

Justification of LIFE

by Kerry S. Robichaux

“It is God who justifies.” (Rom. 8:33b)

Introduction

That God justifies human beings is alone a striking matter. How He justifies human beings is even more striking. Why He justifies, apart from the basic observation that He Himself is righteous and before Him all are unrighteous, is almost beyond comprehension. As extraordinary as it may be, justification is a most basic notion in the economy of God’s salvation. Yet, for as basic as it is, the concept of justification has generated an immense amount of controversy in the Christian church over the past five hundred years, controversy that has done nothing less than cleave the Western church into two great dispositions toward the issue of how humankind obtains salvation through Christ. (The Eastern church, loosely termed Orthodoxy, seemed little affected by the controversy.) From a historical perspective, the controversy flared during the Reformation under the polemic of Martin Luther (d. 1546), and indeed the Reformation is in many senses a reformation of the church with regard to justification. But the question of how God justifies the sinner had simmered in Christian thought long before Luther, and his participation in the controversy served to bring into open conversation the various historical opinions on the matter. But this is not to say that Luther did not innovate; in fact, the doctrine of justification as propounded by him, though firmly sustained by a voluminous appeal to Augustine (d. 430), is primarily Luther’s own, at least in its emphases. And despite the demonization that he suffered from his opponents at the time, his particular emphases clearly defined the parameters by which justification came to be understood not only by his followers in Protestantism but also by his detractors in the Catholic Church. Hence, Luther can be called a Reformer not only in the sense that he offered the Christian conscience an alternative to the Roman view of salvation but also in

the sense that he forced the Roman Church to reevaluate and define its own position on the matter of God’s salvation and to do so in terms dictated almost exclusively by him. Today, regardless of one’s persuasion on the matter of justification, if it is Western at all, it is “Lutheran” either by adherence or by reaction.

Luther, therefore, provides a basis of comparison by which we may identify the various perspectives on justification in God’s salvation, and in this article I hope to present these perspectives. Yet, the larger purpose of this article is to provide our readers a view of justification which we hope will better encompass both the significant finds of Luther and his significant deficiencies. It is certain that such a task will be met with at least muted skepticism, and owing to the massive contribution of Luther to the understanding of justification, skepticism is to be expected. Yet, any understanding is always subject to improvement, and discourse on a matter so important and yet so controversial as justification can only be allowed if the hearts of the discussants are at the same time noble and humble.

Within the larger context of this issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, my article on justification serves as a statement concerning the judicial basis for the more organic notion of regeneration. Regeneration, as aptly described by my colleagues in this issue, is the organic process whereby God makes us His sons not simply by way of adoption according to His sovereign decree but more intrinsically by way of rebirth according to His divine life. But our regeneration is not accomplished without regard for our actual sinful condition before God. There is the need for righting the wrong between God and the sinner, and this need is met by justification. By definition, justification is a judicial activity, yet there can be a range of understanding as to how justification takes place, and this, in essence, is what my article addresses. Like the notion of sonship, presented in previous issues of *Affirmation & Critique*, which relies on an intrinsically organic concept of the believers’ identity

as children of God, the view of justification advanced below relies on an organic understanding of how God justifies the sinner. Hence, while serving as a judicial basis for regeneration, justification will be seen to be as well an organic action on God's part. As Paul says in Romans 5:18, justification is of life.

Luther and Justification

It is important to recognize that Luther originally came to the issue of justification from a very personal perspective. His torments over the wrath of God for sinners is documented well enough.¹ For a period of years he agonized over God's absolute right to punish sin with perdition, understanding that this was all well within the righteousness of God. So acute had his pain become over this matter that the threat of God's righteous punishment, ever over his head yet tortuously unfulfilled, caused him to come to hate God rather than to love Him, as Christian faith demanded. His initial confrontation with the local authorities of the Catholic Church was motivated by this deep concern that God's righteous wrath could not be stayed as easily as churchmen there were representing to the laity. Indulgences, those purchased remissions for sins, could not, in Luther's view, mitigate God's wrath, because only the death of Christ had such power. Although he initially agreed that the church had the authority to remit the guilt related to sins, insofar as they were to be punished in purgatory, he found the abuses attached to indulgences, as practiced then, to be offensive. In time, he took issue with the very notion of indulgences, in his *Ninety-five Theses*, denying that they could effect any mitigation of God's righteous punishment at all and affirming that only through the benefits of Christ's death are sins truly forgiven. The *Theses* are actually an attempt to defend what he saw as the proper pastoral responsibility of the pope in the matter of forgiveness of sins, and he expected that the pope would appreciate and support his endeavor. But much to Luther's surprise, the pope did not see these declarations as a defense but rather as an assault on his authority, driven as he was not by pastoral concerns for the Catholic flock but by financial concerns for the renovation of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. An angry reaction flew from the Roman See in the form of a series of interviews of Luther by papal deputies and culminated in a papal bull of excommunication on June 15, 1520.

Behind all Luther's protestations was the question of how one can be assured that the wrath of God is stayed for the sinner. Luther was stubbornly suspicious of the effectiveness of human effort in appeasing the righteous demand of God. And if human effort was suspect, then human conscience could hardly be at rest but, in Luther's case, could only be in constant turmoil. One could never know for certain that God was appeased if all one had to rely on was his or her own confession, penance, and contrition, especially

when we consider how changeable the human heart is. For Luther there had to be some sure basis for the forgiveness of our sins, external and objective to the penitent, that he could point to, to find relief from the righteous punishment of God. This he found in the very righteousness of God that terrorized him in the first place, for, he reasoned, the same righteousness that compels God to punish sinners likewise compels Him, in light of the death of His beloved Son for our offenses, to forgive those who acknowledge that death. The righteousness of God, unable to be swayed by human action regardless of how good it was, could only be assuaged by what divine righteousness demanded—the punishment for offenses, and this, Scripture happily announces, was fully meted out when Christ died for the ungodly. In a real sense, Luther was unable to trust even the love of God, taken abstractly and on its own, while the righteousness of God made so heavy and serious a demand on the human being. Only the righteousness of God, pitted against itself, so to speak, could satisfy a rightly angry and vengeful God as well as a fearful and exhausted Luther. Luther had brought upon his conscience the full requirement of an infinite righteousness and had successfully found an infinitely righteous response that satisfied the complete demand, not just of God but of his own. The divine righteousness that once drove him to hate God now by its same operation drove him to love God, for instead of God's punishment it now offered him God's proper acceptance; instead of condemnation it now offered proper justification.

This insight concerning the righteousness of God, simple but profound, has reformed the Christian church. But there is a deeper corollary to the insight, which corresponds to another concern that Luther had, a concern that had likewise plagued the Christian church since the fifth century. The issue was the role of human effort in obtaining salvation, in being justified before God. Luther felt strongly that the church, in its penitential practices, had fallen back into the ancient heresy of Pelagianism, against which Augustine had struggled vigorously in the fifth century. The Pelagian controversy focused on the relationship between God's grace and human effort in obtaining salvation. It involved the understanding of the effects of the fall upon the human being and to what extent the human being could please God after the fall. Pelagius (d. after 418) was an ascetic of immense moral character, whose major concern was the ethical condition of the church and the believers. In his opinion, and that of his pupil and ultimate intellectual champion Celestius, perfection by the Christian could be attained through the exercise of the human will and was thus the sole responsibility of every believer. There was, in their opinion, an innate ability in human beings to live a godly life, and Christians should live up to that potential fully. While they recognized the tragic event of the fall of humankind and acknowledged that the effects were dramatic, they denied that the fall had so effaced the image of God in humankind that human beings could not now willfully choose

to live a life acceptable to God. They feared that to think anything else (and is this not a dilemma of the ages?) would invite moral laxity and demolish the ethical qualities of the Christian life. If human beings do not understand that they have the ability to pursue holiness before

God, and that they must, then they will become lax in their efforts for perfection and will devolve into decadence. Pelagius and Celestius could hardly ignore the grace of God, which is so strongly mentioned in the New Testament and had been so strongly preached in the early Christian church, but for them grace was a useful help to human effort and not a necessary means. Grace, available to all human beings, particularly aids the Christian in his or her struggle toward perfection and can thus hardly be refused. But, in theory at least, human nature, even after the fall, has sufficient ability, indeed a “natural grace” as they termed it, to pursue a life that is acceptable and pleasing to God. It may be a testament to the atmosphere in the Christian church of the fifth century that Pelagius and Celestius did not suspect that they were teaching anything apart from what Scripture taught and the church believed, and while some notice and criticism of their teachings occurred, for the most part the issue was not consuming for the church—until Augustine entered the fray and practically immortalized the issue.

Pelagius had long struggled with Augustine’s abandonment of human responsibility to the divine will. He was scandalized early on by a statement in Augustine’s *Confessions* whereby Augustine clearly indicated that only by what God graciously gives us are we able to keep what God requires of us: “Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt” (X:29). As Pelagius read it, such a statement seemingly excused human beings from the moral responsibility to lead a holy life and denied the power of human nature to do so. Here lay the great difference between the two teachers. Pelagius believed that human nature was capable of good even after the fall, while Augustine held that it was so incapacitated by the fall that it could never attain to justifying good. For Augustine grace was the only means to live a godly life and thus our only hope, while Pelagius admitted to grace only an adjuvant role. The issue was nature versus grace, and for Augustine grace held not merely the stronger influence, as Pelagius understood, but even more the *only* influence that could effect our salvation. Human nature, while capable of some motion and effort, could never save itself through the merit of its own actions. It was Augustine’s strident attempts to champion the sole merit of the grace of God over the potential of human nature that ultimately earned him the title the “Doctor of grace” in the Christian church.

