that question why some shall enjoy eternal bliss in heaven—God's grace in Christ. Christ's work is the impulsive external cause of our justification and God's grace is the impulsive internal cause of our justification. According to his underserved mercy and loving kindness, for an undeserving human race that had despised his love and which could not in any way deserve his help, without any thought of cooperation on the part of man much less a return on man's part, God planned man's salvation.

Payment for sin required obedience and death, a perfect fulfillment of the law that was broken and a genuine death brought into the world by sin. For God said: "When you eat of it you will surely die" Ge 2:16. Only God's own Son could render such obedience and through death offer a sufficient ransom. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" Eph 1.

Him, Christ, we preach. This is not the Christ of the modernists of one stripe or another who speak of the "Christ event" and the "Christ of faith", much less the Christ of those who still search for the "historical Jesus." The Christ we proclaim to poor contrite sinners is not simply some abstract ideal, some noble idea planted in the minds of man, a nebulous Christ who can be molded into whatever shape or form the individual

prefers to think of him, who are quick to add quotation marks when they speak of his death on Calvary and his resurrection on the third day. Having rejected the inerrancy and authority of Scripture which reveals the Son of God incarnate they press on in their search of the “historical Jesus” whom they refuse to identify with Christ our Lord.

To emphasize this thought, allow me to go back to the concept of sin. We said many behaviorists have trouble with the thought of sin. It is not only the field of psychology or psychiatry that has trouble with sin. Modern theology that is great on methods and short on beliefs, which has a bounty of purely subjective ideas but a dearth of basic truths, does not at all agree with the Scripture’s doctrine of sin. For most liberal theologians sin is a nasty word. Either they deny it altogether or they call something a sin only when men take it to be such. Thus what is sin for one is not necessarily sin for another. What is sin for you may be okay, virtuous for another. If sin is such an indeterminate thing, then what should a man do with Christ?

If there is no sin, then Christ lived, died, and rose for the fun of it. Not only do Christ’s death and resurrection count for nothing and pose a kind of embarrassment for modern man, Christ’s very life, his very existence becomes a riddle. The modern theologian is as befuddled as Pilate standing before the people, who demanded the release of Barabas. “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? Mt 27:22.

But we preach the preexistent, eternal Son of God who became also true man to be the sinner’s substitute. In the place of all sinners Christ put himself under the law, to redeem those who were under the law. From infancy to youth to manhood he lived a perfect life of love. He is the one notable exception to the universal depravity that resulted from the fall. As the sinless Son of God he succeeded where all others failed. He did it, not for himself, but for all others. Because many would misunderstand him and the nature of his work he said: “Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them!” Mt 5:17. Not that any explanation was required. The prophets foretold it as an accomplished fact. Already in his day Isaiah (chapter 53) complained of the disbelief of men. But man’s unbelief does not annul sin nor the promise of a gracious, merciful God. In verses one and three Isaiah laments: “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” In verses four to six we have the heart of Isaiah’s message and God’s promise: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

We preach him whom the inspired apostle calls the second Adam. “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act or righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” Ro 5:18-19. Obedient to God’s holy law he “became obedient to death, even death on a cross” Php 2:8. He offered that sacrifice that was prefigured in all the sacrifices offered in the temple during the Old Testament covenant days. He is the atoning sacrifice in whom all the believers of old trusted and hoped. His life given into death was a sufficient ransom for the sins and guilt of all.

And we preach Christ who died and lives. For he rose again according to the Scripture. By raising from the dead him who laid down his life God declared the world justified. By the exaltation of his Son, God, who imputed the sins of the whole world to him, also declared that his righteousness is likewise imputed to all and whosoever believes in him shall pass from death to life. One wonders what part Christ’s death and resurrection actually played in the meeting of Lutherans at Budapest. We are told that much time was spent in worship, Bible study, devotion and prayer. Ordinarily one would rejoice in the fact and not raise any questions. But one cannot objectively evaluate the assembly of Lutherans from all over the world without giving some attention to the resolves that were passed and the direction that was taken.

One’s uneasiness begins with the elections. The assembly, representing 54 million of the world’s 69 million Lutherans elected as President Bishop Zultan Kaldy of Communist Hungary. Kaldy is a member of the communist parliament and has been an outspoken defender of communism in his country. Two constitutional changes, as much as anything, sum up the discussions and actions of the 7th LWF gathering and portend its future course. One was a constitutional amendment which states that LWF member churches “understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other” –a resolution which ought to cause some problems for the six partner churches (formerly mission churches) of the LC-MS, and yes, problems for the LC-MS itself. The other was an addition to the constitution over against some member churches that still have entertained higher goals for the LWF. The addition nails down the policy of the LWF “to promote social and economic justice and human rights.” Virtually every recommendation that came before the assembly and eventual resolution to pass promoted some facet of ecumenism and of the social gospel.

In view of these decisions one rightly wonders what Christ’s death and resurrection means. Even if we had no reason to doubt that each one who participated believes in Christ’s resurrection on the third day with a glorified body, what does it mean, what can it mean to those who are so committed to a social gospel? What does “he died, he arose” mean, what can it mean to those who have lived with more than 20 years of confusion concerning the doctrine of justification?

The message we preach is a message of pure and boundless grace. It is a message which is the very opposite of the message of man's religion, of work or merit. Grace rules out every effort and merit on the part of man. "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would be no longer grace" Ro 11:6. This is not the grace of Rome—infused grace. This grace is not anything inherent in man, but is found entirely outside of man—in God. Even as faith justifies only because of its object—Christ, grace describes God alone, not man, and therefore saves. One can hardly imagine anyone who claims to be Lutheran, who pretends to know and love Luther, who can be quite knowledgeable on the history of the Lutheran Reformation, sitting down with the disciples of Rome to discuss justification, without first agreeing upon the word grace.

It is true, Scripture does speak of gifts of God's grace. Grace describes those spiritual gifts which God the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who know Christ by faith, such as comfort in tribulation, confidence to pray, hope of eternal life. The use of grace to describe these gifts, however, dare not be cited as a cause of forgiveness and salvation. For Scripture says: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law Ro 3:28. The sharp distinction between grace as God's unmerited favor and grace as God's gift is of greatest importance in a discussion of justification. To teach grace as a quality supplied in man for salvation is to return to salvation by works and to fall from grace. Christian terminology may be retained, but pagan doctrine is embraced.

The mixing of grace and the gifts of grace is the basic error of Rome which has anathematized the *sola gratia* as a favor of God to the exclusion of infused grace. But the error is not limited to Rome. In denying universal grace the Reformed must resort to something within man or man's work for the assurance of salvation. So do all those who teach that the Holy Ghost works his saving grace outside of the divinely appointed Means of Grace. Whenever the sinner is not taught to rely upon the objective promise of God, he must fall back on a feeling of grace, the working of grace, within his heart.

Divine grace is grace in Christ. We read in the Apology: "Besides it is necessary that in the church of Christ the Gospel be retained, i.e., the promise that for Christ's sake sins are freely remitted. Those who teach nothing of this faith, concerning which we speak, altogether abolish the Gospel"⁵ God is gracious to sinful mankind and a condemned world only in view of the vicarious atonement of Christ, his Son.

Divine grace does not exclude divine justice. Here, too, men thrust themselves upon the horns of a dilemma. They ask, how can a gracious God punish sins?—and turn themselves to universalism. Or they insist that a just God cannot simply overlook sin and turn to some form or degree of work righteousness. There is no conflict whatsoever between Scripture's message of the grace and justice of God. We said divine grace does not exclude divine justice. Justice demands satisfaction for sins; grace supplies it through the obedience and death of Christ as the sinner's substitute. The Gospel offers grace to sinners, not apart from Christ, but in Christ, who has satisfied fully the demands of divine justice. Luther writes: "Though grace is given to us for nothing, so that it does not cost us anything, yet it cost some one else on our behalf very much; for it has been secured through an uncountable, infinite treasure, namely, through God's Son himself."⁶

The doctrine of grace, *sola gratia*, gives all glory to God. We take our cue from the apostle to the Romans. Following his lengthy treatment on justification in the first eleven chapters he concludes the doctrinal portion of his epistle: "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who can know the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" 11:33-36.

The work of Christ and the grace of God, the very basis of our Christian faith, alone impart comfort to sinners. We reminded ourselves at the start, justification is the most important doctrine of the church. Objective justification, that God has declared all sinners to be righteous, that this took place already at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is an all important truth. He who sacrifices this truth sacrifices the fulness of God's grace, takes away glory from God and gives it to men, reintroduces work or merit on the part of man into the doctrine of salvation, robs the sinner of his sure comfort, leaves the church only a conditional gospel to reach out to a world dead in trespasses and sins.

II. DOWN TO THE MEANING

What can be more embarrassing than having in your possession an object, a tool, which you do not know what to do with. One evening I stopped south of Fond du Lac to help a motorist in trouble. It was only a flat tire, but the man had spent most of an hour, according to his time, trying to operate his car jack. He had owned the car for a couple of years but now, with two elderly ladies depending on him, he could not figure out what to do with his jack. However, he wasn't the only one who was embarrassed. I had the same kind of jack in my trunk and I did not know how to operate the jack either. I could explain that I had only had my car a couple of months, but then how difficult can a car jack be. They are supposedly made so that any non-mechanical person can operate them. Never mind that it had been more than 25 years since I had operated anything but a bumper jack. I finally figured out that this jack was not meant to lift by the way of the bumper. But it is still aggravating and embarrassing to have an object that is the key to changing a flat tire and not know what to do with it.

A similar dilemma took place at Helsinki two decades ago. What to do with the doctrine of justification! After all this was a meeting of Lutherans from all over the world. It was over the doctrine of justification, more than any other, that Lutherans and Catholics parted more than 41/2 centuries earlier. Certainly a world wide gathering of Lutherans would know what to do with justification. It was quite embarrassing for anyone who

calls himself a Lutheran when the media, newspapers, periodicals, etc., reported that Lutherans did not know what to do with, were not even able to begin to agree on, justification. It is rather obvious today that the overriding concern at Helsinki was not to make a clear, Scriptural statement on the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran church. Rather the real purpose was to open the way to dialogue and fellowship with non-Lutherans, not just other Protestant bodies, but with Catholicism itself. Twenty years later the wish is beginning to come true. Certain Lutheran and Catholic principals joined hands and knocked heads to draw up a joint statement on justification. Make a statement they did. But the interest of the Lutherans involved was no more honorable than their forefathers 20 years earlier. The purpose was hardly to make a sound Lutheran confession concerning the doctrine of justification, but to find a way to appear to be more in agreement with Catholics, to appear less different to an unsuspecting public.

Our interest as a pastors' institute is not what will wash with others, Catholics, Protestants, or Lutherans regarding justification. Our only interest is what the Scriptures say. We must again come to grips with Scriptural terms and Scripture's meaning. Without that we are ill equipped to discuss justification even among ourselves, much less with anyone else. Without that we are ill equipped to reach out to a dying world. Without that we are ill equipped to minister to souls entrusted to our care.

Having gone back to the basics, sin and grace, to man's sin and God's holiness on one hand and God's grace and Christ's work on the other, let us get **DOWN TO THE MEANING** of justification, namely, a judicial verdict of acquittal.

Our study begins with the two key words, *tzadiq* and *dikaiooo*. Both are used in an ordinary sense in Scripture. "When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty" Dt 25:1. "For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" Mt 12:37. And both are used in the sense of helping a man get to salvation. "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied, by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will fear their iniquities!" Isa 53:11. "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God" Lk 18:14. "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justified the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness!" Ro 4:2,5. But in either case, the words denote a judicial, forensic act. To justify in the Bible always has the meaning to declare righteous. Never do the terms denote a qualitative change in man, a sanative act. The change that is meant is not a change in one's person, but a change in one's status before God. Furthermore, taken as a judicial act, it is not to be understood as a mere pardon, but in every case a verdict, the verdict of a judge. It is God pronouncing a sinner righteous—an act which takes place apart from man. God declares sinners righteous not because of anything he foresaw in man, not because he is able to overlook sin and guilt, but for the sake of Christ, the sinner's substitute.

