

**CONCORDIA  
THEOLOGICAL  
QUARTERLY**

**CTQ**

Volume 45, Number 4

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
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**OCTOBER 1981**

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# Contemporary Lutheran Views of Justification

Richard Klann

By "contemporary Lutheran views" I mean formulations of the past half century. If we can agree on this limitation, I shall try to move to the topic by touching on the interest of the ancient church, on Luther and some of his interpreters, on the influence of Karl Barth's theology on Lutherans, and use this opportunity to look at the efforts of the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki in 1964 to deal with proposals regarding "justification." Reports of emerging agreements, however fragmentary, of participants in unofficial dialogues between Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians, particularly since Helsinki, call for some attention. While we seek to examine these developments, I believe there will be occasion to affirm the historical force of Luther's biblical interpretation upon the orientation of contemporary Lutheran theologians, even though their confessional commitment appears to some of their contemporaries to have the character of a cultural memory rather than that of a present consensus.

It is probably easy to agree to the generalization that examinations of the views of theologians, expressed in their particular formulations, has always been the occupation of polemicists from the earliest days of the Christian Church. This is a normal development. Even from the circumscribed interests of a humanistic and academic perspective - akin to an interest in the history of ideas - one may sympathize with efforts to sort out the formulations of ideas in terms of their historical occasions and implications. But as students of theology, attentive to the continuity of the great Christian themes, formulated during the past centuries (often under great stress), we cannot help but rejoice in the availability of great works of description and analysis of the history of doctrine. Some of them are pearls of great price. Their absence would greatly impoverish us, because their research benefits us even though we may not agree with their conclusions.

## I.

Since the place of formulations of the doctrine of justification lies within the structure of the doctrine of Christ or, in the larger sense, they are aspects of our understanding and teaching regarding the Holy Trinity, we do not mean to assert the importance of "justification" apart from, or even above, the

Christian doctrine of God and of Christology. We just note that the examination our Lord gave His disciples consisted of one question: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered correctly: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15, 16). The formulations used to answer His ultimate question became issues during the christological controversies of the first five centuries. Those issues had to be settled first. The *Quicumque* (usually known as the Athanasian Creed), therefore, functions as the third ecumenical symbol of our confessional corpus. "Theories of the atonement," as J.F. Bethune-Baker calls them,<sup>1</sup> were not especially developed, because they were subsumed under the topic of Christ's person and work. But the doctrine of justification certainly became an important controversial issue when Pelagius and his convert Coelestius left Rome for Sicily and North Africa because of the threat of war by Alaric and his Gothic army. When Coelestius presented himself for ordination, the Synod of Carthage charged him with six heretical propositions, and the Pelagian Controversy was on, and became important in the West, mainly due to the effective writings of Aurelius Augustinus.

But St. Augustine did not settle the controversy, even though "Augustinian" theology became the mainstay of the Christian West. The correlation of God's grace, reconciliation, satisfaction, sanctification, and preservation in the faith according to biblical discourse was never achieved. Nor did medieval theologians achieve a resolution of rationally contradictory elements in those concepts. The magnitude of Luther's theological work is so simple an achievement that men who could not accept it called it simplistic; it was so obvious biblically that it could be denied only by being called heretical and placed under the papal *anathema*. Why was the Reformation controversy on justification beyond the historical possibility of reconciliation?

Our answers must be sought in the assertions of Augustana IV: "It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5."

It may be useful to compare the German text, translated above, with the Latin official text: "Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or

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works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight (Rom. 3,4)."

The articles of justification in the other confessions contained in the Book of Concord are usually treated as elaborations of Augustana IV. That is quite true in the historical sense, and also useful in the interest of effective teaching, but it is not a complete representation of the content. Apology IV is a masterful refutation of the Roman Confutation, and it is nowhere in conflict with Augustana IV. But the presentation of justification in Apology IV is much more than an elaboration of the Augsburg Confession.