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Augustine’s extensive literary efforts on the matter² served to pointedly define church teaching on two very particular issues: the effects of the fall on humankind and the respective roles of grace and human nature in salvation. But on more particular matters, matters of

greater concern to the later church, he was decidedly less precise and less deliberate. Two of these were the condition of human will after the fall and the exact role of faith in obtaining salvation. Luther would develop both these points to give the Reformation its distinctive theological quality. For Augustine at issue was divine grace versus human nature; for Luther it was human will versus divine will. In actuality, and I think Luther would agree, both teachers were addressing the same matter from two different perspectives. Augustine’s attempts to show the incapacity of human nature were augmented by Luther’s attempts to show that human will was the locus of the incapacity. Augustine had been divided concerning the effects of the fall on the human will, admitting to it true freedom at least insofar as it was able to choose to sin but denying to it the freedom “to have a full righteousness with immortality,” a quality that the human being possessed only before the fall (*Treatise* I:5). Luther was pointedly far less appreciative of human will: “It is settled, then,...that we do everything by necessity, and nothing from free choice, since the power of free choice is nothing and neither does nor can do good in the absence of grace” (*Bondage* 68). Luther’s human being, not unlike Augustine’s, was by force of fallen nature bound to sin and bound not to choose God; there was no escape, except by God’s grace. In his austere exposition of the total servitude of the human will under the effect of the fall and against God, Luther pronounced the most stringent form of opposition to the ancient Pelagian position. For those who would adopt his view as their own, Pelagianism was effectively killed, and human endeavor, insofar as it operates on its own and apart from the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, was forcefully denounced in all matters pertaining to salvation. To them, Luther had expressed in full the doctrine of Paul: “Out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him” (Rom. 3:20), and “A man is not justified out of works of law” (Gal. 2:16); to others less convinced of his view, he had taken it to an extreme.

The second refinement of Augustine that Luther advanced was related to divine grace, which, Augustine had pressed, alone can operate to save man. For Augustine saving grace was simple and undefined; for Luther this grace was more precisely justifying faith, which, he pressed, was the sole means (hence, the Latin banner for the Reformation *sola*

fide “by faith alone”) for apprehending the merit of Christ’s death and enjoying the benefit of justification. Viewing Augustine and Luther comparatively, we can see that while the two men concerned themselves with justification and salvation generally, the former, in direct response to the theory of Pelagius, expounded his position negatively by demonstrating that human beings are not justified by human nature at all, and the latter, in direct response to a system of works built upon a Pelagian tendency in the church, expounded his position positively by demonstrating that human beings are justified by faith alone. It was to Luther’s advantage that his struggle mirrored that of the apostle Paul, whose efforts were likewise directed against a system of works. Luther was able to marshal, almost without alloy, the forces of the apostle in his battle: “For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

Yet it must be noted that Luther’s employment of Paul cannot be characterized as being completely without alloy, for Luther stressed justification by faith *alone*, and Paul technically did not, at least not in so many words. Indeed, Luther’s formula seemed to smack sharply against another biblical predication concerning justification: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only” (James 2:24), but Luther contended that in Romans 3:28 “actually the text itself and the meaning of St. Paul urgently require and demand” the inclusion of the word *alone* (*Translating* 195), and thus without hesitation he included it in his translation of this crucial verse: “Der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben” [“Man is justified without the works of law, *alone* through faith”]. Of course, the addition, embodies the exact point of contention in the Western church regarding the nature of God’s justification and provided the Reformation its theological distinctive. Human beings cannot work for their justification and salvation, but for their justification and salvation must place their reliance (faith) on the graciousness of God which operated in Christ when He died for our sins and which accepted His perfect sacrifice for our sins. This particular reliance, this particular faith, alone justifies human beings. No works of penance were needed—and certainly no indulgences from the pope. Seen now with a modern eye, it does not seem so revolutionary, but seen then with a medieval eye, it was utterly revolutionary, for it undermined the entire understanding and method concerning our relationship with God that had prevailed for a thousand years.

But even for all its brilliance, the doctrine of justification by faith alone needed some undergirding if it was to sustain the onslaught of scrutiny about to begin. The nature of justifying faith needed to be clearly enunciated, and this was ably accomplished by Luther’s many followers. Franz Pieper, the modern Lutheran dogmatician, specifically defines saving faith as *fiducia cordis* [“reliance of the heart”],

fides specialis [“personal faith”], *fides actualis* [“actual faith,” that is, faith that actually grasps the promises of the gospel], and *fides directa* [“direct faith,” that is, faith that directly lays hold of the promises of the gospel without recourse to the effects of faith as opposed to a faith which only upon reflection (*fides reflexa*) of the effects of faith accepts that faith is possessed] (II:426-445). Such refinements of the notion of faith, while necessary for a complete statement of the Lutheran notion of justifying faith, are beyond the bounds of this article, but another of Pieper’s qualifications for faith is important to us here and was a primary declaration of Luther and the Reformers, namely, that “faith, as far as it justifies, concerns itself only with the gospel, not with the law or the entire Scripture” (II:423-426). The particular faith which Luther and the Reformers specified as that which justifies is faith in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. It is not a faith that requires an understanding of and assent to all the truth of the Scripture. One must acknowledge (and this, in accordance with the finer notions summarized by Pieper) only that Christ died for one’s sins and that God was fully satisfied with that death. Holding to that faith, one could have the full assurance that God had justified him or her. The sole object of justifying faith was as beautifully simple as that, in Luther’s view. Here it must be stressed that what Luther was referring to is *justifying* faith, not faith as it operates after one is justified, for faith in the justified sinner appropriates far more than this simple and basic object. But as the minimum for salvation—and in Luther’s view, this is what justification is, the minimum—the sinner need only grasp the truth that Christ died for his or her sins and that God accepts that death fully. If the sinner accepts this single and cardinal truth, God reckons that faith as righteousness and hence justifies the sinner.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Lutheran theologians define the location of justifying righteousness as external to the believer. They do this because they wish to underscore the notion that justification is an action on God’s part based upon Christ’s death and not upon anything to be found in the believer. This pertains to the notion that human beings, because of the consequence of the fall, possess no justifiable quality and can look to nothing in themselves to be justified. Even after turning to God and believing in Christ’s sacrifice, the sinner gains nothing internally that would of itself justify him or her. Instead, this faith in the death of Christ which the sinner exercises is seen by God as sufficient cause for justification; hence, God justifies the sinner. God does not look for nor find righteousness in the sinner; rather, He turns His eyes to the righteous Christ, who died for sins, and here He finds the righteousness that satisfies His demand. God then counts the righteousness of Christ as the believer’s righteousness based upon the believer’s faith. Righteousness is said to be imputed by God to the believer, not distributed to him or her by any means. This

type of righteousness is strictly external to the believer and is termed an alien righteousness. Because the justification that depends on it is not one based on the actual righteousness of the believer nor even on a righteousness imparted to the believer through some dispensation of God, it is termed a forensic justification. The terms are apt for the purely judicial side of justification that the Reformers espoused.

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It must be noted that the way Lutheran and Reformed theologies have finally settled on the issue of justification, as summarily depicted above, does not completely reflect how Luther himself viewed the matter, nor does it do justice to the broader variety of thought that existed during the decades of the sixteenth century when the Reformation flourished. Luther indeed stressed the notion of the imputation of righteousness to the sinner for justification, but a fairer portrayal of his notions must include his understanding that righteousness is indeed partaken of by the believing sinner and not only imputed to him or her. For Luther, righteousness was both an imputed quality and a quality shared with Christ through union with Him. Luther used three analogies to show how God communicates justifying righteousness to the sinner by faith through union with Christ. The first of these is that of iron heated by fire. The iron is the human soul that hears the Word of God as a fire, and this fire glows in the iron and imparts to the iron its fiery quality, that is, the righteousness that justifies the sinner before God. In the second analogy Luther speaks of the sinner first justifying God, and, because of that justifying act, of God thereby justifying the sinner. Here a righteousness, originating in the union with Christ, exists in the sinner, who recognizes the righteous action and disposition of God toward him or her because of the death of Christ, and for this recognition God can justify the sinner. The third analogy relies on the distinction in law between ownership of property on the one hand and right to possession and use of property on the other. One can possess and use property without actually owning it, and this, in Luther's description, is what happens with Christ's righteousness. This is a common concept in a marriage union, where two persons come together, and while each has respective ownership of property, both enjoy the possession and use of the property of the other. Luther maintained that in the union of the sinner with Christ, each comes to the union with respective properties. For the sinner it is his or her sins; for Christ it is His righteousness. Through the union, each party, while not actually owning the property of the other, can rightfully possess and make use of the

property of the other. Christ rightfully possesses the sins of the sinner and makes them His, and the sinner can rightfully possess the righteousness of Christ and make it his or her own. Christ does not possess sin by virtue of personal ownership—"He who did not know

sin" (2 Cor. 5:21)—but in union with the sinner comes to possess and "use" it, that is, dies for the sins of the sinner. In like manner, the sinner does not possess righteousness as some personal inherent property; rather, in union with Christ the sinner comes to possess righteousness and "uses" it, that is, makes it the righteousness that God needs for his or her justification (*Freedom* 348-358).