This thought is so important it is worth repeating. Justification is a purely judicial act. Yet it is different from those declarations which are handed down in the courts of the land. In the courts of men justice requires that the guilty be declared guilty and the innocent be declared innocent. If a judge fails to recognize this principle of justice, he is unfit for the bench. He must be removed from his office. He stands to be found a public disgrace. But what a human judge may not do and still be a competent judge, God does. And we thank him for it. When God justifies a man through the Gospel. He pronounces the guilty, the ungodly, to be innocent, righteous. The Apology notes this important difference: "therefore, since in this passage our righteousness is the imputation of the righteousness of another, we must here speak concerning righteousness otherwise than when in philosophy or in a civil court we seek after the righteousness of one's own work."¹

Along with the terms specifically meaning righteous, declare righteous, we find synonyms. Whenever Scripture speak of reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, cleansing from sin, ransom for sin, atonement for sin, not imputing sin, not bringing into judgment, it is speaking of God's justification of sinners. Therefore, for example, when we speak of remission of sins, we are not speaking of some part of justification, but of justification itself by a negative expression. Though remission of sins and imputation of righteousness are sometimes called two parts of justification they are not really different and cannot be separated.

A quick look at the terms ought to be sufficient to remind ourselves of the Lutheran doctrine of objective or universal justification—that God, at the resurrection of Christ declared sinners justified, universally, excluding none, and objectively, whether they believe it or not.

With this Catholics and Calvinists would quickly disagree. Catholics must resist the teaching of objective justification because of their teaching of infused grace. Grace secured by Christ is infused into sinners by the sacraments, enabling them to earn their salvation. Calvinists are quick to object to a justification that is universal. They might accept the term objective justification as long as it applies only to the elect. Universal justification conflicts with their limited atonement and particular grace. There is no right teaching concerning objective justification among non-Lutherans. However, even Lutherans have their detractors. In American Lutheranism there is a long list of detractors. In the first 100 years of her existence the LCMS repeatedly resisted those who argued that justification for all at the resurrection of Christ is not reasonable and will lead to universalism. It is not reasonable that God should declare those righteous who have rejected the Gospel. Yet, in 1938 and again in 1950 the LCMS was willing to accept a confessional statement offered by the same church bodies now known as TALC which failed to meet the issues and allowed for a non-objective understanding of justification. More recently the LCMS has come out with a fine document on justification.² Yet it entertains those in her midst who deny at least the *sedes doctrinae* for objective justification, if not the doctrine itself, and

are using the same arguments which the LCMS strongly resisted for a century and a half and still officially resists. While the professor at Ft. Wayne who spawned the recent controversy in the LCMS remains quiet, and hopefully still believes in objective justification, the fact is that he has not retracted his previous teaching on justification. He continues to teach at the synod's seminary, and has followers in the LCMS who persist in a position that calls objective justification into question, not necessarily denying it, but hardly soundly confessing it.

Therefore, having looked at the basic terms, let us proceed to some of the *sedes doctrinae*:

Romans 5:18-19 “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

Historically this reference in Romans is ranked as the principal *sedes doctrinae* for objective justification. Justification, *dikaiosis*, is referred to specifically. Verse 18 informs us that because of Adam's sin a verdict of condemnation was pronounced on all men; because of the one act of righteousness by Christ a verdict of acquittal was pronounced on all men. There can be no question that verse 18 teaches universal and therefore objective justification. Those who deny the doctrine do so mainly on basis of verse 19. They argue that *Polloi* does not mean all. Granted *polloi* ordinarily would seem to mean many, over against a few. But it can also be used for all, in contrast to one. The very context requires that here the *polloi* be understood in the sense of all. By context we refer not only to verse 18, which obviously teaches objective and universal justification, but also to verse 12-15.

No one can dispute that verse 12-21 constitute a unit, the contrast of the two Adams, the first man and Christ. In verses 12-14 Paul also used *pantas*, all. By one man death came to all men. In the very next verse, 15, he uses many, many died and the gift that overflowed to many. Twice in this section, in verses 12-15 –again in 18 and 19 we have this use of many and all, the all described obviously as the *oi polloi*.

The cause of much discussion is the future tense in verse 19, “Many will be made righteous:” Some have insisted it be taken in the future sense. Dr. Maier of Fort Wayne regards it as future and purpose. He will say universal but does not say objective. A future would suggest that justification takes place at a time a person comes to faith, and applies only to believers. However, there is nothing to say that this future must be taken temporally. Why not a logical future? If it is true that by one man's disobedience—Adam's—many were made sinners, then it follows that by one man's obedience Christ's—many will be made righteous. In addition it has been demonstrated that this verb, *kathistami*, is often used in a forensic context such as we have in these verses. Note the words condemnation and act of righteousness in the previous verse.

2 Corinthians 5:19 “That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the word of reconciliation:” The passage does not contain the word righteousness, but ranks as strong support for the doctrine of objective justification because of the manner in which it speaks of the synonymous term reconciliation. In Christ God has reconciled the world to himself. A change has taken place. The change was not in man. Man remained unchanged, by nature sinful, hostile to God. Nor was the change, strictly speaking, in God. One can speak of a change in God anthropopathically. The Old Testament Scriptures often speak of a change in the heart of God. However to speak here of a change in God's heart allows room for the false notion that God's anger has been changed into love, that God no longer hates sin or the sinner. This may remove for man the apparent contradiction between law and gospel. But in the end it only confuses law and gospel.

For the fact is that God loves the sinner and God hates sinners. To the sinner who does not admit sin and does not recognize his need for forgiveness, the law must be preached. God punishes sinners. To the contrite sinner the Gospel of God's love for sinners is the message that heals, offers hope and gives salvation. Therefore orthodox theologians for the most part have spoken of the change as a change in man's status before God. Previously God viewed the world apart from Christ—and it stood condemned. Now God views the world in the light of Christ's work of redemption and has declared the world righteous, forgiven.

Note also the inspired apostle's choice of words God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. Some have tried to limit the pronoun, *autoi*, to refer only to believing ones. It is an arbitrary interpretation. It only satisfies man's reason, a previous notion that God would not declare righteous such as those who end up in hell. But if that is what Paul meant, why did he not at least say, not counting *our* sins against us, if not that God reconciled *believers* to himself. But Paul wrote that God was reconciling the world, not counting men's sins against them.

The participle, reconciling, also requires further comment over against those who place God's act of justification into future time, at the time a person comes to faith. Again Maier does this. Here Rev. Harley, Fairmont, MN, who otherwise supports Maier's views on justification, disagrees with Maier. Maier and others insist that the participle expresses purpose and that the sense is that God was reconciling the world to himself by bringing men to faith in Christ's work of redemption. Then the past tense of the same word in verse 18 is explained by limiting the reconciliation to ones that have already come to faith. Their argument continues that if the apostle in v 19 were speaking of a reconciliation in the past, he would have used an aorist participle. Dr. Becker, in his essay of 1982 on Justification, insists that this argument is untenable. He writes: “No one, for example, would argue that the sentence, “I was sitting” cannot refer to something that happened sixteen years ago because ‘sitting’ is a present participle and if you want to speak of things that happened in the past you

must use a past participle. As is the case in English, so it is also in Greek. As a general rule we can say that the Greek participles are timeless (except for the future participle) and they take their temporal significance from the main verb in the sentence. If the aorist participle were used here it would normally denote an action that took place before God was in Christ. The English translation of such a Greek construction would be, God was in Christ, having reconciled the world unto himself (even before he was in Christ).³

There is nothing in the text which argues that the reconciliation be thought of as a future event. It simply says God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. Following the rule at the mere participle is a periphrastic construction taking the same tense as the verb unless the context requires differently, there is no reason to understand the act of reconciliation at any other time except when Christ died and rose as stated in verse 15. As for the participle expressing purpose, this does not mean it has to be understood as a future event—when men come to faith. One can still say that God reconciled the world to himself as Christ went about his work of active and passive obedience, dying, and rising again from the dead.

Romans 4:25. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised for our justification.

Here the apostle speaks of believers, but what he says does not exclude unbelievers. Of special note is the parallelism introduced in each case with the *dia*. As Dr. Becker notes also in his 1982 essay, *dia* can be taken prospectively and retrospectively. But since it is a parallelism it is logical that it should be used in the same way in both instances. The first half of the parallelism is obviously retrospective. He was delivered over to death for, because of, our sins. It follows that we should take the second *dia* also retrospectively. He was raised to life for our justification. Christ was raised because we had been justified. By his death God's justice was satisfied. By his resurrection God declared it to be so.

To these several *sedes doctrinae* could be added many other passages of Scripture to fortify the doctrine of objective justification. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" Jn 1:29. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 Jn 2:2. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" Gal 3:13. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" 1 Pe 2:24. Any reference that announces that Christ has paid for sin, offered himself as a sacrifice, paid the ransom, shed his blood finally teaches objective justification. Men's sins are paid for whether they believe it or not.

Objective justification is universal. Scripture teaches that God has reconciled the world to himself. This includes all men, believers and unbelievers. All, believers and unbelievers, have deserved death and damnation. Jesus came as the Substitute of all. He obeyed the Law for all. He died in the place of every man. When Jesus died every sinner died. When Jesus rose he rose as the substitute of every sinner. By his resurrection God declared sinners, all of them, forgiven. This is the good news Scripture reveals. This is the good news we proclaim to contrite sinners. God has reconciled you to himself. Your sins are already forgiven. Calvary and the empty tomb are the proof of it.

It is suggested, if not argued, that such interpretation of the Scripture and the teaching of objective justification we defend is something relatively new in Lutheranism. It is true that the terms objective and subjective justification are relatively recent. They are not found in the confessions. It is also true that most of the time when the Scripture speaks of justification they do so in connection with believing. They speak of subjective justification. Yet the fact remains that terms objective justification and subjective justification do convey thoughts which the Scripture teach as all the orthodox theologians have confessed. To quote defenders of the doctrine from the former Synodical Conference:

From an Easter sermon of C.F.W. Walther included in a sermon book published in 1870 we find: "Tell me, who was, therefore, justified in him? Who was declared to be pure and guiltless in him? None other than we men! None other than the whole world! ... His life is our life; his pardon, our pardon; his justification, our justification."⁴

At the first meeting of the Synodical Conference in 1872 the main essay delivered concerned justification. The author was F.A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod. We quote the first five of the 12 essays delivered: The word objective is not used. But universal is, and what is universal must also be objective.

Thesis 1: The doctrine of Justification is the prime article of the Christian faith, the true knowledge and pure proclamation of which is of incomparable importance and absolute necessity for individual salvation and the welfare of the whole church.

Thesis 2. By the mercy of God, the Reformation of the Church through the instrumentality of Dr. Luther took its rise in a renewed knowledge of the pure doctrine of justification, and in the consequent incorrupt proclamation of this article of faith.

Thesis 3. The pure doctrine of Justification, as again conspicuously set forth by our Lutheran Church from the Word of God, involves three leading points; 1) The doctrine of the universal and perfect redemption of the world by Christ; 2) the doctrine of the power and efficacy of the means of grace; and 3) the doctrine of faith.

Thesis 4. As in Adam all men have fallen and passed under the wrath of God and everlasting damnation as the punishment of sin, so also in Christ, as the second Adam, all men have been truly redeemed from sin, death, devil, and hell, and God is truly reconciled to them all.