We are told in Apology IV,5 that the correct teaching of justification presupposes a proper understanding of the Scriptures in terms of its "two chief doctrines, the law and the promises." This is followed by a limited description of Law and Gospel, which entails a presentation of the doctrinal context of justification. Controversial aspects of the doctrine of sin having been discussed under Article II, man's fallenness is subsumed in the discussion of Law in Article IV, so that the chief function of the Law is seen to be the conviction of the sinner. This is understandable. After all, Melancthon was writing basically a polemical reply to the Roman Confutation in the behalf of the Lutheran confessors, not an inclusive theological statement on justification and doctrinal correlations. Luther's treatments in his Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article 1 and Part III, Article 3, in his Large Catechism on the Creed, Articles 2 and 3, and in other places do not anticipate elements of controversy which arose later on, although it is quite possible to understand how Luther might have reacted to later issues in controversy.

Luther's discussion of his initial understanding of the righteousness of God as God's essential reality or quality which reveals itself in God's life-giving creativity is well-known. The good news of God's righteousness in and on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ is the renewing and creative Word of Life by which the sentence of guilt is removed, the powers of sin and the rule of Satan is overcome, the sinner is forgiven and restored to the household of God through the gift of faith and in this reconciliation in Jesus Christ becomes a new creation and is given new life with God (2 Cor. 5:17). This Gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ, "revealed through faith for faith" (Rom. 1:17). Let us hear Luther directly on this:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1:17, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the glory of God.<sup>2</sup>

It is to be expected that the doctrine of justification will continue to attract the labors of many students seeking to

determine the controversial historical facets which appear to them to have relevance for contemporary discourse.<sup>3</sup> For example, Joerg Baur in his *Salus Christiana*<sup>4</sup> offers an extensive analysis, beginning with the teaching of the ancient church and concluding with the theology of the German Enlightenment, mentioning that Wegschneider and others proposed drastic changes in Lutheran teaching regarding justification in order to overcome its traditional *Borniertheit* ("ignorant narrow-mindedness"). His recommendation directed the enlightened theological humanist to displace Augustana IV with a formulation similar to those of the medieval scholastics, who offered a mixture of justification and sanctification.<sup>5</sup>

Even a brief survey of recent Lutheran statements on justification can reveal sharp differences with some aspects of Luther's understanding. For example, while recent interpreters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans undoubtedly intend to follow Luther's understanding of sin in their formulations, the emphatic thrust of Luther's affirmations of man's sin do not always emerge. Here we find the open-ended declaration that sin is "so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it."<sup>6</sup>

Understood both as hereditary and actual sin, the Reformer differs radically from the medieval as well as modern formulations of a quasi-humanistic understanding of man. In the latter cases, some capabilities of the will are assumed to be retained, however weak the residual powers.<sup>7</sup>

## II.

Perhaps this kind of thinking is in part due to the influence of Karl Barth, whose repeated confusion of the functions of Law and Gospel in the justification and sanctification of the sinner have been noted and well examined by our own theologians. It should not be difficult to agree that all forms of modified pelagianism and synergism argue for such a view of man's cooperative capabilities in his conversion which must lead either to an internal contradiction or the modification of Luther's teaching on justification. Luther, and those who followed him, maintained the fundamental biblical assertion regarding man as a fallen and guilty creature because his initial creation in the divine image of holiness and righteousness had been utterly perverted by his disobedience. This interpretation allows no room for Leenhardt's "existential anxiety" leading to the search for God. On the contrary, man the sinner wants to hide from God, instead of finding him. But if we believe, contrary to Paul Tillich's argument, that both the being and existence of man, perverted by sin and hostile to God, are now committed exclusively to the

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subversive powers of evil, represented by Satan, we stand within the frame of Luther's understanding. The entailment of this understanding is Luther's insight that the Law must be believed before the sinner can know himself as a sinner in his recognition of God's wrath over all unrighteousness. This conviction is always the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word, so that the sinner is led to confession: "By His Law, God judges me."