This side of Luther's view of justification by faith is not well known nor widely accepted. In point of fact, the two sides of his notion—righteousness by imputation and righteousness by union with Christ—were each eventually championed by two later Reformers, who took each side of Luther's position to its furthest conclusions and to the absolute denial of the other side. Philip Melancthon (d. 1560) is credited with galvanizing the concept of forensic justification based on imputed, external righteousness for Protestant posterity. At issue for him and the later Melancthonians was the certainty of one's justification. Unless one could point to something external to the believer, something as certain and powerful as the righteousness of God in accepting the righteous sacrifice of Christ, one's justification relied on too subjective a basis, and certainty of one's justification was, in their view, mortally damaged. The terrors of condemnation returned, and the sinner was back to where he or she was before faith appeared. Further, and this was the deeper point of the argument, a righteousness that was anything but alien and based on anything other than merely the sacrifice of Christ for sins diminished the sole import of the forgiveness of sins for our justification. Justification by faith was for them equivalent to the forgiveness of sins. Because of our sins, and simply because of our sins, we are not just before God. If there is some other basis for righteousness, then the notion of justification necessarily broadens to include that basis. If we are righteous because we also enjoy a union with Him, because He also shares His righteousness with us, and not only because He died for our sins, then justification must be understood as being more than the forgiveness of sins; it must be seen as including the positive qualities of possessing Christ the righteous One. This, Melancthon and the later Reformers could not tolerate.

They teach [doctrines] colder than ice, that we are accounted

righteous only on account of the remission of sins, and not also on account of the righteousness of the Christ dwelling in us by faith. God is not indeed so unjust as to regard him as righteous in whom there is really nothing of true righteousness. (quoted in Seeberg II:370-371)

Thus did Andreas Osiander (d. 1552), the Reformer of Nürnberg, condemn the Melanchthonians for their extreme forensic view of justification and launch his sturdy defense of Luther's other basis for righteousness for the sinner. Osiander, observing the increasingly judicial emphases of Luther's followers, hoped to bring his reforming partners back to Luther's view of righteousness based on union with Christ. Like Melanchthon, he also probably pressed Luther's view too forcefully and too exclusively to faithfully represent Luther, even though in his own mind he felt that he alone was being faithful to the senior Reformer. It is apparent from a study of the history of the controversy that opposition to Osiander was not merely theological but also largely personal, for Osiander consistently alienated himself from all who might have helped his cause and made enemies easily. Steinmetz wonders if Osiander "might have received a more sympathetic hearing," had he been less polemic and more tentative in his presentation (98).

As to Osiander's theological position on justification, Seeberg writes:

The theory of Osiander is thus, briefly stated, as follows: Christ through His sufferings appeased the wrath of God, and through His fulfillment of the law made satisfaction for our continuing disobedience. We are thereby objectively redeemed. Salvation becomes ours subjectively in this way: In the preached word the Logos enters us, and He, embraced by faith, begets in us a new life. Thus is our righteousness really begun, and yet it is righteousness only because Christ's abiding presence in us maintains it and leads God to regard our beginning of righteousness in the light of His (Christ's) perfection. (II:372)

Thus, for Osiander righteousness is not imputed, and justification is not forensic; rather, these depend on the indwelling Christ, who is righteousness Himself and who alone can satisfy God. Steinmetz observes that in Osiander's view Christ as our righteousness must be interpreted in light of 2 Peter 1:4, where the believers are said to be "partakers of the divine nature." Only by the indwelling Word and the divine nature partaken of through the Word can the believers be in any sense righteous before God and hence justified. "Justification is Jesus Christ, period! Whoever has Him has the whole Godhead and is righteous" (97).

Osiander's views were not tolerated with any amount of patience, not an uncommon reaction in an age when

theological disputes were sometimes settled in the most indecorous ways. He died before the issue was resolved, but, needless to say in view of the current Lutheran and Reformed position on the matter, it was not resolved in his favor. The *Formula of Concord* (1577) devotes its third article to a repudiation of Osiander's position, and John Calvin (d. 1564) strenuously argues against him in his *Institutes*, III:5-12. The extreme forensic view of justification, as championed by Melanchthon, prevailed and became the characteristic position of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions in the matter of justification. It is not surprising that Luther's more subjective basis for justification "died on the vine" of a very judicial Reformation. The Reformers, in reaction to the medieval penitential system that responded only to a subjective realization of one's condition before God and relied on works for its efficacy, cried out for a solidly objective assurance of their justification before God. Luther, as compared to later Protestantism, was certainly much more in touch with the theological tradition that respected the mystical experience of the believer, and this no doubt prevented him from completely abandoning the value of the believer's union with Christ, even in one's being justified. But as the Reformation progressed (at least temporally) the individual's need for certitude prevailed, and the purely objective standard became the unique basis for justification. It cannot be doubted that this strong objective bias has colored subsequent Protestant thought concerning the whole of Christian experience, not just concerning justification and salvation, and has made much of today's Protestantism a purely objective religion, and happily so for its many adherents. Yet Protestant justification, in the strident forensic form that Melanchthon and Calvin pressed on their followers, is in many respects like the emperor's new clothes, which, even a child can see, leaves much to be desired for covering and propriety. The believer who proclaims, "I am justified because I believe I am justified," can easily lose sight of the basic truth that "it is God who justifies" (Rom. 8:33), not human conscience or human intellect. Seeberg registers the same complaint: "But was not the Melanchthonian doctrine also liable to the perilous misconception, that man may by simply giving intellectual assent to the theory of satisfaction become sure of his salvation?" (II:374). Luther's dual basis of righteousness at least provided some real clothing for the emperor to match what the emperor thought in his own mind about his clothed state.

Protestant justification, insofar as it has descended directly from the Reformers without modification by later teachers (e.g., Wesley and others), bears the following distinctives. First, it is related solely to the forgiveness of sins, not to the further condition of the believer after he or she is saved. Because of the fall of humankind, every human being sins and offends the righteousness of God. Before He can do anything else for those who believe in

Him, God's righteousness must be satisfied; that is, sins must be forgiven. This forgiveness of sins, applied specially to the repentant sinner, constitutes his or her justification. God, in justifying the sinner, does not regard the condition that ensues from His initial acceptance of the sinner and from the gifts of the Spirit that He gives to the repentant sinner afterward; He regards only the forgiveness of sins for justification.

Second, justification is the act of *declaring* the sinner righteous, not in any real sense *making* him or her righteous. The action does not relate to the actual condition of the sinner who repents. This action is understood to be wholly gracious on the part of God and not at all dependent on any merit that the sinner may have. In fact, before God no human being has any justificatory merit at all. The fall of humankind has rendered every human being sinful and unacceptable before God. Whom God justifies is totally a matter of His own good pleasure and selection, it being the prerogative of the Creator to choose whom He chooses and to reject whom He rejects.

Third, justification is an imputation of the righteousness achieved by Christ through His redemptive death. Viewing the death of Christ for the sins of the world, God accepts that His righteous demands on humankind are satisfied and imputes the righteousness achieved by Christ to the sinner who believes in the effectiveness of that death rather than imputing to him or her sins committed.

Fourth, akin to the understanding of it as the act of declaring the sinner righteous, justification is based on a righteousness that is external or alien to the repenting sinner. Since righteousness is imputed, it follows that righteousness is alien to the sinner. Nothing of righteousness is imparted into the sinner to make him or her righteous. The righteousness of Christ, recognized by God and accepted by Him for the sinner, remains with the ascended Christ on the throne in the heavens. He does not bear it down to the sinner, either personally or through His Spirit, for the sinner's justification.

Fifth, justification is a single, complete, and instantaneous act, not a process having discernible duration or moral effect. Because it is declaratory and forensic and because it is based on a righteousness that is external to the sinner, it can be and is effected in an instant by God. Justification does not change the sinner in any real sense; rather, it is a change of perspective by God with regard to the sinner. Formerly He noticed the sinfulness of the sinner

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and rightly demanded justice; now He observes the righteousness of Christ and views the sinner in the light of that righteousness. Since no change has been effected, the justified believer is still a sinner even after justification (*simul peccator, simul iustus*).

Sixth, justification is not based on any work performed or effort exerted by the sinner. Rather, one must only believe to be justified by God; justification is by faith alone. The rejection of works for justification is corollary to the premise that human beings possess no merit in themselves by which God might justify them. Faith is the admission of and trust in something beyond the sinner's own being, in the God who alone acts to justify; hence, faith is the sinner's repudiation of self and affirmation of God, an affirmation which God answers with justification.