Thesis 5. As by the vicarious death of Christ, the guilt of the whole world was cancelled, and the punishment thereof was borne; even so by the resurrection of Christ, righteousness, life, and salvation is restored for the whole world, and in Christ, as the Substitute of all mankind, has come upon all men.⁵

A decade later, at the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth, Prof. Franz Pieper led a conference discussion also on justification. The first of six theses reads:

Thesis 1. All men are sinners by virtue of their natural condition and their own works and, for this reason, lie under God's wrath and the judgment of damnation. But God has completely reconciled all men to himself through Christ's vicarious work and has justified them de facto in Christ's resurrection from the dead."⁶

Later that, same century Gerhardt Stoeckhart said in an article published in the Synod's official magazine: "Genuine Lutheran theology counts the doctrine of general justification among the statements and treasures of its faith. Lutherans teach and confess that through Christ's death the entire world of sinners was justified and that through Christ's resurrection the justification of the sinful world was festively proclaimed. This doctrine of general justification is the guarantee and warranty that the central article of justification by faith is being kept pure. Whoever holds firmly that God was reconciled to the world in Christ, and that to sinners in general their sin was forgiven, to him the justification which comes from faith remains a pure act of the grace of God. Whoever denies general justification is justly under suspicion that he is mixing his own work and merit into the grace of God."⁷

To illustrate the antiquity of universal and therefore objective justification in Lutheran doctrine we go back to Luther and the Confessions themselves. Before citing any statements we note Walther's observation in a

convention essay of 1859. In six summary statements based on the first part of his essay Walther states the following—we quote the first 4:

- 1) That the doctrine of justification is the-most important doctrine of the whole divine revelation, is the common confession of our church, both in her Symbols and in the private writings of her pure, true teachers.
- 2) Those err greatly who allow themselves to imagine that it is an easy matter to correctly hold and present the doctrine of justification, or who truly suppose that they have long ago finished learning this doctrine.
- 3) It is due only to the fact that Luther came to a pure and clear confession of the article of justification that he has been born from above, anointed and equipped to be the Reformer.
- 4) Luther already mourned that in his own time only a few thoroughly understood and expressed the pure doctrine of justification, while many had already become tired of the same, and therefore this doctrine would be obscured again after his death and be lost.⁸

Anyone who has read Luther's "Treatise Concerning the Keys" of 1530 can hardly deny that Luther believed in objective justification. The following paragraph sums up Luther's thoughts quite well: "Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it. St. Paul says in Ro 3 (3): 'Their faithlessness nullifies the faithfulness of God.' We are not talking here either about people's belief or disbelief regarding the efficacy of the keys. We realize that few believe. We are speaking of what the keys accomplish and give. He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But this is not the key's fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it."⁹

As to the Confessions we shall limit ourselves to a few brief references. First from the Apology,

"The Law, which made all sinners, seemed to have done injury, but when the Lord Jesus Christ came, he forgave to all sin which no one could avoid, and, by the shedding of His own blood, blotted out the handwriting which was against us. This is what he says in Ro 5:20: 'The Law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.' Because after the whole world became subject, He took away the Sin of the whole world, as he (John) testified, saying, John 1:29: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'"¹⁰

Secondly from the Formula, in the Epitome:

"But the Gospel is properly a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and obtained and acquired for him, without any merit of his (no merit of the sinner intervening), forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life."¹¹

Thirdly, from the Formula, the Solid Declaration:

"That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who, by His faultless (Innocency) obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life."¹²

Fourthly from Luther's Large Catechism:

"Therefore there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray:

Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses. Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it). But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness"¹³

It is sad that Lutherans at Helsinki did not know what to do with the doctrine of justification. It is the more regrettable that they were content to let the matter be. Not knowing what to do with a jack in one's trunk and walking away in disgust from a flat tire is not catastrophic. Not knowing what to do with justification in itself was not catastrophic. Unwillingness to come to grips with the problem coupled with willingness 20 years later to claim a common ground with those who have pronounced their anathema on the Lutheran teaching of justification is a failing of catastrophic proportions.

III. On with the Message

We have considered man's great need. Man is a sinner; sin is his game. Sinful is his condition. God is holy and righteous. As such he demands payment for sin. Man cannot atone for sin. His great need is forgiveness. We have gone back to the *sedes doctrinae*, both the key words and passages and their indisputable meaning. God has declared sinners righteous. For Christ's sake, by his death and resurrection, he has pronounced all men justified, forgiven, reconciled, to himself.

This doctrine we hold sacred. But God's purpose is not simply that we hold it fast but that we proclaim it. It is not like the jack in my trunk—there if I need it; there to meet an emergency; there, just for myself, which I may not need for weeks, months, years at a time. I recall with one automobile I owned that I did not use the jack in my trunk until I had nearly 100,000 miles on the vehicle.

The message is meant to be proclaimed. That too ought to impress upon us how important it is to keep the doctrine of objective justification inviolate. We have made reference to the Maier case and the Kokomo incident. The two are related. Now we shall give them some attention in detail—later this hour. Just how much is at stake in the Maier contention and the Kokomo statement, or the expressions of others who have come out in their defense? None of these has denied the vicarious atonement of Christ, universal redemption, justification as a forensic act. Yes, they even are willing to use the term universal justification if it means that God accepted Christ's atonement as full payment for sin. In fact, at first, it seems that these conservative Lutherans are only taking exception to the more recent terminology, objective and subjective justification, or the proof passages upon which we teach objective justification. The terms, objective and subjective, are not sacred. But one does wonder how anyone can deny the *sedes doctrinae* and still hold to the doctrine. At the same time other statements are disturbing, that "justification can be only spoken of in connection with faith,"¹ "that Christ's work has only made it possible for God to change hearts of men so that they become reconciled to God through faith,"² that "forgiveness and justification, because of Christ, are objectively available for all mankind through the AGES whether or not individuals appropriate it through faith."³ Furthermore, it is disturbing that these same men use arguments that were used by others before who openly denied objective justification, namely, that objective justification just leads to universalism or to a lack of sanctification, or both.

Consider the consequences, not only if objective justification is denied, but if it is not upheld, defended, stated clearly and precisely. The Gospel becomes conditional. Christ died for you if you believe, when you believe it. Automatically, the attention turns from Christ to faith, his work to man's fickle heart.

At Helsinki in 1973 Lutherans did not know what to do with the doctrine of justification. Just as little have men known what to do with the Gospel message, a message that is foolishness to the wise of this world, a message at which many have taken offense and called it blood theology, cheap grace, an insult to human dignity. Hopefully we can appreciate a little more our heritage in the Scriptural doctrine of objective justification if, before we carefully evaluate the message we proclaim, we consider what others have done and continue to do with the message. Like my new-fangled jack, which is really not new, they don't know what to do with the message, for they refuse to use it as God has carefully instructed his church to use it.

Rome depreciates the message. Justification is not a judicial verdict but a process, a physical, salutary act. Coupled with the merits of Christ is man's own merit, worth, and will. For Rome Christ only merited this much—that God infuses righteousness into man that he might become righteous before God. The result of such preaching is at best fear, doubt, and confusion over one's eternal salvation.

Calvinism limits the atonement. Arminianism makes obedience to Christ the essential factor of justifying faith and for the most part makes of Christ the way shower, the perfect example. Enthusiasts stress the inner word and Christ in us and are little different from Osiandrianism that stated that "if by faith he dwells in us then he brings us righteousness."⁴ Synergists may restrict man's efforts to the initial moment of conversion over against Rome which teaches that man's efforts cover the entire period of Christian experience, but still makes transformation of man a factor in atonement. It echoes the voice of modern Protestantism for whom God declares righteous only such as who are righteous themselves. Add to these the Modernists of various stripes who demythologize, socialize and revolutionize the Gospel message.

This is hardly what our Savior had in mind when he commissioned his disciples to go into the entire world and preach the Gospel to every creature. It is important that Christ's church took seriously the Savior's message to go. A compassion for souls is necessary. Likewise eagerness to preach the message. The early church was eager, so eager to proclaim that Word, and took the Savior's charge so seriously that even in midst of persecution "those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went" Acts 8:4. We find this sincerity and urgency in men such as Peter and John, Stephen and Philip. Paul speaks to the Corinthians of being compelled to preach the Gospel. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" 1 Co 9:16.

What then did our Savior have in mind?—"teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you!" Mt 28:20. They were sent to proclaim the whole counsel of God's word, sin and grace, law and gospel, but especially the gospel of God's marvelous grace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were to proclaim that which we read in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf; Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The real content of the Gospel is the Word of reconciliation. Through Christ God has reconciled us to himself. The work of redemption is finished and done. Note the message to be proclaimed by the church is not what God intends to do, what God is willing to do, much less what God promises to do if certain conditions are met. It is the good news of what God has done. God has reconciled the world to himself. Men’s’ sins are no longer charged against them. Each man is declared righteous. It is an accomplished fact.

This is a message to be proclaimed. Paul says it twice. He “gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” And Paul adds to the thought: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors.” Ambassadors have a message to proclaim. Not their own, but another’s. Christ’s ambassadors speak for Christ. Paul says “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” v 20. When they speak, Christ speaks through them. But speak they must. To be silent would be unfaithfulness. To speak a message other than reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, full and complete, would also be unfaithfulness. “Be reconciled to God.” Here is an invitation to faith, an appeal to accept what is said and done: God has forgiven you in Christ.

Though not expressly stated it is obvious to whom the church is to proclaim the message of reconciliation—to all who have not yet entered into the right relationship with God, to all who have not appropriated to themselves Christ’s righteousness. But the fact that some, many, do not believe does not remove the fact that “God reconciled us to himself through Christ.” That is the message. Having invited sinners to believe, having appealed for faith, the Apostle repeats the message to be proclaimed: “God made him who had no sin to be in for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” v 21.

The church is to proclaim: “He was delivered over to death for our sins and as raised to life for our justification” Ro 4:25. With this verse which concludes the chapter on the example of Abraham the apostle summarizes the object of Abraham’s belief: Christ’s death for his sins and Christ’s resurrection for his justification. Both are historical facts, not needing any further explanation. What if such a death is unheard of—one death for all, that all might live, one death of an innocent man, that guilty ones might go free. What if a resurrection is not natural, contrary to every law of nature. Death and resurrection are the two great facts of our redemption. They are as relevant for sinners now as then. We recall Paul’s words to the Corinthians concerning these two great facts, 2 Corinthians 15. If Christ is not risen from the death he died on Calvary—everything important in our Christian life is in vain, our preaching, our faith. We are yet in our sins, of all men most miserable. Christ died. Christ rose. As the atonement for sin is effected through his death, so our justification is effected through his resurrection. This is the message of Christ’s church.

We note also Romans 5:12-19, reading again the last two verses. “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Again the apostle states the message—justification for all men, a past and complete act. Paul does so with the contrasts of the two Adams. By the first Adam’s sin many, all, were made sinners. By his trespass all are condemned. By his disobedience all have become sinners. As a result of his sin all die. The second Adam came to save many, all. By his act of righteousness all men are justified; by his obedience all are righteous; by his grace life has been purchased for all men.

A quick look at these several *sedes doctrinae* remind us that the message the church has to proclaim, is bound to proclaim, is that forgiveness is a fact, a ready blessing. Such forgiveness is, of course, of Christ. Scripture freely states that God forgives sin for Christ’s sake. Without Christ’s merit there is no forgiveness. We are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” Ro 3:24. Faith has but one object, Christ, his righteousness, his obedience, his death, his resurrection, as we have already noted in the previous references. To these we might also add his blood, his name, God’s testimony of his son, his Gospel. “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him” Ro 5:9. “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life!” 1 Jn 5:13. “Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son” 1 Jn 5:10. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” Ro 1:16.