The justification of the sinner before God, as Luther affirmed on the basis of St. Paul's teaching (Rom. 4:5; cp. Gen. 15:6), can occur only by an act of imputation (reckoning).<sup>8</sup> The person and saving work of Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the realization in history of God's grace for sinners. By His redeeming obedience under the Law and the perfect satisfaction for sin rendered to God alone, Christ is the only Mediator between God and man. "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

But he is not a new creation in the ontic sense of Osiander, who taught that the mystical indwelling of the risen Christ produced the righteousness of God in the sinner. Our charitable comment on such a view must be that Osiander did not understand the difference between Christ's work for us and His work in us which in our theological discourse is also known as the distinction between objective and subjective justification. The latter is as fully the work of the Holy Spirit as the sinner's recognition of the wrath of God when he hears the Law of God. The natural man does not have a contrite heart, nor can he tremble at the word of God (Isa. 66:2), because he lacks spiritual discernment (1 Cor. 2:14). The objective justification of the world obtained by Christ is indeed offered to all the world (Rom. 10:18), but it must be received continuously by individuals in repentance.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible to argue that Karl Barth's teachings on justification reflect in his emphases a debt to Albrecht Ritschl's three-volume work which offered evangelical theologians the advantages of a biblical-historical methodology. Karl Barth represents his exposition of justification in terms of *Freispruch*.<sup>10</sup> *Freispruch* means *Gottes Urteil und Inhalt seines Wortes an uns* (p. 635 f.). It is God's declaration of man's liberation; it is a decision, a verdict of God, spoken in the death and resurrection of Christ. Justification is the forgiveness of sins from God. To receive it means to receive God's promise (*Verheissung*) of forgiveness, and to have it means to hold on to this promise and to go forward in the direction of this promise (p. 665). Justification confers rights upon the recipient: the justified sinner is restored to God as His creation and according to the New Testament promise becomes a

child of God (p. 668 f.), and he is promoted to the state of hope - which is the highest juridical condition of the children of God (p. 671). Moreover, justification is obtained through faith which is "the entirely humble, yet also the entirely positive answer to the inquiry about the reality and existence of that man who has been justified by God" (p. 685). "*Faith is obedient humility, it is renunciation; it will and must exclude all human contributions to justification . . .*" (p. 700).

This faith, according to Barth, is also man's decision for Christ (p. 704). At this point, it seems, Barth's understanding of *sola fide* diminishes the uniqueness of *sola gratia*. He appears to assume the existence of a theological dilemma: how to speak of God's redemptive and justifying monergism without depriving man, the object of God's redemption, of his humanity. It appears to me, Barth sees an acceptable solution in his concept of man's existential decision to believe. But this notion ignores the implication that faith is thereby given the value of a contributory work.

It is undoubtedly obvious to most that large sections of Protestant evangelical theologians share the Barthian view of justification and generally believe themselves to adhere faithfully to the Reformation teaching of this doctrine. A reminder of the great difference of conceptualization between the Barthian teaching and Luther's teaching needs to be made for every student in our time. I conclude that it is therefore not enough to say with Henry P. Hamann,<sup>11</sup>

Much of what Barth says in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* concerning God's righteousness and the role of Jesus Christ . . . seems to be unobjectionable, in spite of the strange and devious ways he uses to express what could be said more clearly and simply. However, at times a statement intrudes which points to a gaping gulf between Barth and Lutheranism. Into the middle of some pure and lucid exposition of God's grace over against man's sin an occasional disturbing thought is introduced, which immediately throws all, from a Lutheran point of view, into confusion, as if some one were suddenly to pour the muddy waters of a turbulent stream into a clear and placid lake. This disturbing element is Barth's identification of Law and Gospel, judgment and grace with his view of God as the Totally Other; and this view in turn points to the vitiating influence exerted by philosophy on Barth's theology.