Seventh, justification is based on a faith that is not directed at the entire compass of Christian truth but only at the very narrow fact of the redemptive merit of Christ's death. The sinner must only acknowledge that all that he or she has is sinfulness and believe that Christ's death on the cross adequately satisfies the righteous God. This faith minimum requires of the sinner nothing at all—no natural merit and no works—and respects the native weakness and incapacity of the fallen human being.

Eighth, justification is based on a faith which is a work of grace initiated by God for the sinner; this faith is not itself a work or effort by the sinner.

Finally, justification is a basis, indeed the sole basis, of certitude for the repentant sinner that God will not impute the sins he or she has committed to him or her. A sinner, awake to his or her actual state before God, can only fear punishment and live in terror of it. Justification provides a certitude that punishment has already been exacted and that God is no longer seeking retribution. Fear of God turns to appreciation for God, and possibly even love toward God, as the sinner enjoys the certainty that he or she has been accepted by God eternally.

Rome and Justification

Luther's protestations against the doctrine and practice of the medieval penitential system began almost immediately to have detrimental effects on the Catholic Church. It is certain that the political unrest in the northern European states coincided with the theological disputes that soon enveloped all Europe north and south, and this situation

provided a receptive atmosphere for talk of change and even a certain degree of revolutionary action. Without too much effort one can construct a revolutionary Luther or a nationalistic Luther from the historical data, even though the man himself would probably be completely at odds with such a portrait. The political and social upheaval caused by Luther's simple *sola fide* may have been the actual concern of the Roman See that propelled it into action. But a deeper problem, if one may call it such, lay in the fabric of religious Europe at the time of Luther, and the Reformer, as much the product of the problem as he was a reaction to it, brought it into open view and forced a resolution. For all its rigidity in ecclesiastical structure there was in the Catholic Church a far from rigid and consistent view concerning human salvation, and this pluralism, as Pelikan describes it (245-274), invited a wealth of thought on the matter, which Luther inherited, enjoyed, and utilized. Luther's first declarations, his *Ninety-five Theses*, are in the spirit of this pluralism, an agreement to disagree, even vehemently, as long as all disputation is under and for the Roman pontiff. As mentioned above, the bull of excommunication in 1520 surprised Luther, and he could feel betrayed because in many respects he was simply doing what a number of others had done before him in the theological realm. What he did not know was that the economic and political situations with which the Roman pontiff was involved had forced a change in the rules, and now the fragile theological pluralism that invited Luther's dissent demanded attention, and got it.

Luther's first soundings can be viewed as an appeal for a clearer definition of how human beings can be saved, but before it answered the appeal, Rome attempted to extinguish the appellant, and this in turn made of Luther not simply an appellant but more a definer of doctrine. Rome had not reckoned on the intellectual and dispositional fiber of a man like Luther, and hence, before it could adequately counter, a new paradigm of salvation had firmly been established in Europe. Now the Catholic Church was on the defensive and found herself in the role of appellant on a number of matters (not least of which was justification) before an inquisitive northern Europe which was religiously, politically, and socially ready to abandon its former ecclesiastical source. The Catholic Church's formal response was embodied in its nineteenth ecumenical council, the Council of Trent, which met over the period of years between 1545 and 1563. The Council's extensive breadth of subject matter established concrete doctrinal statements and initiated ecclesiastical reforms on a number of theological and practical issues. Apart from a thorough consideration of justification and salvation, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (389) was confirmed as the basis of Catholic faith; the Catholic canon of the Scriptures was established, including the so-called deutero-canonical books, which had been

rejected as Scripture by the Reformers; church tradition was placed alongside Scripture as a source of revelation for the church; the Latin Vulgate was accepted as a scriptural base for doctrinal decisions; the number of sacraments was firmly set at seven; the Catholic doctrine of original sin was formally adopted; the teachings on the real presence in the Eucharist and on transubstantiation were elucidated and confirmed; further definition on other sacraments was given; and a number of declarations on clerical behavior and practices, indulgences, purgatory, the veneration of the saints and their relics, and seminaries were issued. The Catholic Church today owes much of its teaching and form to the immense effort expended during these nearly twenty years. Particularly its modern teaching on justification is the direct issue of Trent.

The Council took up justification in its sixth session, which was conducted in the last half of 1546 and whose final decree was promulgated on January 13, 1547. The decree (*de Iustificatione*) is in sixteen chapters, which affirm the Catholic doctrine. This was accompanied by thirty-three canons condemning the alternative doctrines of the Protestant Reformation. While the published decree with its canons is of great import and interest, and will consequently form the basis for my description of the Catholic doctrine of justification, the more voluminous minutes of the sessions with the various drafts of the decree provide considerable insight into the breadth of deliberation by the Catholic theologians at the Council (Ehse et al., *Council of Trent*). Pelikan's excellent chapter on the Council, "The Definition of Roman Catholic Particularity," relies heavily on these more detailed sources and brings to light this largely unnoticed stratum of considerations (245-303). For our purposes here it will be sufficient to refer only to the published chapters and canons regarding justification from the sixth session (henceforth referred to as *Trent*) as well as the more modern application of the decree found in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (henceforth referred to as *Catechism*).

The most basic point to be made concerning Rome's view on justification concerns its definition of what justification is. Unlike the Protestant Reformers, the Catholic theologians did not view justification simply as the forgiveness of sins. They defined it more comprehensively as "not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man" (*Trent* Chap. 7), and termed it "a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior" (*Trent* Chap. 4). "Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man" (*Catechism* §2019). "The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification" (§1989). Hence, justification in Catholic terms, while including the forgiveness of sins,

encompasses also a new condition of the believer, a condition which merits God's justification. The grace that comes to the believer for his or her justification is, in fact, called sanctifying grace and is understood to be "infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it" (§2023). "Sanctifying grace makes us 'pleasing to God'" (§2024); in other words, the grace received justifies us.

Whereas in Luther's description the justified believer is simultaneously a justified one and a sinner (simul iustus, simul peccator), in the Catholic view justification has the effect of changing the sinner into a child of God. It must be noted that this change is actual and not merely forensic.

The implication in this turns out to be the intrinsic point of disagreement between the Catholic and Reformation viewpoints. Catholic justification is based on a real degree of righteousness in the believer, not on an external righteousness that the Reformers defined. Further, and more importantly, justifying righteousness in Catholic thought is not merely resident in the believer, but effects a real change in him or her. Whereas in Luther's description the justified believer is simultaneously a justified one and a sinner (*simul iustus, simul peccator*), in the Catholic view justification has the effect of changing the sinner into a child of God. It must be noted that this change is actual and not merely forensic. "Justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin... It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals" (§1990). Thus, justification is not a mere declaration of righteousness over the believer but an actual making righteous of the believer by grace. Justification effectively severs human beings from their sinful heritage and permits them to live righteously before God.

In its fifth session (concluded June 17, 1546) the Council of Trent had formulated its doctrine of original sin and determined that because of Adam's fall sin was transfused to all his posterity. Human nature was severely weakened by this fall so that it is now impossible for human beings to reverse the effect by the exercise of human nature alone. However, Trent understood that the effects of the fall were not so devastating that human volition was completely annulled. Hence, in the sixth session, when defining justification, the theologians maintained that the freedom of the human will had been preserved, and thus human beings, at least those who come to the faith as adults, must play some part in salvation.

While God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly without doing anything while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet is he not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in His sight. (*Trent* Chap. 5)

The modern *Catechism* echoes the same sentiment based on Trent's declaration:

Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom. On man's part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God,

which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent. (§1993)

For some the point may be quite fine, but there is a clear difference here between the views of Rome and Luther. Rome very solidly respects and follows Augustine's notions concerning the human will after the fall, that on its own it cannot choose salvation but must be helped by divine grace, and yet is nevertheless free in that it can reject salvation. Luther, it will be remembered, was unequivocal in his notion of an absolute bondage of the will: it cannot choose salvation, nor can it reject it, but submits to the divine choice completely; thus, it is passive, both positively and negatively, with regard to justification. Trent decisively rejected Luther's view.

If any one saith, that man's free will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God exciting and calling, nowise co-operates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of justification; that it cannot refuse its consent, if it would, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive; let him be anathema. (*Trent* Can. 4)

The Council of Trent did not deny the important role of faith in justification. Paul's declaration in Romans 3:28 ("For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law") had to be respected as equally as James's in 2:24 of his Epistle ("You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only"). In the words of the Council, "We are...said to be justified by faith, because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation, and the root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God, and to come unto the fellowship of His sons" (*Trent* Chap. 8). But Trent also flatly rejected the notion of justification by faith alone, as Luther had asserted.

If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema" (*Trent* Can. 14)

By this they counted Luther's addition to the rendering of Paul's statement not merely a filling out of the sense but an improper and foreign addition to the text. Justification was declared to be both by faith (*Trent* Chap. 8) and not utterly without human doing (*Trent* Chap. 5), thus, not by faith alone but also by works, as James more fully expressed it. At the same time, Trent denied the adequacy of human work alone for justification and understood that human effort was co-operative with and dependent upon the grace of God (*Trent* Chap. 5). Hence, faith by divine initiative and works through divine assistance were both necessary for justification according to the Council. From a slightly different perspective, the modern doctrine states that "[justifying] merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly to man's collaboration. Man's merit is due to God" (*Catechism* §2025).