The Lutheran confessions freely underscore universal justification for Christ’s sake. Article III of the Formula of Concord states: “But, since it is the obedience as above mentioned (not only of one nature, but) of the entire person, it is a complete satisfaction and expiation for the human race, by which the eternal, immutable righteousness of God, revealed in the Law, has been satisfied, and is thus our righteousness, which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel, and upon which faith relies before God, which God imputes to faith, as it is in Ro 5:19: ‘For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many

be made righteous; and 1 Jn 1:7: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin.' Likewise: 'The just shall live by his faith' Hab 2:4; Ro 1:17."⁵

Article XI adds that Christ's satisfaction is for the whole world, the entire human race. "That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who by his faultless (innocency) obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life."⁶

Turning back to Article III of the Formula we note its emphasis upon Christ, for Christ's sake, and the comfort this offers. "In order, therefore, that troubled hearts may have a firm, sure consolation, also, that due honor be given to the merit of Christ and the grace of God, the Scriptures teach that the righteousness of faith before God consists alone in the gracious (gratuitous) reconciliation or the forgiveness of sins, which is present to us out of pure grace, for the sake of the only merit of the Mediator, Christ, and is received through faith alone in the promise of the Gospel. In like manner, too, in justification before God faith relies neither upon contrition nor upon love, or other virtues, but upon Christ alone, and in him upon his complete obedience by which he has fulfilled the Law for us, which (obedience) is imputed to believers or righteousness."⁷

The Confessions also remind us this is a message to be proclaimed. "For either you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on him, and obtain him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by his suffering, death, resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused his Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which he gave the Holy Ghost to bring his treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves."⁸

The thought of condition was mentioned earlier in the introduction and in comments on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. We return to that thought here. What would the church be losing if she were willing to compromise, be flexible, give an inch on the doctrine of objective justification? We have commented on the perversity of Roman, Protestant, Modernist teachings on justification and what they do to the message of forgiveness by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. By yielding anything at all on the doctrine of objective justification, take a giant step in this direction.

Dr. Walther complained long ago that men, yes Lutheran dogmaticians, wanted to make a difference, a separation, between Christ's merit as the thing that justifies and justification, or remission of sins itself. Following this thought the message that the church proclaims is Christ, his merit, what he earned, yes for all the world but not the forgiveness of sins itself, justification, as the object of faith. Dr. Walther argued that if this distinction were applied consistently, "one could no longer believe in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, on the basis of the gracious promise in the objective means of grace, but would have to deduce the fact one is justified from the fact that one truly believes."⁹ Here our own Dr. Adolph Hoenecke comments to the same effect. "The questions as to assurance in regard to the truth and reality of our faith must be carefully distinguished from the question as to the assurance of justification by faith, for the moment one would become involved in the former question, one would have entered the subjective domain, namely, the nature, constitution, etc., of the true faith, and thus justification would become uncertain because nothing of our own, nothing subjective, can constitute our righteousness before God."¹⁰

Take away objective justification—that God at the death and resurrection of Christ nearly 2000 years ago declared the world, all sinners righteous, each individual righteous—and you take away the certainty of salvation. No, it doesn't make salvation as uncertain as do the teaching of Rome, Calvinists, Arminians, Enthusiasts. But just as certainly it introduces subjectivity to faith and salvation, and with subjectivity, the doubt and uncertainty which must follow.

In this connection we add a few words concerning absolution. In the earliest days of the Synodical Conference, yes even before the Synodical Conference was formed, the doctrine of objective justification was staunchly defended in Dr. Walther's presentation on Absolution. It was at a time when orthodox Lutheranism had for the most part vanished in Europe and was fighting for its very existence in the new world. Pietism and Rationalism and take its toll over the centuries. Dr. Walther, in his student days, had experienced the "enthusiasm" of pietism, its conditional Gospel, and had not quickly forgotten the anguish of soul it had caused him. Perhaps no one since Luther came to appreciate as much the unconditional promise of the Gospel of objective justification and the wonderful assurance offered to him in both the general and private absolution. For Walther the purest form of the Gospel was always to be found in the doctrine of absolution. Twelve years after the founding of the German Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, with Walther elected as its first president, and nine years after he began teaching as professor of theology at the Synod's seminary, Walther wrote an article entitled "How Great and Deadly Is the Error of Those Who Deny the Preaching of the Gospel and the Power to Forgive Sins on Earth."¹¹ In this essay Walther writes: "For what does it mean 'Christ has perfectly redeemed us?' It means: Christ has already, for us all, done and conducted what we should have done and conducted to acquire salvation; for, as the Bible says, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. One died for all, and therefore all died. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. (2 Co 5:21, 14; Ro 5:18) As Christ, expiring on the cross, paid for the punishment of sin for all men, there all of us have already actually paid for the same; and as Christ as a former

debtor was openly and ceremoniously pardoned, absolved, and justified by his Father from all debt through his resurrection from the dead, there all of us were already actually pardoned, absolved and justified; consequently, St. Paul wrote: Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

Here Dr. Walther expresses strongly and clearly the doctrine of objective justification. And he goes on to state its result in the absolution, “From this it follows that this can also be announced to all people: Be happy, you sinners! Christ has already cancelled your sins. Christ has already seized the forgiveness of your sins. Christ has already reconciled you with God and has already won you God’s grace. Christ has already merited you a righteousness that is valid before God. Christ already conquered death and hell for you. Christ has already obtained your entrance into heaven through his worthiness. In short, Christ has already completely accomplished the work of your redemption. Consequently, it is clear that since Christ has already completely redeemed all men the Gospel is nothing else than a preaching of the forgiveness of sins to all people on earth, to which God himself in heaven speaks his “Yes” and “Amen.” It is, in a word, a universal absolution of the entire world, brought from heaven by men, sealed with Christ’s blood and death, not only confirmed by God himself in the most glorious and festive manner by Christ’s resurrection but, indeed, at the same time truly consummated.”

In the same article Dr. Walther also injects the exception which men take the doctrine of absolution. Human reason objects to the proclamation of forgiveness as a fact, a ready blessing, arguing that if that were true, even the impenitent would be absolved. Since the impenitent cannot be absolved, they insist that absolution truly offers, confers, and imparts forgiveness only to those who believe. Absolution becomes valid only if a person believes. Sensing this objection Walter went on to add that the penitent should not be absolved but “not for the reason that absolution spoken to an impenitent would be invalid but because the same would nevertheless despise it and push it away from himself and would there by only fall into more sin and lay a greater damnation upon himself.”

This objective justification, confessed by Walther in his article on absolution, was confessed also by Luther: “Remember that the keys or the forgiveness of sins are not based on our own repentance or worthiness, as they (the Baptists) wrongly teach. Such teachings are entirely Pelagian, Mohammedan, pagan, Jewish, like those of the Anabaptists, fanatic, and anti-Christian. On the contrary our repentance and work, our disposition and all we are, should be built on the keys. We are to depend on them with as daring confidence as on God’s Word itself. You must never doubt what the keys say and give you, at the risk of losing both body and soul. It is as certain as if God himself were saying so, which indeed he does. It is his own Word and command. But if you doubt the same you make God a liar. You prevent his order and base his keys on your own repentance and worthiness. You should, indeed, repent. But to make repentance the basis of the forgiveness of your sins and of corroborating the work of the keys, is to abandon faith and deny Christ. By means of the key, he will forgive your sins, not for your own sake but for his own name’s sake out of pure grace.”¹²

Because of the nature of objective justification absolution offers, gives, confers, imparts, forgiveness of sins. It is valid, not because of the integrity of the man who proclaims it, not because of the faith of one who hears it, but because of God’s declaration of righteousness through Christ.

To pronounce such absolution is not always easy for the Christian. In his pastoral theology, John H.C. Fritz draws attention to this fact, by quoting a statement from Walther: “When the pastor has good reasons to doubt that a person confessing his sins is truly penitent, but cannot absolutely prove that he is impenitent and therefore cannot suspend him from Communion, he dare not attempt to salve his conscience by adding all sorts of conditions, even warnings and threats, to the formula of absolution.”¹³

If the Christian pastor were to make absolution into a conditional formula, then he would also have to do the same thing in administering Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—in which case again the certainty of forgiveness would rest, not on the objective, gracious promise of forgiveness for Christ’s sake, but on a persons’ contrition and faith. The justified sinner would be robbed of his assurance of freedom from servitude of sin, his assurance of peace with God, his assurance of his new liberty in Christ, and sanctification would become a drugery rather than the pleasure it ought to be.

How important it is that we hold fast to the doctrine of objective justification in our proclamation of the Gospel. It is highlighted for us in the Kokomo affair. Ordinarily a charge a few members brought against their pastor, congregation and synod would not have become such general knowledge, nor cause such wide concern. The fact that the congregation’s action to remove the persons involved led to an appeal to the district does not alone explain the notoriety. Mainly it was this that the incident was tied in with Dr. Maier’s teaching at Ft. Wayne and that Christian News chose to publish every letter and article that came its way with little, if any, discrimination. What was especially confusing to many within and without our synod were the four statements offered by those who brought the charges. These four statements were to present accurately the position of our WELS concerning the doctrine of objective justification and substantiate the charge of false doctrine. Though most, if not all of you have heard them, we read them here to refresh our memory.

- 1) Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner’s attitude toward Christ’s sacrifice, purely on the basis of God’s verdict, every sinner, whether he knows it or not, whether he believes it or not, has received the status of a saint.
- 2) After Christ’s intervention and through Christ’s intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints.
- 3) When God reconciled the world to himself through Christ, he individually pronounced forgiveness to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not.

- 4) At the time of the resurrection of Christ God looked down in hell and declared Judas, the people destroyed in the flood, and all the ungodly, innocent, not guilty, and forgiven of all sin and gave unto them the status of saints.

Because of the confusion they caused I also read at length Dr. Becker's response to the statements as written in an essay delivered to the Chicago Pastoral Conference on Nov. 9, 1982:

"These statements were not drawn up by anyone in WELS in order to present our position on universal and objective justification. They were quotations selected by lay members of a WELS congregation who did not agree with our doctrine. They held that Jesus by his vicarious satisfaction had made it possible for God to forgive sins but that God forgives men only when and if they believe, so that man's act of believing always precedes God's verdict of innocence.

The first three statements are taken verbatim from WELS sources. It should be said that they are found in contexts that throw considerable light on what the writers intended to convey by the words used. The last statement is quoted from a term paper from Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne. It reflects the views of a LC-MS professor who saw in it the significance of objective justification. It should probably be said that this professor does not accept our exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 5:19, which, by the way, is also the traditional standard LC-MS interpretation of those passages.

The laymen who drew up this list of statements evidently intended to persuade their congregation that universal justification could not possibly be true, because that would mean that God forgives also unbelievers. We can sympathize with their difficulties. It is hard for human reason to believe that if God has forgiven he can still condemn. Even for Christians the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness insofar as they are still natural men, or insofar as the Old Adam still clings to them. It is difficult to take every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Walther was right when he said that the highest art of the Christian theologian is the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. But we need to remember that the main issue always was: 'Has God forgiven the sins of all men?'

Because the passages are torn out of context, they are likely to cause some difficulties. When the LC-MS layman who felt called to come to the defense of the WELS Kokomo laymen circulated a questionnaire calling for an expression of opinion on the four statements, I also received a copy. I refused to participate in the survey on the grounds that the statements are not clear and the results of the survey would therefore also be confused. Every one of the statements can be understood correctly, even though one must swallow a little hard to accede to the fourth. However, because the statements were used to discredit the truth of universal justification and to cause other laymen to doubt this teaching it is especially necessary to point out that the statements do not contain false doctrine.

Anyone who reads the statements carefully will recognize that they do not say that there are saints in hell. The charge that our Synod teaches such foolishness is a base canard that has been widely circulated on the basis of the four statements.

The third statement is a basically good summary of our position, although on the part of those who believe that we do not consider faith to be important enough, it probably needs the wider context of our stress on *sola fide*. Because the terms "general justification" and "individual justification" have sometimes been used as synonyms for objective and subjective justification, respectively, I would have preferred it if the words "individually" and "individual" had not been used. But the meaning of the statement is nevertheless clear and correct.

The first statement can easily be misunderstood and has caused confusion. The Bible never uses the word saint, when applied to human beings, in any other sense than a converted Christian. Those who have read those words in the context of John Meyer's *Ministers of Christ* know what Prof. Meyer wanted to say in that sentence. The key words are "objectively speaking" and "status." Meyer simply wanted to say that the sins of all men are forgiven. "Status of a saint" to him meant "the legal state of a forgiven sinner." While we may disagree with his use of English, we cannot as biblical theologians surrender what he wanted to say. Nevertheless it would have been better if he had not used the word saint in that connection, especially since the word "received" is also a word which is often used in describing the function of faith in justification. We *receive* the status of saint for ourselves or accept forgiveness through faith.