The well-known *Concordia Theological Monthly* articles cited by Hamann on page 114 of his study do not center upon this



fundamental fault, as I see it, in Karl Barth's theological understanding — namely, his erroneous understanding of the nature and function of faith. I am persuaded that Barth's errors, so well described by other students of Barth, derive their primary origin from Barth's unspoken assumption that his Christian faith is for him the ultimate source of knowledge in theology, and that it is the element in Karl Barth's thinking which, as Hamann so kindly says it, introduces "an occasional disturbing thought."

Karl Barth did not originate this theological orientation. It is really the very old syndrome of an "inspired" Christian reason controlling the formulations of Christian thought. At this point, the Christian theologian actually stops hearing the speaking God (1 Sam. 3:9) and becomes a prophet who will use his own tongue (Jer. 23:31). It is a threat and danger not far away from any one of us. Modern Lutheran theologians are generally willing to agree with Karl Holl's dictum, "Nur das Selbsterlebte steht unerschuetterlich fest."<sup>13</sup> Hamann chose the approach to the problem he perceived by dividing it into two sub-topics. He analyses the work of representative theologians who hold the view that justification is regeneration. It may be argued that such a teaching is not a novelty but a variation of the teachings of St. Paul's Judaizing opponents in Galatia, the Christian moralizing of the *Didache* of the second century, or *Pelagianus redivivus*. The truth of such a judgment would have to be granted if it is also agreed that it is necessary to maintain sharply the distinction between *Christus pro nobis* and *Christus in nobis*, between justification and sanctification in the narrow sense, between objective justification and subjective justification, between justification of the sinner before God and his mystical union with Christ or the Trinity. It requires a sensitive understanding of the meaning of Luther's "breakthrough" regarding the "righteousness of Christ" and the teaching of the first of his Ninety-five Theses, that the Christian lives on earth *simul justus et peccator*, to rejoice with St. Paul that "now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Rom. 8:1) and to hear with sobriety the admonition of St. John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Familiar names appear in Hamann's analysis: C. H. Dodd, Vincent Taylor, James Stewart, C. S. Lewis, G. C. Bosanquet, Paul Holmer, Emil Brunner, H. Lietzmann, Ronald A. Knox and Jacques Maritain. If we eliminate the names of those who were Roman Catholic and Reformed in their theological orientation, we must note the American Paul Holmer and H. Lietzmann, the editor-in-chief of the *Bekennnisschriften*.

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Hamann seeks to establish his case regarding these men, that they confuse justification and regeneration. His evidence is persuasive. By way of contrast, he argues correctly, St. Paul taught that justification is complete before there is such a thing as faith. Reconciliation and justification are the same. Justification, like reconciliation, exists before the sinner hears of it. Faith, although it is also more than this, is first and foremost the trusting acceptance of this accomplished fact (p. 60).

Hamann does not like the customary terms “objective” and “subjective” because he argues that “subjective justification” is every bit as objective as “objective” justification, and therefore the term does not say what Missourians mean to say (p. 60). But even though he is willing to do without the terms, Hamann does agree that the objective justification of the sinner, guaranteed in Christ’s resurrection, must be personally appropriated by the sinner through the gift of faith, by which he also receives this justification (p. 61).

The indirect rejection of justification occurs when it is taught that salvation is union with Christ. That St. Paul does stress the phrase *en Christo* is undeniably true. The modern error here again confuses justification with its consequences. I am not comfortable with Hamann’s distinctions of “direct” and “indirect” rejection of justification, because the qualifiers “direct” and “indirect” do not change the actuality of the error, and I find it strange that he has made this choice after arguing that both “objective” and “subjective” justification are actually objective in their effects.

It is Hamann’s conclusion that modern views of justification can be described as follows (p. 103):

- (1) God justifies men on the basis of faith;
- (2) Justification is wrongly regarded as the central thing in St. Paul, instead of union with Christ.