Like the Reformers, the Catholic Church held firmly to the redemptive death of Christ as the basis of our justification and elucidated their notions in chapter seven of their decree. Technically, they termed Christ's death the meritorious cause of our justification, meaning that God's Son alone "merited justification for us by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father." But the effect of this meritorious death was not, as the Reformers understood it, external to the justified.

Although no one can be just, but he to whom the merits of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet is this done in the said justification of the impious, when by the merit of that same most holy Passion, the charity of God is poured forth, by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein.

Justification required the communication of the merits of Christ's redemptive death to the justified and thus was not to be viewed as an external imputation, as the anathematizing canon mandates:

If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God; let him be anathema. (*Trent* Can. 11)

Further, with respect to justifying faith and the redemption of Christ, we should notice that the latter was not the sole object of the former for the Council of Trent, again in opposition to the Reformers. The faith necessary for justification, according to the Reformers, takes as its sole object the promise of God that because of the death of Christ the believer will not suffer punishment for sins;

it is not a faith that must encompass anything more concerning the divine realities. For justification one must have at least this much conviction concerning God. This internal conviction which the Reformers had discovered, called fiduciary faith (*fides fiducialis*), and which had been made the minimal requirement of belief was probably the unique innovation of the Reformation, all else having some ground in previous theology. Trent took great exception with this. "If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema" (*Trent* Can. 12). Further, Trent condemned the requirement that one must have the conviction that he or she is forgiven of sins to actually be forgiven. "If any one saith, that it is necessary for every one, for the obtaining of the remission of sins, that he believe for certain, and without any wavering arising from his own infirmity and disposition, that his sins are forgiven him; let him be anathema" (*Trent* Can. 13). In the main decree itself, in a chapter titled "Against the vain confidence of Heretics" (*Trent* Chap. 9), much the same is said, without anathema. These statements sought to undermine the necessary and sufficient conditions of Reformation justification. Faith, in the view of the Council, could not be limited to so narrow a field, nor could conviction itself be held as a proper basis for justification (see above). Trent had come to the same conclusion as Seeberg long before he noted that there could be in the Protestant doctrine "the perilous misconception, that man may by simply giving intellectual assent to the theory of satisfaction become sure of his salvation." Whether fairly or not, they drew the misconception out and seized upon it.

Basic to the concept of Catholic justification and the major complaint of Protestant critics is the notion that justification is not a once-for-all event in the believer's apprehension of salvation, not a fixed point upon which all else builds, but an ongoing process which depends constantly on the inward condition of the believer and which can be stalled or even worse ceased. Here we find the classic bugaboo of Catholic justification, the necessity of good works. In the Catholic view sterile faith, that mere fiduciary (i.e., trusting) conviction of the Reformers, was not true justifying faith. Rather, proper faith should issue in love, and the complex of faith working in love is what justifies. The love that issues from the faith is, of course, not merely a sentiment in the believer's heart but an outworking of charity in the believer's life. By requiring a faith that works, not merely a faith that trusts, the Council was able to incorporate the words of James into their statement—"For which reason it is most truly said, that Faith without works is dead and profitless [James 2:26]" (*Trent* Chap. 7)—and to encompass James's seeming contradiction of Paul: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Trent required that works visibly exist, for

only these provide adequate token that underlying faith invisibly exists. Hence, without being so explicit about it, works become part of the basis of justification. But, against the caricatures that have been raised across the centuries, only works imbued with and motivated by the divine grace infused into the believer can be said to merit justification. Like the Protestants, Trent affirmed that mere human works are without justifying worth before God. “If any one saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema” (*Trent* Can. 1). But good works motivated by grace serve to maintain and increase justification before God. The believers, “through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified” (*Trent* Chap. 10). Thus, God initiates justification based on the proper faith (not fiduciary, but that which encompasses love), but the believers must apply the grace infused into them to live a justified life that is according to the commandments of both God and the church so that the initial justification may be maintained and increased. Quite contrary to the Protestant view, the Council saw in the commandments of God not the basis of our condemnation which should prod us toward trust in the effectiveness of Christ’s death but the basis of our justification which should exist in the believer who has received and now lives according to infused grace. “If any one saith, that the man who is justified and how perfect soever, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe; as if indeed the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observing the commandments; let him be anathema” (*Trent* Can. 20).

What is important in all this is that the works imbued by grace, the believer’s keeping of the commandments, are not simply the fruit of justification, as the Protestants would have it, but the basis of the ongoing state of justification. Should one fall away from a justifiable living, from a graced life in accordance with the commandments, he or she is no longer justified before God at all. There is no justification independent of a living that justifies. Because believers may fall out of the state of justification, there is never any certainty that one is truly saved. “If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end—unless he have learned this by special revelation; let him be anathema” (*Trent* Can. 16). Faith alone will

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not suffice, for even if one believes in Christ and the redemption, the lack of outworked love and of the commandments fulfilled by grace render the believer unjustifiable.

The received grace of justification is lost, not only by infidelity whereby

even faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin whatever, though faith be not lost; thus defending the doctrine of the divine law, which excludes from the kingdom of God not only the unbelieving, but the faithful also (who are) fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, liars with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, railers, extortioners, and all others who commit deadly sins. (*Trent* Chap. 15)

Only the sacrament of penance can restore a person in this condition to the life of grace that issues in proper works and to the state of justification. “As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost” (*Trent* Chap. 14). Thus, there is no security in one’s salvation in the Catholic view, no certainty that one will persevere in the grace of God. However, there is a relatively easy return to the justified state through penance, and penance is the ordinary method for repairing back to a justified state by Catholics.

Comparing Luther and Rome, we can distill the items of contention down to contrasting assumptions on the condition of the human will after the fall. A fully impaired human will, one so completely in bondage to the effects of the fall it could not even refuse salvation if thrust upon it by grace, forced Luther to conclude that human effort was not necessary in any degree for justification. God must graciously operate in the sinner to produce only the most minimal saving apprehension, a trust in God’s righteous abeyance of judgment because of the death of Christ. This trust alone saves, because no human endeavor ever can. And this saving trust is in something that does not change or waver, the eternal righteousness of God; hence, it does not rely on the addition of human endeavor nor can it ever be annulled by human endeavor. Justification in this view forms a waterline in the sinner’s life, below which he or she can never recede. The righteousness of God, which this trust observes, need never actually involve the believer (though Luther himself admits that it does by union with Christ) but can and does remain external (as Melancthon and Calvin pressed). Rome, on the other hand, comes to the issue assuming

far less devastating consequences of the fall. The human will certainly cannot attain to righteousness on its own, but it maintains enough strength to withstand grace and thus to choose against salvation. This leaves human beings with some degree of moral responsibility; they must not choose against being made righteous. Further, once enlivened by saving grace, they must further choose for being righteous. Trust alone will not make them righteous in God's sight. The further fruit of faith, the work of love, delivered through volitional cooperation with divine grace continually and increasingly justifies them. Justification is not in one instant but at every instant. Since human beings must cooperate by choice, they can by choice fall from the justified state. The righteousness of God, with which human volition cooperates, must be inherent in the believer; otherwise, he or she is void of the saving resource with which to cooperate. Something must be infused into the believer for justification. For all the complexities of the debates of the sixteenth century, both by and among the Reformers and by and among the theologians at Trent, little impact was made by one side or the other because of this contrast in assumption concerning the human will. Neither side relented in its position, and thus Western Christianity was cleaved in two over the function of human will in salvation.

An Organic Justification

There can be no doubt that the mental energy expended in the sixteenth century on the matter of justification, by some of the greatest minds not only of the century but also of the modern era, forms a formidable background for any further thought on the matter. Yet, even though I have not catalogued these equally ample contributions—of the Pietists and the Methodists, of the likes of Ritschl and Schleiermacher, to name a very few—thought has continued on this basis of our salvation, justification. To this day, the endeavor continues. It is my intention here, against the background of the classic forms of the doctrine thus far reviewed, to present a view of justification that respects the outlook of this journal, an organic view of God and His work in humankind. Understanding the immense quality of the thought given before on this matter, I can come to this presentation only with trepidation and almost a sense of apology. But there is undeniably some dissatisfaction with the models of justification that have gone before, and these compel further consideration and refinement. In what follows the studied reader will not find a wealth of innovation, except perhaps in the definition of faith, but instead a reapplication of a number of notions previously presented. Luther will echo, as will also Trent, and Osiander will come alive again, hopefully with some needed correction. Who will not be heard, in their most austere and radical forms, are Melancthon and Calvin, and this, I hope, will not disappoint too many.

First and foremost, we must say, almost axiomatically, that the judicial base of our justification is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is righteous both as the eternal God (Heb. 1:8-9) and as a perfect man (Acts 3:14; Matt. 27:19; Luke 23:47). His righteousness as God is as certain as His divinity, for both attributes contribute to His definition as God. But as a man, His righteousness was not a given and required the testing of His human living and death. In every respect, He proved Himself righteous as a human being, indeed the only One in all human history past and to come. The basis of His righteousness in humanity was the Old Testament law, given by God. In relation to it, Christ fulfilled every aspect (Matt. 5:17) and completed it entirely in His human living (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and, though tempted like us in all respects, did everything without sin (Heb. 4:15). But beyond His personal fulfilling and completing of the law, Christ fulfilled the demands of the law on all His fellow human beings. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10); "all have sinned" (v. 23) and all deserve the punishments mandated repeatedly in the Old Testament for infractions against God, including finally death. Christ suffered death at the hands of unrighteous men, but more importantly under the judgment of the righteous God. "Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6, 8), and He died for all (2 Cor. 5:14). In doing so, He fulfilled the righteous demand against all and redeemed us out of the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).