The same criticism can be directed against the second statement. One really becomes a guilt-free *saint* only through faith, if we limit ourselves to the biblical usage of the word. However, since our holiness, as Augustine says, consists in sin's remission rather than in life's perfection, we could say that when God forgave the sins of the whole world he *regarded* all sinners as guiltfree, but if they are guilt-free we might also say that they are considered sinless in the sight of God. But a sinless person is a holy person, a saint. The fact that unbelievers do not consider *themselves* to be forgiven does not change the truth of God's Word that tells us that God does not impute the sins of all men to them, or that through one man justification has come upon all men.

Even the fourth statement can be defended even though it leaves much to be desired. As we have said, the statement is not drawn from a WELS source. If it is true that God has forgiven the sins of the world then it is also true that he forgave the sin of Judas. When Jesus called Judas "friend" in the garden he was in effect treating him as a forgiven sinner. If Jesus took away the sins of the world he also took

away the sins of the people who died in the flood. It is surely no more difficult to believe that God forgave sins that were already being punished than to believe that at the time of the resurrection he forgave sins that had not yet been committed. How that is possible I do not know. It very likely finds its explanation in the divine attribute of eternity

But while the statement can be defended as expressing a biblical reality, yet it would be best not to speak in such terms. In Scandinavia it is customary on the part of some to ridicule universal justification with the remark, "The damned lie in hell with their forgiven sins." So this fourth statement is a caricature which has a tendency to make universal justification look ridiculous.

There is little point in talking about forgiveness for the damned. They have made their bed by not believing the Gospel and all that is left to believe then is the condemnation of the law which they hear in their own conscience.

If I know for sure that a man with whom I am dealing is a wicked impenitent unbeliever I will not tell him his sin is forgiven. That message is for those who are troubled by their sin. To the impenitent we preach the Law and the Lord Jesus promises to stand behind our message with his words, "Whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Only when men confess that they are sinners who need forgiveness are they ready to hear the message, "Your sins are forgiven," not "Your sins will be forgiven if you believe, or if you pray, or if anything," but just "Your sins are forgiven." And the Lord Jesus also promises to stand behind the word of those who speak for him. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." "They are remitted" is a perfect tense, and we can really say "They have been forgiven long ago," or as Luther says, "before we prayed or before we ever thought of it."

What shall we say of the four statements? It would have been better if the Kokomo laymen had simply been told, "Since you refuse to accept the clear teaching of the Bible that God has for Christ's sake already forgiven the sins of the world, and since you are not willing to be treated as weak Christians but persist in 'doubtful disputations' (Ro 14:1), we can no longer tolerate your propaganda against the doctrine of our church or consider you to be in fellowship with us."

Three of the four statements, because of their lack of clarity, tend to confuse the issue. But since the disciplined laymen used them to advance their false doctrine, it was understandable that the congregation should also use them in its rejection of the falsehood being advocated. I do not consider any of the four statements to be false doctrine, but I would rather not use the language used in the first, second, and fourth." (end of Becker quotations)

While the Kokomo incident raised many questions before the matter was resolved, it has caused us to review again for ourselves the doctrine of objective justification, the comfort that this doctrine is to our personal salvation, and its great importance for us a church in our reaching out with the Gospel.

IV. By Faith

Just a few years ago Catholic and Lutheran scholars appointed respectively by the United States Roman Catholic Bishop's Committee for Ecumenical Interreligious Affairs and the Lutheran World Ministries which is the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation released a 24,000 word document entitled *Justification by Faith*, stating they had reached a "fundamental consensus on the Gospel." The document went on to say "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."

Naturally the religious press made the most of this suggesting that finally Lutheran and Catholics were beginning to agree on the doctrine which was the major doctrinal dispute at the time of the Reformation. The fact that the results of this five year study, a shared statement on justification, appeared just when Lutherans were nearing the end of a year long celebration of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth made the news the more sensational. Needless to say some of our people who knew little more than the newspapers revealed were taken by surprise, if not troubled and confused. No doubt there were those who had real hopes that after nearly 500 years an end of the Lutheran-Catholic separation was at hand. At any rate our people were asking honest questions. Are Lutherans and Catholics growing closer! Are our teachings more alike than we had supposed over the past centuries? Are Catholics becoming more like Lutherans? Are Lutherans becoming more like Catholics? Is it possible that Catholics and Lutherans will one day unite?

There is little doubt that one can find much in the wording of the statement on justification which would give the religious press and many people, Lutherans and Catholics alike, hope of better things to come. However, the better informed among our own people were alerted already by the names of the participants. They represent elements in Lutheran and Catholic circles that are ultra liberal and hotly ecumenical in their views. Helsinki, twenty years earlier, extended the hand of closer relations with Catholics. The statement on justification is the result of five year long hand clasping where all participants, as it seems, were bent on emphasizing the positive and ignoring the negative.

The discussions bore fruit to be sure—the very fruit that the participants were determined to realize. This is not to suggest that the participants entered the discussions with tongue in cheek. This is not to accuse them of being dishonest, insincere men. But sincerity and honesty is not the measure of a man's doctrinal integrity. If hope of any God-pleasing fruits was not to be dismissed before a single word was spoken in the long discussion, all hope was cast aside when the participants failed to come to grips with terms. We said earlier that there was no unanimity on the terms of sin and grace, though both expressions were used throughout. Because of the Historical-Critical method of Bible interpretation common to the participants one does not

expect to find the group coming to grips with sin. It is much the same with grace. To be sure, the dialogue mentioned infused grace versus grace alone, but for the most part tried to reconcile the two. In fact that is really the tone of the entire discussion. The purpose from the start was not to reach an agreement on the doctrine of justification. Nor did the dialogue disappoint us here either. The purpose was to gain a greater understanding for and tolerance of the way each side speaks. As if Luther and all the other orthodox theologians hadn't understood what Rome has taught and stood for. Yes, as if the Council of Trent did not know what the Lutheran Confessions said. But ecumenists wear blinders. They look through rose colored glasses. They see only what they want to see.

All this is to be seen also in the use of the term faith, justification by faith. Again the participants never really come to grips with the term. Nor could one hope for that. If Lutherans at Helsinki could not agree among themselves on justification by faith, how could they hope to come to a consensus, a real, a Scriptural consensus with the spokesmen of the antichrist. Furthermore, if Lutherans do not hold to objective justification, and there is not the least reason to believe that one of the Lutheran men does, then there is no chance for agreement on the role of justification by faith.

The participants tried very hard. In fact they really overdo it in order to make it appear that already at the Reformation, before and after Luther's death, the two sides did not really understand each other. Luther is passed off for the most part as one whose concern was only pastoral, a concern for the troubled consciences of his people. And if the Catholics had been a little more understanding, corrected some abuses, Luther would not have persisted as he did. The suggestion is very strong at this point of the discussion that with a little more understanding Luther's views could have stood along side the church's views. The Regensburg Colloquy is cited as a step in that direction, or at least an attempt that sets a good precedent for the future. Again the goal remains consistent—understanding, not agreement in doctrine, a willingness not only to let bygones be bygones, but to allow Roman Catholic teachings stand side by side with Lutheran teachings as representative of Christian teaching. This may strike us as absurd, and it is, but again we must remember who is talking. They are men who represent strong Neo-Orthodox and ecumenical views. Scripture is not the inspired word of God. These are men who think in terms of mythology in Scripture. For Neo-Orthodox Lutherans the idea of faith is no longer that much different from Rome's transformation. Near the end the document finally states that imputation and transformation can both be Biblical. For the Neo-Orthodox Lutheran faith is the essential change in man, a going on process. Not many mental gymnastics are necessary for the Lutheran participants to quiesce to Rome's use of faith as the beginning of justification, as Rome has been willing to speak of it. Furthermore it is nothing new for Catholics to speak of a man being saved by faith and by grace. Even Dr. Eck was willing to do that. But for Catholics faith remains the same, the beginning of justification, a quality, a moral achievement, a mere knowledge of Christ according to the intellect, but not a trusting in the merits of Christ for forgiveness.

Such an injustice to the doctrine of justification by faith as reflected in this joint statement of Lutheran and Catholics prompts us to go back again and carefully consider the Scriptural teaching of justification by faith.

We begin with a description of faith. Faith is a condition of the heart. It is essentially the reliance of the heart on the promises of God as revealed in the Gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" v. 18. Hence faith is more than mere knowledge of God or of Christ. The Jews of Jesus' day knew of him. Jews today are content to speak of the historical Jesus. I recently read an article by a Jewish rabbi who insisted that the account of Jesus' death and resurrection in the Scriptures must be true. But Jews do not know him in faith. They do not trust in him with the heart. The Apology states: "Faith is not only knowledge in the intellect, but all confidence in the will, i.e., it is to wish and receive that which is offered in the promise, namely reconciliation and remission of sins. Scripture thus uses the term faith."¹

Rome, as its basic error, teaches that faith is mere knowledge of Christ, only takes place in the intellect, and does not involve the will. Trust then follows faith and is the fruit of faith. Over against this basic Roman error orthodox Lutheran dogmatists have described faith as knowledge, assent, and trust. In so doing, however, they do not want these to be understood as three parts of faith, or three stages of faith, but the same Spirit-worked faith from three different angles. Knowledge, that true knowledge of the heart, is saving faith. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" John 17:3. Assent is also saving faith. "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" 1 John 3:23. Confidence is faith "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" John 3:36. The Confessions also recognize this terminology. The Apology states: "Faith which receives the forgiveness of sins . . . is the true knowledge of Christ."² "Faith, properly so called, is that which assents to the promise."³ "To believe means to rely on the mercy of God, that he desires to be gracious for Christ's sake, without our merits."⁴

Faith in the Gospel is a special personal thing. He is a believer who applies the promise of the gospel to himself and says with the apostle: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" Gal 2:20. The very nature of the Gospel promise calls for such self appropriation. We have considered at some length the

Gospel promise in Romans 5:18-19, 2 Co 5:18-19 and Romans 4:25. They proclaim that through the obedience of Christ all have been justified, God has reconciled sinners to himself through his Son, that Christ was delivered up for sins and raised up for the justification of sinners. But these words mean nothing to the individual unless he realizes he is included and says Christ died for me. Christ paid for my sin. In the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed we confess that Christ was born, suffered, died and rose again. Yet, what do they mean when we do not add, understand, "for me." Luther writes: "The creed does not say in so many words, "born, suffered, for us, but Scripture compels us to add these words: "for us" to every act of Christ mentioned" ⁵ The Apology states: "This special faith, therefore, by which an individual believes that for Christ's sake his sins are remitted him, and that for Christ is sake God is reconciled and propitious, obtains remission of sins and Justification."⁶

There is reason for this stress also. While admitting that faith has to do with justification, Rome denies faith as a special, personal thing. Consider what that would mean! It would mean that the sinner can be sure that God is gracious and that he is forgiven, justified, free from the guilt and punishment of sin. What a horrible thought this is for Rome. It destroys papal theology and its entire Sacramental system. Then grace becomes grace, and merit has no merit; merit becomes unnecessary, even destructive to faith and salvation.

Saving faith is also actual, this is, an act of the intellect and the will. We had begun to touch upon this thought when we spoke of faith as knowledge. Faith is called an act over against those, again, who only look upon faith as a quality, or a work which justifies. Here Rome speaks of infused grace; enthusiasts speak of Christ in us. Thinking of faith as a quality or work separates faith from its object, the Gospel promise. Calvinists also separate faith from its object by its denial of universal grace. But note the expression that the Scripture uses in speaking of faith: "having obtained righteousness" Ro 9:30; "as you received Christ" Col 2:6; "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord" Isa 2:3; "will hasten to you" Isa 55:5; "unites himself with the Lord" 1 Co 6:17 to name a few. Such terms portray faith as an act of the will that with confidence of the heart lays hold of Christ, and clings to him for forgiveness and salvation.