It is my own conclusion that Hamann has described the essential problem as well as its solution in contemporary Lutheran theology. The problem appears to be the confusion of justification and sanctification — the spiritual malaise of the Christian Church since the time of St. Paul. It is certainly evident in the theological activities of many Lutherans today, if my reading of the releases of the News Bureau of the National Lutheran Council is correct. Perhaps we attribute these “new directions” in Lutheran theology to the congenital desire of the human nature (or Old Adam) of Lutheran theologians to seize every opportunity to keep up with the current theological fashion. If it were a case of mere trendiness, the Lutheran Church could undoubtedly cope with this failure as it does generally with the

idiosyncracies of its pastors and professors. Unfortunately, the Church is being told that to be the Church of Jesus Christ, it must also support a program of secular redemption because justification is said to be not merely the renewal or regeneration of the believer, but entails the liberation of all from their particular oppressions, the execution of social and economic justice for all who are deprived of it — in short, it calls for the fulfillment of the last petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And deliver us from evil." This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why so many pastors in Europe and elsewhere have accepted and now support aspects of the socialist program for the world.

### III.

As recently as 1963 the "Study Document on Justification," prepared by the Commission on Theology for the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Helsinki, July 30 - August 11, 1963, and written by Warren A. Quanbeck, announced the intention to study the relationship of justification and the life of the Christian. Written for lay people, the document renounces all "technical jargon" and thereby the author liberates himself from the bondage of precise statements. In order to give his presentation of "The Righteousness of God or the Righteousness of Man?" the existential reality of living examples, he liberally exposes the defects of all within his horizon.<sup>14</sup>

Toward the end of his presentation, Warren Quanbeck cannot help but confuse the Lutheran understanding of justification with the topic of regeneration when he fails to state that God's justification of the sinner by grace, through faith, and on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ, must be clearly distinguished from the life of the justified sinner to be lived in faith. His titles, "Faith without Church" and "Faith without Deeds," will tend to confuse the thinking of his readers.

The Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki (1963) rejected the report of the Commission on Theology, Document 75. It was decided that the discussion on justification must continue in the churches. Why? Questions were raised about the function of the doctrine of justification. Previously, at the Amsterdam assembly, Regin Prenter had argued, "Modern exegesis causes traditional Lutheran dogmatics to face the question whether it is biblical to ascribe an all-dominant role to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Is not the fulness of the biblical witness thereby rendered one-sided and cramped in an improper manner?" (This question coincides to some extent with the critical questions put by Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians.)<sup>15</sup> The objective announced by

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Prenter became the pivot of much of the discussion at Helsinki and has continued to be such since then: "The doctrine of justification must be so interpreted that it can be understood in a catholic way (in the true sense of the word), and not as a special Lutheran doctrine."<sup>16</sup> By way of accommodation to the "neo-Lutheranism" (especially in America) which wanted to retain old formulations, it was proposed that, "The doctrine of justification is a pure interpretation of the New Testament, but not the only pure interpretation. This would mean that other groups of churches, in which justification does not occupy the center of theological thinking, stand just as much on a biblical basis as the Lutheran church - a conception which the Lutheran World Federation has adopted in a practical way by accepting the Batak Church."<sup>17</sup>

In the plenary discussion of the Assembly, the relation of the doctrine of justification to other doctrines was emphasized. According to the report, the discussion stressed particularly the question of who is justified.<sup>18</sup> The interest of the Assembly centered upon the question of the place of justification. Ought the doctrine to be so formulated that we distinguish between the psychology of justification (imputation) and a sociology of justification (the unity of believers as the body of Christ). This would raise new questions regarding church and ministry and the Lutheran formulation of the doctrine of sin - particularly as it touches upon questions of authority in the community. In the discussions on the relation of the doctrine of justification to the doctrine of sin it was argued that the Lutheran formulation of *simul justus et peccator* should be abandoned in favor of statements to the effect that "for the Christian sin has been extinguished, destroyed, forgiven."<sup>19</sup>