Christ terminated the righteous demands upon human beings, and those who believe this enjoy the benefits of His righteous work, particularly a state of righteousness before God for their justification (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:22; 4:5; 10:4, 11; Gal. 2:16). Unless people believe in Christ and what He has done through His death, it is not possible for them to enjoy the benefits of Christ's righteousness. The divine requirement for justification is faith.

Faith, insofar as it justifies us before God, is not a natural ability in human beings, but must be granted to us by God mercifully. To believe in Christ and thereby to be justified by God is the gracious gift of God; it is not of ourselves (Eph. 2:8). This gift of faith comes to us through the preaching of the gospel by the servants of God. "Faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17; cf. Gal. 3:2, 5). Without their direct preaching, we could perhaps theoretically obtain saving faith, but in almost all cases, the Lord uses the dear preachers, who speak the word of the gospel, to give us faith. "And how shall they believe into Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without one who proclaims Him? And how shall they proclaim Him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the news of good things!'" (Rom.

10:14-15). Their speaking bears the word of Christ, and the word of Christ bears faith into us. We must say here, above the objections of the Protestants, that God infuses something into us for our justification, that is, the faith that justifies us. But for this we must understand the preaching to be something more than the simple delivery of gospel truths. In fact, the gospel preached is the shining out of Christ into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:4). This shining generates the ability to believe within us.

Paul, we may say, discovered the righteousness of faith in the account concerning Abraham (Gen. 15:1-6) and realized that, long before the law was given, Abraham had been justified by God. Paul used Abraham's experience to illustrate how we today are likewise justified (Rom. 4)—apart from the works of the law and by faith (3:28). But how did Abraham come to believe God in a way that would justify him? Luther maintained that Abraham did not merely believe that God existed but that God, doing the impossible for him, would keep His promise to him (*Genesis* 20-21); and so it seems, because the account refers to Abraham's believing that God would give him an heir to inherit the land of promise in spite of his old age and that of his wife (Gen. 15:4; cf. Rom. 4:19-20). But this kind of faith did not arise within Abraham on his own; rather, it came after the prior appearances of God to him, which served to cause him to believe in what God could and would do. Showing him the stars of heaven and bidding him to count them if he could, the Lord said, "So shall your seed be"; and Abraham simply believed the Lord. He could believe because he had been inwardly persuaded by God's appearing to him before. Stephen, in Acts, recounts that before this time "the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia" (7:2), referring to God's first visitation to him in Genesis 12:1-3. The epithet *the God of glory* is important here because it tells us not merely who God is but how He appeared to Abraham. His appearing was a shining to Abraham, which instilled into him the appreciation of who God is and what God is able to do.

The faith necessary for our justification is infused into us by the appearing of the God of glory through the preaching of the word of Christ. Of course, this is not a visible appearing or a physical glory but the spiritual shining of Christ into our hearts, manifesting to us who God is and what He will do. It is an appearing which is, by definition, irresistibly attractive, for as His creatures, even under the tragic consequences of the fall, we were made to respond

The faith necessary for our justification is infused into us by the appearing of the God of glory through the preaching of the word of Christ. This is the spiritual shining of Christ into our hearts. As His creatures, even under the tragic consequences of the fall, we were made to respond favorably to His appearing.

favorably to His appearing. At one moment, because of the fall, we may deliberately choose to ignore, reject, and even despise Him. But should He appear to us in the foolishness of the preaching (1 Cor. 1:21), His glorious shining will be too attractive to resist, and we

will without hesitation choose the One of peerless worth. His appearing, even in this uncomely mode, is stronger than the will of a human being (v. 25). And though He does not directly compel, we are compelled by His irresistible beauty, and in one and the same instant, He respects our free will and carries out His own good will and selection. Whom He chooses to appear to, as an act of His own mercy and grace, will choose to believe in Him, as the response of appreciation for an irresistible glory.

Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

He chooses whom He chooses according to His own good pleasure and will (9:18), and these to whom He shines out in the gospel freely choose Him. Is the human will free after the fall? Insofar as it chooses to sin, it is indeed free; insofar as it will never choose God on its own, it is bound by fallen nature and is not free. But under the shining of the God of glory, appearing in the preaching of the gospel of Christ, the detriment of the fall is suppressed by the help of grace, and the human will is made able to choose the greatest Attraction in the universe, all according to His will. Is human will then really free? I cannot say, yet I cannot protest that my will was violated when the gospel shined into me. I must testify that even though minutes before, I actively and strongly refused God, at those words spoken by those blessed preachers, I was filled with so strong an attraction and belief and trust in Christ that I decided, just as deliberately, to acknowledge Him for who He is. I own it as my own decision and cannot say that I was forced into belief. (But who, I would ask, could have resisted such an attraction? No one, I contend!) I was free, and I chose, but the purpose of God according to selection nevertheless remains (v. 11).

There is controversy between classical Reformation theology and Catholic theology concerning what we must believe in order to be justified, but there must be a minimum of belief, for we cannot believe all the divine truth without first knowing of it, and we cannot know all of it

even after we have been justified. Paul tells us of “the word of the faith which we proclaim, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:8-9). In the preaching of the apostles, the resurrection of Christ was the central proclamation (Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31; 26:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:8). We must believe that God raised Christ from the dead, and this implies that Christ died for our sins; otherwise, why would God have cared to raise Him? Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25); that is, He died for our sins, and God raised Him as evidence that He was satisfied with the substitutionary sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor. 15:17). When the gospel is properly preached, regardless of the details of the message, the effect on the heart is always the same. We come to realize that we are absolutely sinful and need God’s forgiveness, which forgiveness has been tendered by the death of Christ, whom God raised from the dead for us. If the gospel preached is from the negative perspective of our fallen condition, and our sin and fall are made the topic of the preaching, this effect is no doubt clear. But even when the gospel is preached positively, and the beauty of God and His Christ is made the topic of the preaching, this beauty can only make us cringe within at our own true sinful condition, and again we come to realize our great need for the death of Christ and to treasure that He was indeed resurrected for us. More than the details of the message, what is most needed is the Spirit’s convicting (John 16:8-11), without which no human being can be justified and saved. Through such convicting, we are assured that we deserve the punishment reserved for the devil and his angels because of our sins, that Christ died as our Substitute, and that God raised Him from the dead in satisfaction for the punishment required. This we simply must believe by the faith that is infused into us through the gospel in order for us to be justified before God.

It is important to realize that the faith infused into us through the gospel is not something different from Christ Himself; it is not some emanation from God into us. Rather, the Christ who is preached to us is infused into us through the word of the gospel. Faith is not merely a mental comprehension of the things preached but the apprehended reality of what is preached; it is the actual token of the things we believe. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ, and this word is not simply about Christ but that which bears Christ into us. The ability to believe that is infused into us is actually Christ as our faith. This appears to be the meaning of the much disputed expression *the faith of Jesus (Christ)*, used by Paul in Romans 3:22 and 26, and Galatians 2:16 and 3:22. While many commentators have understood the genitive of *Jesus* and *Jesus Christ* in these verses to refer to the object of the noun *faith* and suggest the translation “faith in Jesus (Christ),” the notion of faith

in Christ is amply and unambiguously expressed in Greek with the Greek preposition for “in” in a number of places (v. 26; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 3:15). Hence, the genitive form of the expression appears to have a somewhat different meaning, and thus there is a case to be made for taking the genitive either in an appositional sense and translating it “Jesus (Christ) as faith” or in a subjective sense and translating it “the believing that Jesus (Christ) does.” Given the fact that Christ and faith come to us at the same moment through the preaching, it is not at all far-fetched to understand that He Himself is the source of our faith, our ability to believe and appreciate the contents of the gospel.

It is clear in the New Testament that God accounts this faith as righteousness and thereby justifies us. He “justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus” (Rom. 3:26) because “faith is accounted as righteousness” (4:5). Faith is righteousness because faith is by definition a rejection of our own worth and merit for justification and an acceptance of the worth and merit of Another, who righteously deserves justification for His perfect human living and satisfying death, and who righteously has received it through His resurrection. As we hear of His righteous death, we are attracted by who He is and, through the preaching, He is infused into us. He alone is justifiable before God, and we are as nothing before God’s justice. Our believing in Him, initiated through the preaching and helped by His infusion within us, is indeed righteous because it is the first and only response within us that matches the real state of affairs with regard to the righteousness of God. By believing in who we really are, who He is, and what He has done, for the first time in our lives there is a righteous and justifiable response within us, albeit sourced and maintained by the Christ infused into us. Through the preaching, we are brought into union with Him, and Christ as righteousness is shared with us through faith. This faith, that is, our believing initiated by and helped by Him, can be and is justified by God. The faith of Jesus Christ, the faith that is infused into us, is the faith that God accounts as righteousness for our justification.