The Apology acknowledges faith as an act of the will when it says: "The faith which justifies is to wish and receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of Justification"⁷ Luther adds: "God wishes and desires that we should ardently long for this grace, and faith does this very thing. Faith considers grace to the highest good, therefore hungers and thirsts for it intensely, and thus obtains it."⁸

Though we rightly speak of faith as a personal and actual thing, as an act of the will as well as a condition of the heart, faith still remains but the instrument, the *organon leptikon*, for apprehending the forgiveness of sin in the Gospel. As long as Scripture speaks of God's act of declaring sinners righteousness, faith does not play into the picture. Faith has nothing to do with the change in man's status before God. Here Romans 5:1-11 is an interesting study. The apostle, speaking of the Christian at Rome, does begin this chapter with subjective justification—how by faith they came to be possessors of peace with God. Having said that and what it means for the Christian even in the midst of suffering and difficulties in this life, the apostle goes on to speak of that which God did to make this possible.

He reviews man's hopeless condition. "When we were still powerless" v. 5, "while we were still sinners" Christ died for us (v. 8). There was nothing in man to account for the blessed state in which the Roman Christians found themselves. Where then? In the love of God. "God demonstrates his own love for us v. 8. That great demonstration of God's love is Christ. "Christ died for the ungodly" v. 6; "Christ died for us" v 8. The apostle goes on and on to impress men of the certainty of man's despicable condition and God's love, and man's new status before God, without mentioning faith, always speaking of man's justification as a past completed thing—"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him" v. 9. Verse 10: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life." Finally, in the last verse of the section, verse 11, Paul gets to the matter of faith—does it so quietly we hardly notice. "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christy through whom we have now received reconciliation." There is the part that faith plays. There is nothing to boast about, no great attention placed upon faith. Faith merely receives the promised blessing.

Faith is merely the instrument of receiving God's grace. It is the hand that receives, but not a helping hand. When speaking of justification faith is placed in opposition to works. "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" Ro 3:28. "However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" Ro 4:5. The Confessions heartily agree. "The sole office and property of faith is that it is the means or instrument by and through which God's grace and the merit of Christ in the promise of the Gospel are received, apprehended, accepted, applied to us, and appropriated."⁹ "Faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy."¹⁰

Anyone who does not hold to objective justification is bound to have trouble thinking of faith only as an instrument that receives. Take away objective justification and faith becomes some kind of quality, an ethical act, some moral improvement in man. To support their false contention they point to Scriptures that command men to believe. "And this is his command; to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commands us" 1 Jn 3:23. To this they attach those Scriptures that speak of faith as obedience. "Through him and for his name's sake we receive grace and apostleship to call people from among all Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" Ro 1:5. "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in

Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” Acts 6:7. Hence, men argue faith must be thought of as a moral achievement. But such an argument again separates faith from its object, the Gospel. Commandments and obedience here cannot refer to Law, but the Gospel. The proper interpretation of these passages seems to be that God not only permits us to look to him as a gracious God, he commands it. They certainly cannot make faith a moral act. To clarify Lutheran dogmaticians have insisted: “Faith justifies not in the category of quality, but in the category of relation.” Faith justifies not as an act by itself, but because of the object which it grasps.” “Faith justifies not as a work but as an instrument.”¹¹

But isn't faith a work? In fact, can't it be called a good work, the first and best good work? Luther certainly called it a work or act but in so doing separates it from the works and virtues that flow from faith. Commenting on John 6:28-29 Luther says: “The text deals with the work that we are to perform, namely to believe. Faith is a work that man must do.” Having called faith a work Luther goes on: “Later Christ tells us about the origin of faith—for no one possesses faith of himself—then he says: (Jn 6:44) “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.” And again (Jn 6:65): “No one can believe in me unless it is granted him by the Father.” For faith is a divine work which God demands of us; but at the same time he himself must implant it in us; for we cannot believe by ourselves.”¹²

Luther is speaking of faith as a work in a wider sense, a movement, an activity, in the intellect and will of man. Faith may be called a work as long as it is not meant in the specific sense and meant as something done in response to the command of the law. Faith is a work. Faith is a good work, but not in the meritorious sense. “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the Law” Ro 3:28. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast” Eph 2:8-9.

In this connection it has also been asked whether faith should be thought of as a receiving hand or hand which takes hold of something. Actually both are correct, properly understood. For faith may be understood as both active and passive. It is active in so far as it apprehends Christ. It is passive in as much as it is a free gift of God and not some kind of human cooperation. Jeremiah rightly said: “Turn thou me; and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God, Surely after that I was turned, I repented” Jer 31:18f.

It is not only Rome which objects to the Lutheran doctrine of faith as a mere instrument. So do all synergists. In this way they seek to solve the riddle of why some are saved and not others. They reason that unless faith has some inherent, intrinsic goodness that sets the believer apart from the unbeliever God is actually arbitrary in accepting an Able and refusing a Cain. But if faith is meritorious in any remote sense then salvation is not according to grace. Since it is of grace, faith remains a gift.

Faith is the mere instrument. Therefore in justification the emphasis must not be upon faith, but upon the object of faith, upon Christ, upon God's gracious pardon according to his act of justification. As Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost he did not harp on faith. He said: “Follow me:” “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life” Jn 6:47-48. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” Jn 14:6. At other times Scripture names the Father as the object of faith inasmuch as the Father promised and sent his Son. “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” Jn 5:24. Or Scripture may mention the Gospel as the object of faith. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the Word I preached to you” 1 Co 15:1-2. In so naming the Gospel as the object of faith we must insist on only, the gospel, and not the law. For Rome makes all of God's word the object of faith, this is, also the law, to make of faith a moral act and thereby prevent sinners from being certain of their salvation. Not that there isn't a proper way to speak of faith in the entire word of God. But when we do we are no longer speaking of special faith, justifying faith, but general faith that believes all that the inspired Scriptures say and teach.

This might be the place to caution against making faith a condition. It is something that is easy to do without intending to do so. We said our Lord did not harp on faith; he simply proclaimed himself to be the true Messiah and invited sinners to come to him. Too many questions about faith: do you believe? Are you sure you believe? Why don't you have more trust? can be misleading as emphasis IF you believe you will be saved. True, at times Scripture does sound a call to faith after the Gospel has been preached. But just as often it simply announces the Gospel message without any invitation to believe. This thought alone is a good reason why we encourage our seminary students, even after they have several whole years of sermon preparation behind them, to continue to write out their sermons. Key thoughts such as those that speak of faith, which express key doctrines and appropriate them to sinners, deserve careful thought and wording. One can mention faith, encourage, exhort, and admonish faith and still have failed to preach the doctrine of justification. At the same time one can preach an entire sermon without the mention of faith and still have greatly edified and strengthened faith, as long as we proclaimed the blessed Gospel of Christ the sinner's substitute. Yes, we will feel free, even obligated, to appeal to the intellect and will in our preaching. At the same time we will clearly remind our hearers that faith is the gift of God by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. But first and foremost we will let the message of the cross shine forth upon hearts that have been made contrite by the law.

A word should also be said about contrition. Caution must be exercised that we do not make contrition a condition of forgiveness. God will forgive your sins if you are sorry. It is true that no one can be saved unless

he is contrite. The Savior says: “Repent and believe the good news” Mark 1:15. Contrition must be preached, but only as a preparation for faith, not as a necessary condition of forgiveness. Walther has said: “When a person has been made to hunger and thirst for mercy contrition has done its full work in him.”¹² The sinner must be made to realize he is a lost and condemned sinner. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” Lk 5:31-32. But contrition precedes faith, it is not a part of faith, it is not a condition for forgiveness. The sorrow that precedes faith has no more to do with our becoming just in the sight of God than do all the fruits of faith. We would not want to say: “God will forgive your sins if you are sorry and believe, anymore than we want to say God will forgive your sins if you believe and do good works. Though either statement could be properly understood, both are open to serious misunderstanding.

Here again it is Rome that strays the furthest, stressing the quality of a man’s contrition. Stress is placed upon the sincerity, genuineness, and motivation of his contrition before he can be assured of any kind of forgiveness. But not only Rome. Pietism too has its way of stressing proper degrees of contrition as a condition of forgiveness.

We have spoken of faith as a condition of the heart and desire of the will, a real personal act. Yet faith is the mere instrument of receiving. Christ is the object of faith. Yes, faith is a good work, but not meritorious, a gift of God, not a condition of forgiveness. What this points to is the doctrine of the *sola fide*. Luther is to be defended and praised for adding the word *allein* to his translation of Romans 3:28. Man is saved by faith alone, and this faith is the work, the gift of God. By alone Luther does not exclude grace as Rome chose to understand it. To the contrary he maintains grace alone. Give up the *sola fide* and lose the *sola gratia*. Nor does the *sola* exclude contrition as a preparation for faith, as the so-called positive theologians understand grace and faith. For them sin is negative. Law preaching is offensive, demeaning. Contrition is outmoded, unnecessary. All a man needs is faith in a good God who would not think of punishing evil. The alone of Luther’s faith excludes works, only works and merit on the part of man, all works, any works, as Scripture emphatically states: “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” Ro 4:5. Again, give up the *sola fide* and you give up faith itself since Scripture places faith in opposition to works.

Returning to where we began, to the Lutheran-Catholic statement on justification, we fully understand our people’s concern over the much publicized accord. They have every right to ask questions. We must understand their concern, even sympathize if they seem to be confused. But our answer must be: The antichrist is still the antichrist; the Council of Trent still stands. Were there any gains, any pluses as a result of the 5 year study? Who gave up more, Lutherans or Catholics? Can anything positive be said for the venture? Certainly there were no gains for Biblical Christianity. Any dialogue that sets out to achieve a show of unity at any cost usually pays dearly. The cost can be calculated in terms of those who are now convinced that Lutheran and Catholic teaching on justification have much in common, have anything in common. They do not point in a similar direction to heaven—but oppositely. It is difficult to say who gave up more. Since both sides represented the most liberal voices in their respective church bodies and did not necessarily speak for a majority within their church bodies, much less all, the question who gave up most means little. Both sides had already given up much personally before they even met. If I had to say which, I would say the Lutheran point of view is the only loser. Catholicism has nothing to lose on the doctrine of justification. The true Lutheran doctrine has everything to lose. Can anything positive be said for the dialogue and statement? Maybe, but I haven’t found it yet. I must confess, I have stopped looking.

No reference has been made to other current events, the Fort Wayne disturbance and the Kokomo case. Subjective justification has not been a question. Yet it must be said once more: what becomes of subjective justification if objective justification is denied. Finally in some form or fashion, the *sola fide* is fractured maybe only a hairline fracture, but still a fracture. If justification does not mean that God has declared all sinners righteous and that this took place at Christ’s death and resurrection—then somehow, somewhere, sooner, not later, faith becomes more than the mere instrument, the receiving hand. Subjective faith becomes a condition, a reason, an explanation why some are saved and not others.

V. ON THE WAY TO FRUITFULNESS

We conclude our study of justification by turning our attention to sanctification. Justification has more to do with sanctification and sanctification has more to do with justification than we might at first think. The fact that Lutherans have joined Catholics in a statement on justification certainly warrants the attention we give sanctification at this time. Our study would be incomplete without saying something about the relation of the two, at least for a couple of reasons. Catholics charge that Lutherans ignore, do not teach good works. Many insist that some Lutherans put more stress on creeds than deeds. In this century the cry among Protestantism has reached a fever pitch—deeds, not creeds. Deeds, not creeds, is a noticeable mood behind the entire ecumenical movement. Ecumenists in all sincerity believe that a united Christendom will be a more effective voice to a dying world. Deeds not creeds is certainly the battle cry of the social Gospel, deeds which set out to resolve man’s temporal woes to the great neglect of man’s great spiritual need. Little is heard of man’s sin and separation from God and of God’s rich grace in Christ. I hope you will find this conclusion to our discussion of justification more than an afterthought, a remotely related subject, but a very fitting finishing touch to our study of Justification in the Light of Present Problems.