It was further argued that while the Reformation recapitulated ancient christology in a legitimate way, it is necessary to consider that the consequent soteriological formulations differ: "Without doubt the soteriology underlying the christology of the ancient church emphasized *redemption from* 'fallen being' to a 'new being,' whereas the soteriology of the Reformation emphasizes *atonement* for guilt and condemnation, resulting in a new relationship with God."<sup>20</sup> But the discussants quickly noted some of the implications of seeing eastern and western theology in terms of these differences. After all, they said, in the New Testament justification is both salvation and reconciliation, and in Luther and Lutheran doctrine both are presented. "Therefore we are not allowed today to give up the ontological foundation of the Reformation doctrine of justification and to give absolute

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importance to its personal and existential reference."<sup>21</sup>

Document 75 of the Helsinki Assembly was understood to be a "basis for discussion."<sup>22</sup> That raises the question of who was addressed by Document 75. A distant observer should perhaps conclude that it was submitted primarily to the Assembly for discussion. The response of the Assembly also seems to have made that point.

The report on the discussion shows that the sub-themes of the document of justification received considerable scrutiny and criticism. "Justification and Anthropology" was seen by many as offering non-biblical interpretations and accommodations with aspects of existentialist and humanistic interpretations of the human condition. The anti-nominalistic tendencies of the document were sharply criticized: "The proclamation that the world stands under judgment was not taken seriously enough."<sup>23</sup>

"Justification as the Key to the Holy Scriptures" was characterized as movement in the realm of 'as if,' and therefore evasive of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. "Justification as God's Act in Word and Sacrament" was expressed so one-sidedly in emphasis "that even the Catholic asks whether the role of faith in the New Testament doctrine on justification is sufficiently expressed."<sup>24</sup> Similar questions were raised regarding the understanding of *sola fide*. "Justification and the New View of the Church" was intended to deal with the office and task of the church in terms of justification, but the criticism emphasized the lack of clarity in the document. The topics "Justification: Resurrection and New Life" and "Justification as Courage to Be" were assigned to further study by the Commission on Theology. Perhaps it is of interest to note the comment of a Roman Catholic observer regarding the treatment of the relation of justification and sanctification: "It is worthy of note that the document connects justification and sanctification and therefore departs from the particular Lutheran tradition of emphasizing simply justification."<sup>25</sup>

My treatment of the documents and discussions at the Helsinki Assembly may create the impression that I believe them to be some kind of doctrinal watershed for Lutheran theology. I have focused on those theological formulations primarily for the sake of convenience, because those proceedings present us with summaries of Lutheran thought regarding the current debate on the doctrine of justification. A large number of articles and learned dissertations have been written during the years since Helsinki, exploring aspects of exegesis, ethics, Lutheran ecclesiology, and ecumenical policy.

One Roman Catholic observer at Helsinki, Peter Blaeser of the Johann Adam Moehler Institute in Paderborn, Westphalia, reports that he had gone to Helsinki with "high hopes": "I went also hoping that on this issue a real *rapprochement* between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran positions would occur for all men to see . . . Concretely expressed: justification was itself still a matter of dispute at Helsinki and so it was, and simply had to be, an impossible undertaking to express justification for contemporary man in a modern idiom while its inner contradictions were unresolved. While the what to say remained ambiguous, the how to say it could not succeed either."<sup>26</sup> But Blaeser retained an optimistic frame of mind. He had seen the preliminary studies for Helsinki, in particular the essay by Prof. Joest<sup>27</sup> on the doctrine of justification at the Council of Trent, which he called "surely among the best that has been written on this subject. In this he shed light on the real problem of the differences between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran doctrines of justification. Not only so, but he here brought up both of these for reconsideration and, as I see it, he formulated the decisive questions which have to be asked."