Hence, justifying righteousness depends on the faith that is infused into us through the preaching of the gospel. Contrary to the harsher forms of Reformation justification, this justification is real because it is indeed within the believer. On the one hand, Christ the righteous One is our righteousness, and He alone could serve as a basis of our justification. But on the other hand, He has been infused into us through the preaching and has become at the same moment the source of our appreciation and belief in Him as righteousness. Hence, by His help we find ourselves with a justifiable response before God, again a response fully sourced and maintained by Him, yet nevertheless ours. Thus, it is we who are justified by God, not He in us, but we are justified in full dependence on Him in us. His

righteousness, now the confession of our own faith, becomes our righteousness before God, not by virtue of its being a property of our own—He alone is righteousness—but by virtue of its being our joint possession with Him through our union with Him. Luther described Christ's righteousness as something imputed to the believers for their justification, and this need not be rejected. The initial righteousness that we enjoy in our union with Christ is indeed solely His as an inherent attribute of His divine nature and as a manifest virtue of His human nature in His living and death. But through the preaching He has entered our hearts and joined us to Himself, becoming in us the source and maintenance of our believing. Now through faith in Him, the faith that joins us to Him, all that He properly owns can be attributed to us rightfully as our possession. This attribution goes beyond what faith simply appreciates and rather encompasses all the righteousness that Christ is. In this sense, the righteousness that He is, is imputed to us, not simply through some judicial transfer of merit but more profoundly on the basis of an organic union and the certainty of what that union will ultimately do within us.

This is not to say that we are justified because we have first been regenerated. Regeneration does not form the basis of our justification; we are justified based on the redemptive death of Christ and by our faith in it. The divine life of God, which we receive when we believe, does not form the judicial ground for justification. Instead, justification is "of life" (Rom. 5:18), that is, has life as its reason and final cause. We are not justified simply for the sake of arriving at a righteous state but more profoundly for the sake of being in a divinely organic state. Justification provides the righteous condition within which we may enjoy the divine life. "The spirit is life because of righteousness" (8:10). It is not necessary to arrange these matters in a temporal succession; the relation between them is not temporal but purely causal, since, as applied to us, both righteousness and life become the sinner's possession simultaneously at repentance.

Although Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), and by this we are justified by God, we should realize that we are justified initially only because of our union with Him and not because of our application of Him or of His grace in, for, and through our living. God does not justify us based upon a change in our conduct and living, either through our own efforts or through the grace that we receive from Him. The Catholic notion that God justifies human beings by works which are motivated and supplied by grace is to

The divine life of God, which we receive when we believe, does not form the judicial ground for justification. Instead, justification is "of life." We are not justified simply for the sake of arriving at a righteous state but more profoundly for the sake of being in a divinely organic state.

be rejected soundly. Justification, insofar as it rescues us from God's wrath of eternal punishment, is based purely on Christ as righteousness that we enjoy through our faith union with Him. Even if we were to never progress beyond that simple benefit, we would

remain justified before God. The righteousness that justifies us initially is sufficient for eternity because it is solely Christ's, and ours only by union with Him. In this sense, even though Christ has been infused into us, Christ as righteousness within us is objective to us; that is, it is not lived out by us and we cannot in any true sense say that we act out righteousness; we are not the agents of this righteousness, only passive beneficiaries. At this point, we are, as Luther says, simultaneously justified ones and sinners; that is, objectively righteous yet subjectively sinful. For this initial stage of justification we must reject the Catholic notion that justification severs us from sin and eradicates the sinful nature within us.

Because initially righteousness is objective to us (though not external to us) and by it we are justified by God, we must posit an objective aspect of justification, which is the initial justification that is necessary and sufficient for salvation from perdition. Here too this objective aspect of justification does not refer to a justification that is made without regard to what is within us but rather to a justification that does not depend on our agency, that is, on our expressing Christ the righteous One in our daily living. This objective justification is referred to in 1 Corinthians 1:30. Because our justification, even in this initial, objective aspect, is not based on a righteousness that is external or alien to us, there is no need to speak of a forensic notion of justification, that is, the notion that God justifies us without any regard for what is within us. It is not the case that there is still only sin in the sinner who repents and believes; rather, now Christ is righteousness within the believer, and He enables him or her to believe unto righteousness for justification. This objective justification is actual because there is righteousness within us, indeed the righteousness of the God-man in both His divine and human natures, and our union with Him allows us to possess His righteousness for our justification. In this sense, God justifies our organic union with Christ.

Our initial justification does not require a forensic judgment on God's part because it is based on an actual reality within us. Further, our justification is not hollow or a mere "accounting trick," because while being based certainly and solely on the accomplishments of Christ for our redemption, it also looks forward to what Christ will do within us

as we grow in His life, are transformed, and are ultimately glorified. Hence, God can on two accounts righteously justify us: based upon the redemption of Christ and based upon the sanctifying work of the Spirit within us to come. However, the redemption of Christ is alone the necessary and sufficient basis for our justification and salvation from God's wrath. The second basis, while being contemplated by the justifying God, is not necessary for Him to justify us.

The Protestant Reformers sought a certitude for our justification, and this they found in the acceptance of the fact of Christ's redemptive death. The need for certitude was a crucial motivation for the Reformation, and particularly for Luther. It should be a crucial motivation for every believer as well, because without it we are constantly dogged by questions about our state before God and can hardly progress in the Christian life with such questions. The Council of Trent wished to remove certitude from the believer, trusting, I suppose, that fear would properly motivate the believer toward progress in the Christian life. The Reformers, particularly Melancthon and Calvin, wished to base our certitude only on the external fact of Christ's death on the cross, which should indeed be enough for us. However, it appears that God is not so austere and demanding of His justified ones that He expects them to be assured of their justified state with so little to rely on. Our faith is a deep appreciation of who Christ is, and this appreciation assures us that we have been justified by God because this appreciation, this faith, is reckoned by God as justifying righteousness. Faith, in its aspect of an inward appreciation of Christ, is an internal sign of our justification. While we draw our certainty on the external facts contained in the Word of God (cf. 1 John 5:13), we also have an inward witness that we are saved. "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). Inwardly, we have a satisfying sense of the Spirit that we are indeed saved from the wrath of God and now own God as our Father. In addition to this, we have a subjective assurance of our justification in our newfound love for the brothers. First John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers." Luther may have been satisfied with much less, and Melancthon and Calvin may not have tolerated more than what Luther was satisfied with, but the Scriptures present us with legitimate internal evidences for our justification and exhort us to enjoy them for our assurance of salvation.

But apart from what we inwardly "feel" about our justification, there is indeed the external security of it. Because our justification is based on the redemptive death of Christ and not on our merit, action, or subjective condition (understanding *subjective* here as denoting our agency), and because the redemptive death of Christ has eternal merit before God, our justification is eternal and can never be

revoked by Him. This fact serves as the security of our salvation, a necessary quality of our justification. There are many proofs in Scripture regarding the security of our salvation, but here I will focus only on a few. Our justification is secure because God is invariable (James 1:17) in His respect for Christ's righteous death and in His acceptance of that death for our justification. Likewise, His justification, as a free gift to us (Rom. 5:16), is irrevocable (11:29). It is secured by His will that of all which He has given the Son, none would be lost by the Son (John 6:39). And while Luther could not seem to be satisfied with the love of God for his certitude, we should understand that it is God's love that keeps us from being separated from Him eternally (Rom. 8:35-39; cf. 1 John 4:10). An unchanging God with an unchanging will out of an unchanging love has sent an unchanging sacrifice for our sins, which He accepts in an unchanging way, and this is as eternally secure as He is eternally God.

The certitude, or assurance, of our salvation as a subjective realization is one thing; the security of our salvation as an objective fact is quite another. We may lack the certitude (and suffer terror needlessly), but we can never alter the security of our salvation. Even if we deny a previous faith and its certitude, we cannot lose the objective security, for once saved, we are always saved. Trent was right in asserting that certitude cannot be the basis of our justification, and Seeberg's warning concerning the peril in the Melancthonian doctrine of justification is warranted. We are not justified simply because we are certain of it. In many respects, the Reformers can be accused of trusting more in their certainty than in the actual justifying action of God. We must remember that it is God who justifies (Rom. 8:33), and it is His good pleasure how He does it. Our certainty and trust in His justifying action may waver; we may even lose faith in what He has done. But will that annul His regard for us in the light of the death of His Son? He saved us gratuitously, apart from our own merit and work, while we were yet enemies. Will His unchanging love, will, and even very being change because we waver inwardly, we decide that He is not to be believed, or we fail and sin in the most pernicious ways? Absolutely not! He is unchanged in His justification of us, even when we are changed in our certainty of it.