I. We are new creatures by faith in Jesus Christ

Sanctify means make holy. It could just as well mean change. For the heart that has come to faith in Christ Jesus has been changed. When the heart is changed, the life must also be changed. “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” Ro 6:1-4. Sanctification is change, change, however, only for the better. Sanctification means a new life. The change comes about the moment a person comes to faith. Paul underwent such change. The enemy of Christ became the follower of Christ and his word. The persecution became the confessor. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come” 2 Co 5:17. Change is real. Change is complete. It involves all, heart, life, purpose, being. All is new.

But the apostle is quick to add: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ...” 2 Co 5:18. The change is not of man or of men. It is not turning over a new leaf, the result of some New Year’s resolution. Like justification, the change is not of oneself, but the work of God the Holy Spirit by the Gospel. Justification is that which God has done for us. He does not hold our sin against us. Christ has paid the price. God has imputed Christ’s righteousness to us. Forgiveness is not something we look forward to or for which we still hope. Our justification is real; it is complete; it is perfect. And we contribute nothing. We could do nothing. So also our sanctification. Our sanctification is some thing God does in us. No, it is not perfect. It is not complete. More of that later. It is the work of God. It is what God does in the one whose life has been changed. “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure” Php 2:13.

But where does that leave us? Where does it leave man? What of man’s cooperation? Does this free man of any responsibility over against a lack of sanctification? Scripture truly teaches cooperation on the part of the Christians when it says: “You shall be witness unto me.” “Let your light shine before men.” “You are workers together with Christ.” “Apart from me you can do nothing.” The confessions also speak of the Christian’s cooperation when they speak of the free will or human powers after conversion. “But when man has been converted, and is thus enlightened, and his will is renewed, it is then that man wills what is good (so far as he is regenerate or a new man), and delights in the Law of God after the inward man, Ro 7:22, and henceforth does good to such an extent and as long as he is impelled by God’s spirit, as Paul says, Ro 8:14: ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ And this impulse of the Holy Ghost is not a *coactio*, or coercion, but as David says, Ps 110:4: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”¹ “From this, then, it follows that as soon as the Holy Ghost, as has been said, through the Word and holy Sacraments, has begun in us his work of regeneration and renewal, it is certain that through the power of the Holy Ghost we can and should cooperate, although still in great weakness. But this (that we cooperate) does not occur from our carnal natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly exhorts that as workers together with him we receive not the grace of God in vain. 2 Co 6:1. But this is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by his Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him, and that as soon as God would withdraw his gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God. But if this were understood thus (if any one would, take the expression of St. Paul in this sense) that the converted man cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the manner as when two horses together draw a wagon, this could in no way be conceded without prejudice to the divine truth.”²

We are new creatures by faith in Christ Jesus. The change in us is not of ourselves. In a proper manner of speaking we are called by God to cooperate in our life of sanctification and enabled by God alone to do so. Such cooperation is not of ourselves, not according to the natural man, but the power of God in us by the Gospel.

II. Lutherans do teach good works. Lutherans, in fact, teach cooperation in good works. Good works are the evidence of our Newness of Life.

Every good court of law seeks evidence. It does not convict, or acquit, without solid evidence. In every successful industry or business performance charts are the bottom line. God seeks fruitfulness in our lives. The Savior said: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” Jn 14:15. And again in his sermon on the mount: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” Mt 5:16. God delights in fruitfulness. The fruitfulness of the Christian is evidence of faith. “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth just as the Father commanded” 2 Jn 3:4. Fruitfulness in the Christian causes the world to sit up and take notice. It will lead men to glorify God who is in heaven. Fruitfulness is the evidence of acquittal, evidence that the Christian trusts in the righteousness of Christ. It is the bottom line to his faith, that faith is present, alive, and well.

Yes, without fruitfulness, faith is dead. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” Mt 7:21. Therefore we speak of good works as necessary. No, they have nothing to do with our coming to faith. Nor do they enable the Christian to retain his faith. “We believe, teach and confess also that not works maintain faith and salvation, but the Spirit of God alone, through faith, of whose presence and indwelling good works are necessary.”³ Good works are the evidence of faith. If there are no good works there can be no faith. Good works are necessary. It is one of the purposes for which the Holy Ghost has called us. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” Eph 2:10. Call it a matter of choice. We have no choice but to do them. If we despise works, if we ignore God’s call to fruitfulness, then faith has perished. If we are careless in regard to works, indifferent to them, faith is weak, even uncertain.

God seeks fruitfulness. God seeks growth in sanctification. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing!” Jn 15:5. Abounding in fruitfulness is a thought mentioned repeatedly by the apostle Paul in his epistles to the Corinthians. “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” 1 Co 15:58. “And God is able to make all grace abound in you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” 2 Co 9:8. Sanctification then is a process, an ongoing change for the better. It is growth in all Christian virtues as the Christian grows in knowledge and understanding. It is a steady growth that can result only from a more faithful use of God’s Word and Sacrament. Even as we can say that faith that does not grow and increase begins to falter and wane, even so we might say that fruitfulness which does not grow and increase begins to shrivel and pale.

Growth in sanctification is a lifelong process. Unfortunately it is not a steady advance. Too often the advance in sanctification is marked by repeated declines. Growing in sanctification is a lifelong process that is never complete. The Christian can never say: “I am satisfied with my degree of sanctification.” He cannot say that any more than he can say that he is satisfied with the steadfastness of his faith. We say with Paul, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” Php 3:12-14. The apostle Peter also urges: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” 2 Pt 3:18.

God seeks fruitfulness as evidence of our newness of life. Growth in sanctification is a lifelong process. Without good works faith is dead. But only God may determine what works are good, pleasing, and acceptable to him. Such fruitfulness God has revealed in his holy Word. “Love is the fulfillment of the Law” Ro 13:10. In his holy Law God reveals the conduct of Christians toward himself and toward all men. Clearly he has set forth sins of commission and omission. He has given in detail the godly virtues that the Christian must seek and in which he should strive to grow. Such works do not necessarily reflect the approval of men. Men may give little regard to gentleness, meekness, contentment, humility, a forgiving spirit. They may regard these more as liabilities and weaknesses than virtues. On the other hand men may establish works as good and necessary where God has not prescribed. Fasting, refraining from certain foods and beverages, prayers to saints and for the dead, Sabbath laws, etc., not only establish laws where God has not but the very establishing of such laws as good works for salvation proclaim Christ’s atonement insufficient and invalid. “You were bought with a price; do not become a slave of men” 1 Co 7:23.

III. The Prospect for Such Newness of Life

Fruitfulness is evidence of faith. God seeks fruitfulness. Faith without works is dead. God seeks growth in sanctification. God has not hidden from us the works that he seeks as evidence of faith. What do we find when we look around in our congregations? Do we see evidence of faith? Do we see growth in sanctification? When we observe the lives of our people in the church and its activities, when we observe them in worship, engaged in acts of Christian fellowship, offering time, talents and treasures to the Lord we are fairly confident of their faith. But when we observe our people in day-to-day living, when they are there in the world rubbing elbows with the masses, do they appear to be such sanctified Christians? Is there some validity to the charges of the papists who insist that if you teach justification by faith alone without works, you teach people to sin—you give them a license to lead unsanctified lives?

Consider the matter of divorce. The divorce rate of the nation has escalated the past decade or two. It is not only the unchurched who contribute to the increase. We need look no further than our own congregations to know what has happened to the home and marriage. Have you ever begun to determine the percentage of homes in your own congregation that have had a broken marriage, the number of homes where children do not enjoy the company of both of their natural parents? When it comes to divorce there is little to surprise us. The next person could be an elder, our congregational president, the organist, and we might respond by saying, “I could see it coming.”

Consider also society’s attitude toward consumption of alcoholic beverage. Every culture has “enjoyed” its use of alcohol. Every society has had its problems that result from alcohol abuse. We have not made having a few drinks a sin. But one is sorely tempted when he sees all the abuses, all the unhappiness the “Happy Hour” causes. Scripture labels drunkenness a sin. It lists drunkenness along with many sordid sins and says such persons shall not inherit eternal life. Yet, our own people are fairly fascinated with drinking. Drunkenness is invariably something to joke about. The next highway death caused by the drunken driver, the next family fight in the middle of the night because of the alcoholic parent(s), the next funeral of the father or mother who has ruined his or her life with drinking has only a temporary sobering effect. Drunkenness is socially acceptable. Talk about problem drinking, the dangers of alcohol abuse, in the confirmation class and the 12, 13, 14 year olds look at each other knowingly. Some are no doubt thinking of their own experiences with drinking. Others know of the grief they have felt in their young lives because of drinking in the family. Still others can’t wait until they can be one of the crowd, drink in one hand and cigarette in the other, just like in the commercials. At our Lutheran schools we like to think we have the better students, from homes that are above average in their

faith and sanctification. Even among them drinking, usually under age, may be the big topic on Monday morning. Parents have even been known to help them plan their parties.

A few years ago an abortion by one of our members, married or unmarried, was unthinkable. We just didn't think it could happen, at least not among our active membership. They would endure great embarrassment and hardship without even a thought of an abortion. Now much of society has accepted abortion. Our president is maligned because he opposes it. Some have made it honorable. Our people are a part of this culture. They become conditioned to certain sins. They know their church frowns upon abortion, but then it frowns upon missing church too. Who of us has not had to deal with a member who has had an abortion, or at least heard reports that a member has had an abortion?

These are only a few areas of growing concern. We could speak at length of others, the effects humanism and materialism have had upon our people. These influences lurk behind the problems of divorce, drunkenness, and abortion. We could dwell upon sins of the tongue, cursing and swearing, gossip and slander. We could go on to sexual attitudes, permissiveness.

We observe a definite lack of growth in sanctification. We might even think the level of sanctification does not measure up with the past. One can gather some rather dismal statistics to support the charge that Lutherans are very worldly Christians. Disgruntled members who have come under the influence of groups claiming a superior Christianity have plenty of evidence to throw at our feet. "If the people of your church were really Christians, if they really loved their Lord, they would not do the things they do." The unchurched also seem to have ample ammunition for their claim that there are too many hypocrites in the church—as an excuse not to become involved.

We can lament the lack of sanctification, and we ought to. But we must never do so the extent that we imply a state of perfectionism. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" 1 Jn 1:8. That applies to the Christian, both before and after conversion. One cannot teach perfectionism without toning down the nature of sin, limiting that which may be labeled sin, lowering the standards of God's Law. As much as we might wish that there could be perfectionism in this life, the fact is that our sheep will never be anything but sinner-saints. They are sinner-saints because of the Christians dual nature. Yes, they are regenerate, born again, members of Christ. But the Old Adam remains. He is ever present and seeking to dominate. Luther writes in his comments on the Sermon on the Mount: "For our condition in the kingdom of Christ is half sin and half holiness. What there is in us that belongs to faith and to Christ is completely pure and perfect, since it is not our own but Christ's, who is ours through faith and who lives and works in us. But what is still our own is completely sinful. Yet under Christ and in him it is concealed and blotted out through the forgiveness of sins; and daily is put to death through the same grace of the Spirit, until we have died to this life altogether."⁴

The very term, sanctification, suggests imperfection. Scriptures use of sanctification boldly recognizes that there is no "entire sanctification." It sadly admits that there is a lack of sanctification in all Christians. It loudly proclaims a need for growth, growth both in Christian knowledge and Christian virtues. The apostle Peter recognizes the same: "For this very reason, make very effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" 2 Pe 1:5-9.

Always there is need for growth. But no growth in sanctification comes without a struggle. The struggle goes on daily. On some days the New Man will remain on top. On other days the Old Adam gains the upper hand. The realization of the grace of God gives the Christian the earnest desire to do God's will. Yet, within himself is the overpowering force pulling him in the opposite direction, bent on that which is wrong, worldly, wicked. Consider the lives of the saints of old, our very heroes of faith such as Jacob, David, Peter, Paul. Each, in a different way, experienced the painfulness of the daily struggle. More than once sin got the better of them. The words of the apostle bear this out: "We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who does it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" Ro 7:14-25.