Attempts to reach the best possible level of understanding between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians have continued on the advanced or university level.<sup>28</sup> We may be permitted to observe that the efforts of European theologians, particularly in view of developments in the Roman Catholic church, beginning with the events of Vatican II, were reflected to some extent in their research. It is my judgment of the moment that theologians have sought to be understanding, and write and talk politely regarding outstanding differences. For example, essays on justification published in the *Festschrift* for Ernst Kaesemann in 1976, edited by Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Poehlmann, and Peter Stuhlmacher of Tübingen University,<sup>29</sup> contain no substantive changes from previous positions. We may notice that recent authors offer no substantive changes from previous positions. We may notice occasional emphases of a new ecumenical consciousness, but I do not see a convergence of Lutheran and Roman Catholic formulations regarding justification. Perhaps there will be general agreement if I add that there is no convergence in the understanding of Lutheran and Roman Catholic participants in Lutheran and Roman Catholic dialogues in America.

Differences regarding the interpretations of the biblical *loci* on justification remain as deep and wide as ever. The legacy of Karl Barth's joining of justification and faith remains in the thinking of

many theologians, even when contemporary theological activists think of going "beyond" Barth. The desire for "confessional convergence" is certainly very much alive among some Lutherans, but has met with no official reciprocity. On his recent visit to Germany, Pope John Paul II rejected the entreaties of German Evangelical bishops that he establish altar fellowship with them. Unofficial forms of fellowship remain unofficial, as far as the Roman curia is concerned, and all publicly expressed yearnings for theological convergence will probably remain unrequited in our life-time.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1951), pp. 19-21 and 327f.
2. *Luther's Works*, 34, 336-337 (transl. by Lewis W. Spitz, Sr.).
3. The comprehensive discussion (though not always in sufficient depth) of modern theologians' views of Luther's doctrine of justification is to be found in the *Habilitationsschrift* of Albrecht Peters, *Glaube und Werk. Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre im Lichte der heiligen Schrift* (Berlin und Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967).
4. Joerg Baur, *Salus Christiana. Die Rechtfertigungslehre in der Geschichte des christlichen Heilsverstaendnis* (Guetersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968).
5. P. 172. Note here also Baur's quotation of the judgment of R. A. Lipsius (my translation): "The attempts repeatedly undertaken in accordance with the precedent of the Socinians, to base justification upon the subjective quality of faith evidenced in initial obedience, produce a complete dissolution of the dogma of the Church on the part of rationalistic theologians. They do it by reducing justification through faith to a general moral commonplace, not by referring this to an external action, but by asserting that it is the inner disposition (*Gesinnung*) alone which makes a person well-pleasing to God and by limiting regeneration simply to the exclusively humanly-subjective work of the individual to improve his moral condition."
6. SA III, 1; repeated in F.C. Epit. I and SD I.
7. Franz J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), pp. 61 ff. He cites formulations of recent studies on the topics of God's righteousness and God's wrath, particularly Guenter Bornkamm's *Das Ende des Gesetzes* (1952), Schrenk's *Unser Glaube an den Zorn Gottes nach dem Roemerbrief* (1944), and G. Bornkamm's earlier essay, "Die Offenbarung des Zornes Gottes," in *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1935). Leenhardt argues from "What can be known about God is plain to them" (Rom. 1:19) to his assumption that recognition of the wrath of God produces "existential anguish," which "incites man to seek God" (*ibid.* p. 60 f.). The proper understanding of the relation of God's wrath to God's righteousness is here beclouded (or, to say it more sharply) confused by Leenhardt's confusion of the functions of Law and Gospel when he argues (p. 61) that the Gospel reveals the wrath of God.
8. After Theodor Zahn published his *Introduction to the New Testament*, his cousin Adolf Zahn published his criticism in the form of a protest and judgment against the work. Adolf complained that Theodor had failed to understand 2 Thess. 2 and this failure also caused Theodor Zahn's