All of what has previously been discussed relates to our initial, objective justification. This justification is sufficient for our salvation from the wrath of God and eternal perdition. But the righteousness that secures our initial justification is not static; rather, it grows in us as do all godly virtues and, like all godly virtues, becomes a part of our own Christian living. The divine life we gain, based on our justification before God, is a life that transforms us (12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18) and conforms us to the image of the firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29). It is a life that sanctifies us wholly, not just in our position before God, whereby we may rightly be called

saints, but also in our disposition, whereby we may rightly be said to be holy (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Col. 1:22; 1 Thes. 5:23). In this state we are able to employ the divine grace to become agents of righteousness, wielding our activities as manifestations of the righteousness we possess (Rom. 6:13). This is not the objective, indwelling righteousness within us, but a subjective, manifest righteousness lived out before God and humankind. It is subjective not in the simple sense that it is from within us but in the sense that now we are the doers of it, the agents of it. But we must not think that it has its source in a righteousness that is our own property; rather, its source is in the righteousness which Christ is within us and which we possess and enjoy in our union with Him. It is a righteousness that comes from Him but is lived out by us. It is akin to what Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20, lit.). Paul cannot deny that he lives because Christ lives in him, yet at the same time he cannot deny that he is the one who lives. Likewise, as a specific application of this living out of our organic union with Christ, we cannot deny that Christ is our righteousness, but neither can we deny that we are the ones being righteous in our living. And in fact, we understand that this outlived union, in which both we and Christ can rightly lay claim to the godly virtues expressed, is exactly what God wants of us after all.

Because there is this aspect of a progressing righteousness which relates to our living and to our agency, we must also posit a subjective aspect of our justification before God. This subjective justification is not necessary for our salvation from perdition, but it is nevertheless a significant requirement for a proper Christian life. There is, of course, the possibility that a believer would not advance in righteousness and would not live a life that justifies him subjectively before God. Sadly this is not uncommon among the believers today. This does not mean that such a believer lapses back into a condition that will issue in perdition, for initial justification, based solely on the merits of Christ's redemption, is secure regardless of the believer's further application of grace for righteousness. But God desires the believers to advance in righteousness and to express that righteousness in their own living (Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 15:34; Eph. 5:9; 1 Thes. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 1:8; 2:12; Heb. 12:11; 1 John 2:29, 3:7; Rev. 19:8), and He will reward each believer for this advance (1 Cor. 3:8, 14). While our salvation from perdition is secure, we must all stand before

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the Lord and be judged for how we lived based on our enjoyment and application of His grace (2 Cor. 5:10). We are certainly saved from perdition, but according to the Scriptures it is possible that we as believers will suffer some loss for failing to live out the righteousness that we possess (1 Cor. 3:15). Paul did not account himself worthy of this reward, which differs from eternal salvation, but strove to attain to it (Phil. 3:13-14; 1 Cor. 9:24-27). He finally reached some confidence that he had attained it near the end of his course (2 Tim. 4:7-8). It is only by understanding that the believers will be rewarded or punished for their Christian lives that we can adequately reconcile the proof-texts for the eternal security of salvation with those that indicate that the believers may suffer punishment and loss. It is also only by such an understanding that we can adequately account for the seemingly contradictory notions of the gratuitous, unmerited salvation of the believers and their reward or punishment based upon their works.

In the final analysis, justification is the great act of God to make us like Himself in the matter of righteousness. Paul views singly the whole endeavor in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." It is not God's intention to simply justify us on a juridical level, to get us "legal," so to speak; His intention is to gain in us a degree of righteousness that expresses who He is, so that He may be glorified in His righteousness through us. Although the latter church, primarily through Irenaeus and Athanasius, would advance more elegant and succinct forms of expressing the goal of God's salvation, saying that God became what we are to make us what He is and that God became human to make humans God, Paul long anticipated them: Christ was made the sin that we are that we might become the righteousness that He is. This, I think, is beyond the communication of properties that Luther proposed for our initial justification, though it certainly respects and includes it. This more comprehensively contemplates the final, the telic, cause for our justification, our becoming the manifest, bodily, and expressive righteousness of God for His glory. It is we as His righteousness, but most certainly it is "in Him," that is, with Christ as our source of righteousness and grace for our living. This perhaps answers the deeper question first raised in this essay: Why does God justify? Beyond the simple and apparent need to make us righteous because we offend Him with our unrighteousness, there is His more profound desire that we become what He is in righteousness so that He may be expressed in all that He is. Justification, based on who He is and because of our living

out of Him, proves to be the aspect of salvation as deification relative to His exquisite attribute of righteousness.

Summary

To conclude, I wish to capture the essence of the preceding paragraphs as a series of propositions regarding justification. In this form, I hope, our readers will have a better overview of our position on this crucial matter.

1. God can justify us righteously because Christ, who is righteous both in His divinity and in His humanity, has fulfilled all the requirements of the law in His human living and has suffered for us in His human death the righteous punishment we deserved.
2. The benefits of Christ's righteousness are applied to us by faith alone.
3. Faith is infused into us by the God of glory appearing to us in the word of the gospel.
4. His appearing, with the faith that is produced by it, is His free and unmerited action based upon His selection according to His own good pleasure.
5. The object of the faith infused into us for our justification is the affirmation that we are indeed fallen before God and indeed worthy in ourselves of perdition and the trust that God remits our deserved punishment because He has accepted the death of His beloved Son instead.
6. The faith that is infused into us is "the faith of Jesus Christ," i.e., Jesus Christ as our ability to believe and appreciate the contents of the gospel as the object of our faith.
7. The faith of Jesus Christ, the faith that is infused into us, is the faith that God accounts as righteousness for our justification.
8. Hence, justifying righteousness depends on the faith that is infused into us through the preaching of the gospel.
9. This initial righteousness, which is Christ within us, is imputed to us for our righteousness before God. As Luther describes it, this righteousness, because of our union with Christ, though not our own, is for our use (individual property vs. right to possession and use), that is, for our justification.
10. Although Christ as our righteousness within us brings us into union with Him, the righteousness that He is, is initially ours only by our union with Him, not by our application of Him in, for, and through our living. It is in this sense objective to us. (Objective here is used not in the sense of external to us but in the sense of not taking us as the personal agents.)
11. Because this initial righteousness is objective, there is as well an objective justification before God, which is the justification we need for salvation from perdition.
12. This objective justification is not forensic in the sense that it is based on a righteousness that is external or alien to us and is externally imputed to us by God without regard for any righteousness within us.
13. This objective justification is actual because there is righteousness within us, indeed the righteousness of the God-man in both His divine and human natures, and our union with Him admits us into His righteousness for our justification. In this sense, God justifies our organic union with Christ.
14. The objective righteousness that we enjoy for our objective justification, while being based upon the accomplishments of Christ for our redemption, looks forward to our certain transformation and glorification. Hence, God can on two accounts righteously justify us: based upon the redemption of Christ and based upon the sanctifying work of the Spirit within us to come. However, the redemption of Christ is alone the necessary and sufficient basis for our justification. The second basis, while being contemplated by the justifying God, is not necessary for Him to justify us.
15. The internal sign of our righteousness is our belief in Christ and our appreciation of Him, for this faith is reckoned as righteousness by God. This sign serves as the certitude of our salvation, a highly desired effect of our justification.
16. Because our justification is based on the redemptive death of Christ and not on our merit, action, or subjective condition (understanding subjective here as denoting our agency), and because the redemptive death of Christ has eternal merit before God, our justification is eternal and can never be revoked by God. This fact serves as the security of our salvation, a necessary quality of our justification.
17. The certitude, or assurance, of our salvation as a subjective realization is one thing; the security of our salvation as an objective fact is quite another. We may lack the certitude (and suffer terror needlessly), but we can never alter the security of our salvation. Even if we deny a previous faith and its certitude,

we cannot lose the objective security, for once saved, we are always saved.

18. Beyond initial, objective justification, faith operates in us to subjectively transform us and conform us to the image of the first-born Son, and to sanctify us wholly, so that by the divine energy of grace we ourselves become agents of righteousness. This results in a progressing, subjective righteousness before God. (*Subjective* here is not used in the simple sense of something internal but in the sense of our being the personal agents.)
19. This subjective righteousness is our living out of the divine life, yet mysteriously it is not we who live but Christ who lives in us; the life that we live, we live by the Son of God as our faith.
20. Because this progressing righteousness is subjective, there is as well a subjective justification before God, which is a justification that will be rewarded, besides the eternal reward, by Christ at His coming before eternity.
21. Ultimately, based on so extensive a living out of our organic union with Christ, we become the righteousness of God, not by imputation alone but by union and in our living. Subjective justification is an aspect of deification according to God's attribute of righteousness.

Thankfully, we are justified by God through Christ, and this not of ourselves. May we all advance in righteousness through His grace to express Him fully. LFC

Notes

¹Of the many studies of Luther's life and thought, Heiko Oberman's *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* is both scholarly and enlightening.

²*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* (412); *De spiritu et litera* (418); *De natura et gratia* (415); *De gestis Pelagii* (417); *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (418); *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (419); *Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum* (420); *Contra Julianum, Libri VI* (421); *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum* (429); *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (426 or 427); *De correptione et gratia* (427) *De praedestinatione sanctorum* (428 or 429); *De dono perseverantiae* (429); and other anti-Pelagian writings, which are collected in the 10th volume of his *Opera*, in two divisions, ed. Bened. Par. 1690, and again Venet. 1733" (Schaff III, sec. 146).

Ultimately, based on so extensive a living out of our organic union with Christ, we become the righteousness of God, not by imputation alone but by union and in our living. Subjective justification is an aspect of deification according to God's attribute of righteousness.

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