Just as there is no growth without a struggle, there can be no real growth in sanctification without the Spirit of God. Every Christian teacher and pastor longs for growth. In the place of jealousy, envy, bitterness, strife, gossip, greed, covetousness, materialism, self-indulgence, pleasure seeking, the shepherd of souls longs for joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, meekness, gentleness, contentment, commitment. He hopes to observe his people drawn more and more away from the world to live more and more unto Christ. But what can he do?

There is a great temptation to build upon hay, straw, and stubble, to try something new, search for new ideas and greater variety in his ministry. He may feel it necessary to get inside the minds and emotions of his people, to resort to psychology and psychoanalysis. He might conclude he must make his preaching and teaching more relevant. But no pastor or teacher, no matter how gifted he is with words, how striking his personality; how modern his methods, can change the heart. He cannot do that, which only the Spirit of God can do and will do by the power of the Word. God's Word alone is the power of God unto repentance and sanctification. God's Word is the sword that must be wielded daily. The Lord equipped his disciples with the Word, and sent them out. As Apostles they won battle after battle against Satan, the world, and the flesh, in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and in other parts of the world. The Word is what made Paul the world's greatest missionary. Luther's long awaited and much needed reformation of the church succeeded where others failed because it was a reformation by the Word. Because faith and sanctification are impossible without the Spirit by the Word, all of the saints who went forth to build God's kingdom were willing to contend for the Word, and if necessary to die that the Word might be preached. Confident of the Word as the vehicle of the Holy Spirit they preached the word faithfully and fearlessly, and left it up to the Holy Spirit to work how and where he would. No, they did not experience mass conversions and perfect sanctification, but they did not change their course of action, preaching the Word, trusting in his promise: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" Isa 55:11.

We are ministers of God's Word. We are charged with building up Christ's Church. Our Lord says: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" 2 Ti 4:2. We are keenly aware of lack of sanctification in the Church. It is lacking in all of our members, in some more than others; it is lacking in ourselves.

We can easily become discouraged. We entertain high hopes as we moved from the seminary to our assigned field of labor, as we accept a call to a new field of labor. Ideals rarely reach reality. No, we have never sought out the perfect congregation. But we may have given the impression that with our energy and drive we could be the first one to mold one. We may have indulged ourselves in thinking that with more organization and right programs we could do what our predecessors failed to do. We end up where we started, ministering to sinner-saints.

The quest for greater sanctification begins and ends with a faithful preaching of God's Word. Changing lives still begins in our studies where we prepare thoroughly to preach and teach the Word. Change won't come of ourselves. Any change in hearts or lives will only be the result of the Holy Spirit by the Word. Not even our demand for change will accomplish it. Only the Word. Having used our time and strength faithfully in preaching and teaching the Word we need not fret nor apologize. We will not entertain thoughts to go out and dig ditches instead. We will implore daily the Holy Spirit to work his change, and trust in him to do it.

Preach the Word. That includes God's Law. We cannot build a sanctified Church without the preaching of God's Law to convict hearts of sin. Any attempt to build the Church without the Law will lead to pride, conceit, and work righteousness. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were outwardly righteous, admired for their "sanctified" lives; but they had totally missed the very basics and firstfruits of a life of faith.

We will preach the Law to convict of sin, and will rely only upon the Gospel to change hearts. The Law must be preached to "let out the air" from the depraved hearts and lives of sinners. Only the pure and sweet Gospel of God's love in Christ, the Sin-bearer, will change hearts and lives. It is the power of God unto salvation. It is the driving force to change lives. It delivers from darkness and reflects Christ in our lives. It delivers from the love of sinning to a love of serving Christ in thought, word, and deed. It enables the Christian to follow the example of Christ's perfect life.

No we will not expect perfection, or seek it, not even an over night change. Drastic changes happen at times. The alcoholic reforms, the negligent husband becomes a faithful spouse and father. The selfish wife puts her family first, the spoiled, rebellious child becomes a model of obedience. Overnight change is rare. Usually it is slow and gradual. Usually it is not even constant; it has setbacks. But by the power of the Gospel time reveals a solid change for the better.

Not that we should be satisfied with a little change. We will not take the position that kids will be kids, that our youth must first sow their wild oats, that we must allow our people to be a "little" worldly. In our preaching and teaching we will hold out for nothing less than change, real change, great change, immediate change, but be thankful for the little change, patient in awaiting great change.

Nor will we dismiss our own example of sanctified living. No, we are not perfect either. But that dare be no excuse to take our own example lightly. Our own good example may not seem to have a great positive effect. But a lack of a good example can be a great stumbling block to our people. Our people rightly have great expectations of their called workers. Our members may be slow in following their example. But they will be quick to use a poor example to excuse their own lack of sanctification.

The over-all sanctification of a Christian congregation will also suffer if a church does not carry out church discipline when it is called for. Failure to deal with sin, especially public offenses, has an eroding effect on the sanctification of the whole body. One sin not dealt with confirms the same sin in another, and paves the way for others to follow. Divorce, drunkenness, permissiveness, various kinds of stealing, malicious gossip may be socially acceptable. They are grievous sins. They cannot be overlooked for the sake of feelings or outward peace. A church that is not taught to exercise church discipline is a church that is led to believe that what men

do is their own business. They will believe that if some choose to live something less than sanctified lives that is between them and God.

IV. Conclusion

The church's work is not easy. It has never been easy. Our Lord never said it would be easy. There is no easy way. There are no short cuts. Nor are there two or more ways to build Christ's church. True, Christianity remains a minority religion. True, at times the work is slow. True, the time is short. What sincere Christian does not wish for, pray for, great results, a faster growing, stronger, more dedicated church?

Dialogue is not the solution. Dialogue has its place—when men are committed to the truth based upon Holy Scripture. Twenty years ago Lutherans not in fellowship gathered in study at Waterloo, Iowa, and submitted a series of six excellent articles on the doctrine of justification. These articles were published under the title, "His Pardoning Grace". But the dialogue that produced the Roman Catholic-Lutheran document on justification has not set forth the principal of the Lutheran Reformation. It shed no light on the Gospel. I doubt that it directly shall lead anyone, even an ardent catholic, closer to the truth. Personally I saw some lights of truthfulness flicker and go out.

Nor is ecumenism the solution. The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue is a bitter fruit of a new age, an age that is not really new, the age of ecumenism. We can look back and see the seeds of ecumenism within Lutheranism in the history of the new world. Who, at any step along the way would have predicted the whirlwind that has been reaped. I think many were able to predict safely the anti-confessional end—but so soon, well within this century—by a vast majority of Lutherans?

It has been inevitable for some time that Lutherans would become caught up in the social gospel movement, for ecumenism and social gospel are kissing cousins, if not twin sisters. Again I wonder how many of us realized it would happen so fast. Helsinki! Budapest!

Maybe the grassroots isn't always as committed to the social gospel as their wide-eyed leaders. Perhaps they don't feel threatened by high-faluting sounding of names such as neo-orthodoxy, existentialism, and the historical/critical method of Bible interpretation. Whether they know it or not they are caught on a fast moving freight train out of control. Jumping off isn't a pleasant thought. Staying on delays the inevitable.

There are no two ways about it. We build Christ's church through the Word, the Law and the Gospel, proclaiming sin and grace. Every doctrine of scripture is sacred. At the very heart is the doctrine of justification. Every doctrine is sacred, but we should never feel secure. History reveals every doctrine, every truth of Scripture, has suffered attacks repeatedly. Nor is the doctrine of justification an exception.

Humanly speaking the United States has seemed to be the last hope for strong, confessional Lutheranism. This is not said, to take anything away from the scattered bastions of orthodoxy that do exist elsewhere. But two thirds of U.S. Lutherans belong to the Lutheran World Federation that has long ago given up on knowing what to do with the doctrine. It can be safely said that the same two thirds of U.S. Lutherans do not hold to objective justification. That struggle was given up for the most part 100 years ago, whatever struggle there was. Recently the doctrine of objective justification came under fire in our former sister synod. Happily the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations has come forth with a fine confessional statement on justification, including objective justification. It appears the hole in the dike has been fortified and will hold for the time being. Unfortunately not all within the LCMS agree with the statement. Precedent suggests that nothing will be done about it. In this light remember the conviction of Luther which we quoted in the opening remarks of our study. "Neither can anyone teach correctly in the church or successfully resist any adversary if he does not maintain this article."⁵

All of this, from Helsinki, to Budapest, Wittenberg to Rome, Kokomo to Ft. Wayne, has underscored our great concern for the doctrine of justification. The last few years have generated numerous essays and much discussion. We have had the privilege of more study and discussion these past two days. May our preaching and teaching, our whole ministry, be a continuous sharing of the all-important Scriptural doctrine of justification and the great and only comfort it offers to trembling hearts.

Endnotes: (For part I)

1. *Christian Dogmatics*, Francis Pieper, Vol. II, p 512.
2. St. Louis Ed., XIV, p 168.
3. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 1-4, p 119.
4. *Book of Concord*, Smalcald Articles I, p 477.
5. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 120, p 155.
6. St. Louis Ed, XI, 1085.

Endnotes: (For part II)

1. *Book of Concord*, Apology 111, 185, p 207.
2. "Thesis on Justification", LC-MS Commission on Theological and Church Relations, St. Louis, 1983.
3. "Objective Justification", Siegbert W. Becker, Nov. 9, 1982.

4. Walther, C.F.W., "Am heiligen Ostertage," Amerihanische-Lutherische Evangelien Postille 1870.
5. Schmidt, F.A., "A Controversy Among Lutherans about Justification and Absolution", *The Lutheran Standard*, Nov. 1, 1870.
6. Pieper, Francis, "Theses Concerning the Doctrine of Justification." *Verhandlungen des Nebraska-Distrikts*, 1883.
7. *English Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 42, 1978, 139-144.
8. Walther, C.F.W., "Referat," *Verhandlung*, Western District, 1859, p 11-65.
9. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40, p 366-367.
10. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 103.
11. *Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord V, 4, p 801.
12. *Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord XI, 15, p 1069.
13. *Book of Concord*, Large Catechism III, 88.

Endnotes: (For Part III)

1. LC-MS Praesidium, *The Reporter*, Jan 12, 1986.
2. LC-MS Praesidium, *The Reporter*, Jan 12, 1986.
3. Maier, Walter A., "Maier Responds to Notice" *The Reporter*, April 6, 1981.
4. *Book of Concord*, Historical Introduction, 176, p 153.
5. *Book of Concord*, FC 111, 57, p 935.
6. *Book of Concord*, FC XI, 15, p 1069.
7. *Book of Concord*, FC III, 30, p 925.
8. *Book of Concord*, Large Catechism III, 38, 689.
9. Pieper, *Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, p 540.
10. Pieper, *Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, p 404.
11. Walther, C.F.W., *Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 6, No. 15, March 19, 1850, pp 113.
12. Treatise Concerning the Keys of 1530.
13. *Christian Dogmatics*, Pieper, Vol. II, p 540.

Endnotes: (For part IV)

1. *Book of Concord*, Apology III, 183, p 205.
2. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 46, p. 133.
3. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 113, p 154.
4. *Book of Concord*, Apology III, 194, p 207.
5. St. Louis X 1107, 1112.
6. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 45, p 133.
7. *Book of Concord*, Apology IV, 48, p 133.
8. St. Louis Ed., VII, 30.
9. *Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord III, 38, T 29.
10. *Book of Concord*, Formula of Concord III, 13, p 919.
11. Lutheran axioms, cf. Quenstedt II, 789.
12. Am Ed. Vol. 23, p 23.
13. Walther, *Law and Gospel*. p 253.

Endnotes: (For part five)

1. *Book of Concord*, FC, 11, 63-64, p 905.
2. *Book of Concord*, FC, 11, 65-66, p 906.
3. *Book of Concord*, FC, IV, 40, p 799.
4. *Luther*, American Edition, Vol. 21, p 205.
5. *Luther*, St. Louis Edition XLV, 168.