misunderstanding of the meaning of "imputation" (*Anrechnung*), a failure which led to Theodor Zahn's defective formulation of justification. Adolf Zahn, *Ueber den biblischen und kirchlichen Begriff der Anrechnung*. Ein Beitrag zur Rechtfertigungslehre (Amsterdam: Scheffer, 1899). The direction of Adolf Zahn's argument may be seen from his Luther quotation on the title page: "Haec doctrina post mortem nostram rursus obscurabitur. Man wird das Pabsttum wieder auf den Stuhl heben; es wird eine grosse Finsternis kommen, und dann wird der juengste Tag hereinschlagen."

9. The considerable discussion of Osiander's notion of justification by the indwelling Christ during the last century and the present one is evidence of the interest which the topic has aroused. Among the important works available in theological libraries we could mention the following: R. Frank, *Theologie der Concordienformel*, (1861) II, pp. 1-147; W. Mueller, *Andreas Osiander: Leben und ausgewaehlte Schriften* (1870); Albrecht Ritschl, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Andreas Osiander," in *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung* (3rd ed., 1889), p. 235 ff.; Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (4th ed., 1954), IV, 2, pp. 496-508 and 540 ff.; E. Hirsch, *Die Theologie des Andreas Osiander und ihre geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (1919); E. Roth, "Herzog Albrecht von Preuzen als Osiandrist," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 78 (1953), p. 55-64.
10. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischen Verlag AG., 1953).
11. Henry P. Hamann, *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology* (Graduate Study No. 2., St. Louis: School for Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, 1957), p. 109.
12. Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsaezte* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1928), III, p. 559.
13. Henry P. Hamann, *op. cit.*
14. *Justification Today*. Studies and Reports issued by *Lutheran World* (publication of the Lutheran World Federation; suppliment to no. 1, 1965), p. 21. The enemies of the righteousness of God are all who are self-righteous. Here is paragraph 42: "There is the self-righteousness of some orthodox Lutherans. They stand firmly in the theological heritage of the Reformation, vigorously opposing all Romanist, Reformed, or Anabaptist tendencies. They are zealous for pure doctrine and strenuous defenders of the authority of the Scriptures. But they suspect that the Lord has a special affection for them because of their devotion to His cause, their clear reasoning, effectiveness in argument and consistent suspicion of all contemporary learning. For all their good intentions, they are in danger of confusing theology and faith and of making theological dialects a way of salvation."
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29, 30.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
26. *Lutheran World*, XI, 1, p. 63 ff.



27. *Lutheran World*, IX: 3 (July 1962).
28. Examples of this may be seen in the following: Ulrich Kuehn - Otto H. Pesch, *Rechtfertigung im Gespraech zwischen Thomas und Luther* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1967; published by the Konfessionskundliche Forschungsstelle des Evangelischen Bundes in der DDR). Horst Georg Poehlmann, *Rechtfertigung. Die gegenwaertige kontroverstheologische Problematik der Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen der evangelisch lutherischen und der roemisch-katholischen Kirche* (Guetersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971). This dissertation was accepted by the Theological Faculty of Heidelberg University as the author's *Habilitationsschrift*. Poehlmann had been a student of Peter Brunner, one of the major contributors to the preparatory studies on justification for the Assembly at Helsinki.) Alfons Pluta, *Gottes Bundestreue, Ein Schluesselbegriff in Rom. 3:25a* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 34; herausgegeben von Herbert Haag, Rudolf Kilian und Wilhelm Pesch; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969). Franz Muszner, *Theologie der Freiheit nach Paulus* (Quaestiones Disputatae; herausgegeben von Karl Rahner und Heinrich Schlier; Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1976).
29. *Rechtfertigung. Festschrift fuer Ernst Kaesemann* (Tubingen: F.C.B. Mohr, 1976).

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